

June 20th, 2025

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend a meeting of the

Mid and East Antrim Environment and Economy Committee

to be held on **Monday, 23rd June 2025 at 6:30 pm** in **Council Chamber, The Braid, 1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena and via remote access.**

Yours sincerely



Valerie Watts
Interim Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Agenda

1 NOTICE OF MEETING

2 APOLOGIES

3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members and Officers were invited to declare any pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, including gifts and hospitality, they may have in respect of items on this Agenda.

4 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION

4.1 Terms of Reference - circulated (19.06.25)

📎 *Amended Terms of Reference for Environment and Economy - 25-26.pdf* Page 1

4.2 Environmental Performance and Carbon Footprint - circulated

📎 *Environmental Performance and Carbon Footprint Report June 2025 - EE.pdf* Page 6

📎 *Appendix 1 - EMS Overview 2024_25.pdf* Page 11

📎 *Appendix 2 - MEA Environmental Policy 2025.pdf* Page 14

📎 *Appendix 3 - EMS Contribution Diagram.pdf* Page 15

📎 *Appendix 4 - 2025-26 Objectives and Targets.pdf* Page 16

📎 *Appendix 5 - 2024-25 Objectives and Targets.pdf* Page 18

📎 *Appendix 6 - 2024_25 EMS Objectives & Targets - Year End.pdf* Page 20

📎 *Appendix 7 - Environment and Carbon Footprint Report 2024 25.pdf* Page 32

4.3 Scoping Opinion on North Channel Wind Ltd Floating Offshore Wind Proposal under Marine Works (EIA) Regulations 2007 - circulated


📎 *Report to E&E Committee - DAERA Consultation June 2025.pdf* Page 46

📎 *Appendix 1 - DAERA MFD Marine Licensing Scoping Opinion Response Sheet.pdf* Page 48

4.4 Town Centre Investment Plan Update - circulated (18.06.25)

 <i>Town Centre Investment Plans Overview.pdf</i>	<i>Page 51</i>
 <i>Appendix 1 Ballymena Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy.pdf</i>	<i>Page 60</i>
 <i>Appendix 2 Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy .pdf</i>	<i>Page 108</i>
 <i>Appendix 3 Carrickfergus Investment Plan & Town Centre Strategy.pdf</i>	<i>Page 166</i>

4.5 Economic Development Activity Report - circulated

 <i>Economic Development Activity Report - 23 June 2025.pdf</i>	<i>Page 203</i>
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4.6 BID Update - circulated

 <i>BID Update 2025.pdf</i>	<i>Page 209</i>
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4.7 Local Economic Partnership - circulated

 <i>Local Economic Partnership.pdf</i>	<i>Page 213</i>
 <i>Appendix 1 - Regional Balance - Updated Project Guidance.pdf</i>	<i>Page 215</i>
 <i>Appendix 2 - Action Plan Template and Monitoring Return.pdf</i>	<i>Page 221</i>

5 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

6 TABLED QUESTIONS

Closed Committee - In accordance with Council policy, representatives of the Press will not be in attendance for this section of the Meeting.

7 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION / DECISION – CLOSED COMMITTEE



7.1 Notice of Motion (25/11/24) Update - circulated

 <i>Notice of Motion - 25.11.24 Update.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
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7.2 Taylors Avenue Future Arrangements - circulated

 <i>Taylor's Avenue - Future Arrangements.docx</i>	<i>Not included</i>
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7.3 Amateur Grassroots Programme Update - circulated

 <i>Amateur and Grassroots Sporting Organisations Improvement Funding June EE Cttee_EM updated 1662025.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 1 Amateur and Grassroots Sporting Organisations Improvement Funding.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>


7.4 Larne Community Wealth Building Partnership Update - circulated (19.06.25)

 <i>Larne Community Wealth Building Grant Request (June 2025).pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 1 - Larne CWBP Prospectus Document.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>

7.5 DfC Small Settlement Programme Update - circulated

 <i>DfC Small Settlements Programme - EE Update June 2025 V3 EM update.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
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7.6 Go Succeed Update - circulated

 <i>Go Succeed Update - June 2025.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
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7.7 BRCD – I4C Operator Appointment - circulated (19.06.25)

 <i>_I4C Operator Appointment.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Appendix 1 KPMG Tender Evaluation Report.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>

7.8 Carrickfergus Regeneration - Gateway Review Report - circulated

 <i>Carrickfergus Regeneration - Gateway Review Report.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>
 <i>Carrickfergus Regeneration Assurance Review Report.pdf</i>	<i>Not included</i>

8 ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – CLOSED COMMITTEE

Open Committee

9 FORWARD PLAN FOR ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY COMMITTEE - circulated

 <i>E&E Committee - Forward Plan Template v18.pdf</i>	<i>Page 224</i>
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Committee:	Environment and Economy Committee
Date:	23 June 2025
Report Title:	Terms of reference for Environment and Economy Committee
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Shaun Morley, Director of Operations Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report is to outline the areas of business that will fall within the remit of the Committee. It is important that Members have clear responsibility to connect strategy and delivery of services within the committee remit, and their contribution to delivery of the priority outcomes within the Corporate Plan. It is therefore proposed that the service planning, allocation of resources, performance, and service opportunities relating to the areas outlined in 2.1.1 Key Functions will be all reported to the Environment and Economy Committee.
- 1.2. This is in line with the decisions taken at Council on 03 April 2023 with regards to good governance changes and the Scheme of Delegation. The focus of this is to ensure that Council and Committees, through all Members, can drive the strategic direction and resource allocation against priorities but enabling officers to deliver services on a day-to-day basis in a streamlined and seamless way.
- 1.3. The text in red highlights the changes from the previous Terms of Reference.

2. Background

- 2.1. The following are the service functions that fall within the remit of the Environment and Economy Committee:
Key Functions
 - Economic Development to include:
 - Skills and Entrepreneurship
 - Business Start Up and Growth
 - Investment and Funding
 - Investment and Place
 - Town Centre Development
 - Climate and Sustainability to include:
 - Climate Change



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- Carbon accounting and management
- Sustainability
- Neighbourhood Services to include:
 - Waste Management
 - Contract Management
 - Fleet Management
 - Waste Disposal
 - Household Recycling Centres
 - Street Cleansing
 - Parks & Open Spaces
 - Car Parks
 - Cemeteries
 - Sporting Facilities
 - Harbours and Marinas
- Overview of Capital Plan and Budget
- Capital Delivery and Regeneration

- 2.3 All functions will be in line with the Committee's agreed Terms of Reference:
- Focus on creating the conditions to grow the economy and create jobs.
 - Attract inward investment through an innovative and dynamic approach to economic development and regeneration.
 - Focus on developing strategies around economy, regeneration and funding, environment and green growth with a strong emphasis on improving economic sustainability of the Borough.
 - Focus on the delivery of the Building Control function and associated services, which includes Regulatory Services for the enforcement of Building Regulations, Dangerous Structures, Property Certificate, Energy Performance Certificates, Vacancy Property Inspections, Corporate Fire Risk Assessment, Street Naming and Postal Numbering.
 - Maximise opportunities to secure funding and programmes across a range of areas, including urban and rural development through PEACEPLUS, National EU and other Investment Funds.
 - Focus on ensuring Mid and East Antrim inform and influence at a regional level, including the new Programme for Government and **Sub-Regional** Economy Plan.
 - Build strong and effective integrated partnerships with key partners, including local business community through the Manufacturing Task Force, Labour Market Partnership, **Local Economic Partnership (LEP)**, PEACEPLUS Partnership and other sectoral partnerships, Executive Departments i.e., Department for Communities, Department of Infrastructure, Department of the Economy, DEARA and the wider business sector ensuring regular reports are presented to the Environment and Economy Committee.
 - Ensuring the delivery of core services that meet the needs of the community, social economy and business sector,



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- Ensuring delivery of Council's statutory duty where responsibility for 'Promotion of entrepreneurship and encouraging business start-up', 'Provision for under-represented groups in entrepreneurship' and 'Promotion of social enterprise' transferred to Councils from DFE/DETI as part of RPA in 2015.
- Ensuring successful management and delivery of €5.8m of PEACEPLUS funding across Mid and East Antrim for the period 2021 – 2027.
- Ensuring successful management and delivery of £4.5 million funding from DfE under the regional balance fund for the period 2025-2028.
- Focus on decarbonising Council in line with the carbon emission reduction targets set out in the Climate Change (NI) Act 2022 (48% 2030, 77% 2040 and net zero by 2050).
- Lobbying central government to access funding streams to decarbonize Council activities.
- Promoting and embedding sustainable development practices in the exercise of our duties.
- Reducing adverse environmental impacts from daily operations.

2.4 Key Services areas

- Neighbourhood Services to include Waste Management, Fleet Management, Climate & Sustainability, Street Cleansing, Public Conveniences, Household Recycling Centres, Waste Disposal and Service Contracts, Harbours & Marinas, Parks & Open Spaces, Car Parks, Cemeteries, Sports Pitches and MUGAs.
- Climate Change including mitigation and adaptation planning and implementation
- Defining, measuring and monitoring Council's Greenhouse Gas inventory
- Carbon Accounting across Scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions
- Meeting carbon reduction targets in line with the Climate Change (NI) Act 2022
- Public Body Reporting on climate action (The Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (NI) 2024)
- Environmental management including an Environmental Management System
- Environmental performance and benchmarking
- Sustainability including delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Council's Sustainable Duty
- Climate, sustainability and environmental education and awareness
- Capital Plan, Capital Works and Regeneration
- Economic Development to include:
 - Skills and Entrepreneurship
 - Business Start Up and Growth
 - Investment and Funding
 - Investment and Place
 - Town Centre Development

- Building Control
- City Deal and Major Projects.

2.5 As part of the Scheme of Delegation, the Regulatory Services within Council, a number of Officers have been authorised to discharge functions relating to Building Control. This includes serving statutory notices, implementing legislation, and discharging liabilities in accordance with legislation.

3. Key issues for Consideration

3.1. The role of the Environment and Economy Committee is the following:

- To approve strategies that are focused on the ambitious outcomes for residents e.g., Neighbourhood Services to include: Climate Change, Sustainability and Environment; Capital Works and Regeneration; Economic Development; Building Control; and City Deal and Major Projects.
- To review and monitor policies and procedures to ensure delivery in line with corporate priorities.
- To review performance on the relevant service areas, making recommendations for course correction when performance is not meeting targets.
- In relation to funding to consider opportunities for innovation and best practice to ensure continuous improvement and quality service delivery.
- To consider funding opportunities to assist in delivery of Corporate objectives.
- To direct available resources for the remit of services to achieve effective outcome improvement.
- To review fees and charges of all relevant Services.
- To oversee Building Control (except Planning) with the relevant delegations.
- To have management delivery in relation to funding secured for programme activity from central government, UK government, European funding sources and other funding bodies.
- To manage and receive regular reports on the Labour Market Partnership, **Local Economic Partnership (LEP)**, PEACEPLUS Partnership, Go Succeed Service, Multiply and similar delivery mechanisms against Council's strategic priorities.

4. General Considerations/Implications

4.1. Committees of Council can carry out decision making on behalf of Council to ensure the business of Council is transacted in a timely and efficient manner.

- 4.2. At present there are some delegations to officers, as set out in the Scheme of Delegation, however the delegations to Committees needs to be clarified. This may take some time over the coming months to define.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. Elected Members note the remit of the Committee and over the next 12 months the Committee will consider clear delegations it can take, subject to Council approval.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to approve the key functions and service areas of the Committee will consider noting additions added in red and this will operate as the Terms of Reference for the Committee and a further report will be provided once clear delegations can be established.

7. Version Control Record

Action	Date	Approved by
Date of last review	23 June 2025	
Date of next review	June 2026	

Council/Committee:	Environment and Economy Committee
Date:	23 June 2025
Report Title:	Environmental Performance Update and Carbon Footprint Report 2024/25
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Catherine Hunter, Environmental Education Officer
Approver:	Shaun Morley, Director of Operations

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report is to update Elected Members on the performance of Council's environmental objectives and carbon emission output for 2024/25 and seek approval to upload the report and the environmental objectives performance summary 2024/25 for public access on the Council website.

2. Background

- 2.1. Council achieved re-accreditation to ISO14001:2015 International Environmental Management Standard across all services in August 2024 for 3 years. This ensures that Council reduces the impact of its services on the environment and improves its environmental performance year on year, Appendix 1.
- 2.2. Council benchmarks its environmental performance several ways:
 - The environment system is externally audited every year by NQA auditors;
 - Council achieved a Platinum Level at the NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey Awards 2024;
 - Council publishes an annual Carbon Footprint Report; and
 - Annual Management Review of environmental objectives/targets.
- 2.3. All documents relating to Council's environmental performance and carbon footprint are publicly available on the Council website at: <https://www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/council/policies-and-documents/climate-change-sustainability/climate-sustainability-environment-reporting/>
- 2.4. Council's Environmental Policy at Appendix 2 and Environmental Management System meet the requirements of the standard and contribute

to Councils strategic priorities, efficiency programmes, sustainable development duty and the Programme for Government (PfG), illustrated in Appendix 3.

- 2.5. Council's environmental objectives and targets are reviewed quarterly by the Environment Champion Team, made up of members from across all service areas and reviewed annually with senior management. Council plan to set 11 new environmental objectives and targets for 2025/26 on 19 June (Appendix 4).

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. Council has performed well across all its environmental objectives and targets for 2024/25, achieving green status in all 12, see Appendices 5 and 6. Highlights include:

1. **Energy** – 11 LED lighting projects delivered, 5 solar PV projects delivered, 4 new BESS installations progressing. Data Officer continues to collate, analyse and report on energy data and capture actual monthly reads on electricity metering to better inform decision making.
2. **Water** - de-energised several sites reducing potential for water loss. Water saving technologies incorporated into design spec for capital projects, & minor works refurbishments.
3. **Estate (rationalization)** - Disposals have begun, and recommended improvements to the thermal envelope, heating controls added & lighting upgraded. Staff relocations: Env Health from Smiley into Sir Thomas Dickson (Dec 2024) – complete, HR moving to The Braid (June 2025), Finance moving to The Braid (June 2025).
4. **Fleet** – 4% reduction in fleet fuel use compared to 2023/24. Telematics now installed in all fleet – understanding and identifying further efficiencies. HVO trial ongoing.
5. **Scope 3 emissions** – category 6 business miles and category 7 employee commuting data collated for 2024/25 – baseline.
6. **Sustainability** - An Invest NI approval decision is anticipated in Summer 2025. This could unlock £2.5m funding to develop skills and demonstration offer around renewables, green hydrogen production and usage and wider environmental education at the existing Ecos Business Hub and Conferencing Centre in Ballymena. The proposal would also provide funding for Council to trial a range of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.
7. **Sustainability – Fair Trade** – Council promoted and supported Fair Trade Week in September with MEA schools' competition.
8. **Biodiversity** – officers installed 30 cages with 900 oysters in Carrick Marina, adding to the network at Belfast Harbour, Glenarm and Bangor Marinas. In addition to supporting the expansion of wild

populations, the oysters will help boost biodiversity and improve water quality by filtering pollutants.

9. **Climate Canopy Project** - Tree & Woodland Strategy developed and went out for consultation early 2025. Implementation in Summer 2025.

10. **Procurement** - Officers attended SIB/SNI Sustainable Procurement training on 4 March 2025 – new NI regulations and procurement processes are more open, competitive flexible and have climate and sustainability considerations at their core.

- 3.2. Council's Carbon Footprint Report 2024/25 reports on our use of resources and highlights environmental performance during 2024/25 across Council, see Appendix 7. Headlines include:

- Council reduced energy consumption by 2% compared to previous year (reduced 16.7% compared to 2019/20 baseline year).
- Council reduced fuel consumption by 1% compared to previous year (reduced 2.3% to 2019/20 baseline year).
- Council reduced water consumption by 8% compared to previous year (reduced by 13% compared to 2019/20 baseline year).
- Council has reduced its carbon footprint by 2% compared to the previous year (and by 19% 2019/20 baseline year) due to the introduction of energy efficiency measures, electricity being generated from more renewable sources and behavioural change of staff.

- 3.3. With ever increasing services (e.g. new public toilets, community centres / pavilions, 3 & 4 G pitches etc) along with the leasing of additional buildings, actual carbon savings achieved are significant against the carbon emission baseline year (2019/20), which had lower demand.

- 3.4. Highlights in the Carbon Footprint Report include awards received during 2024/25 for environmental management and a summary of environmental initiatives across different service areas.

- 3.5. It should be noted that Council, over a 3-year investment period, has maximised Return On Investment (ROI) through careful consideration of opportunity cost when identifying projects for investment. The opportunity to maximise ROI through selecting projects with extremely short payback periods is diminishing. The approach to date has allowed ~20% reduction in carbon emissions to be delivered from modest CapEx, however it should be understood that in order to meet the Climate Change (NI) Act 2022 emission targets (48% by 2030, 77% by 2040, net zero by 2050), a more committed budget will be required as payback periods increase. Below details potential options:

- 3.5.1. **Purchase of 'green' energy tariff** – Council leads in joint procurement with 9 other NI Councils to procure energy. 2025/26 has seen Council capitalize on this approach, reducing 100% green electricity premium

from 0.65p per kWh to 0.05p per kWh. Purchasing energy on a 'green' tariff allows use lower value emissions factors when calculating carbon output.

- 3.5.2. **Energy Efficiency** – Investment in this program of works continues, currently funded from Council's capital budget and supported, when possible, by NISEP part-funding material costs. While the rest of public estate is supported by DfE funding opportunities, Councils are the only public body excluded from this fund – Elected Member lobbying is welcomed to access this.
- 3.5.3. **Renewable Energy** – further expansion and roll out of programmes is planned from Council capital budget, but also not supported by DfE funding opportunities – Elected Member lobbying is welcomed to access this.
- 3.5.4. **Fleet Fuel** – Council is currently undertaking a HVO trial. HVO fuel will most likely be comparable cost-wise with diesel within the next year. Purchasing of HVO fuel for fleet could see significant carbon savings: Based on current calculations, Council has the opportunity to reduce annual fleet fuel emissions from 1,733 tonnes CO₂e (using diesel) to approximately 132 tonnes CO₂e by switching entirely to HVO fuel) based on 2024/25 fuel usage data). While this transition would currently result in a modest increase in annual fuel costs, from £790,000 for diesel (at £1.17 per litre) to £898,000 for HVO (at £1.33 per litre), market indicators suggest that HVO prices may reach parity with diesel in the near future.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. *Financial implications* - environmental management ensures the efficient use of energy, water and fuel, which reduces costs. Budget is allocated annually for the continued accreditation to ISO14001.
- 4.2. *Human Resources* – environmental performance and reduction in carbon footprint is currently met by Council officer resource.
- 4.3. *Equality Screening* – n/a
- 4.4. *Assets* – n/a
- 4.5. *Alignment with Corporate Priorities and Link to Corporate Plan* - Planet - Council are leading by example to reduce the impact of services on the environment and protecting it for future generations.
- 4.6. *Rural Proofing and Environmental Impact* – Accreditation to ISO14001 ensures that Council reduces the environmental impact of its services and improves its environmental performance year on year.
- 4.7. *UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs)*: UN SDGs all 1-17 engaged.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. Progression of environmental targets in 2025/26 will contribute to reducing Council's carbon footprint and support delivery of the Climate and Sustainability Action Plan, requirements in the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 and deliver upon our sustainability duty.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to:
- (i) Note the performance of the Council's environmental objectives and targets 2024/25 and the 19% reduction in carbon footprint from 2019/20 baseline year; and
 - (ii) Approve the upload of Council's Carbon Footprint Report 2024/25 and Council's Environmental Objectives Performance Summary 2024/25 for public access on the Council website.

7. Appendices / Links


- Appendix 1 Environmental Management System ISO14001 Overview
- Appendix 2 Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Environmental Policy
- Appendix 3 Environmental Management System Contribution Diagram
- Appendix 4 2025-26 Environmental Objectives and Targets
- Appendix 5 2024-25 Environment Objectives and Targets Performance Detail
- Appendix 6 2024-25 Environment Objectives and Target Performance Summary
- Appendix 7 Mid and East Antrim Borough Carbon Footprint Report 2024/25

Environmental Management System ISO14001:2015



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What is the system?	<p>Council is accredited to ISO 14001:2015, the international standard for environmental management. This system ensures that we identify, manage, monitor and control our environmental impact. It requires us to continual improvement of environmental performance.</p>																
What are the benefits to Council? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved awareness of the staff and public of their individual environmental impact; 2. Prevention of pollution through efficient energy management, waste minimisation and efficient resource consumption; 3. Promotion of environmental improvements throughout our borough; 4. Compliance with relevant environmental legislation; 5. Continually improving environmental performance through setting and achieving realistic objectives and targets; 6. Making everyone (employees, public and interested parties) aware of Council's Environmental Policy. 																	
How do we measure environmental performance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system is externally audited every year by NQA Assessors; • Council achieved a Platinum Award at the NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey Awards 2024; • Council publish an annual Carbon Footprint Report on its website • Annual Management Review of environmental objectives/targets. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resource consumption: water/fuel/electric/gas/paper/plastic; 2. Managing emissions: boilers/vehicles/air conditioning; 3. Managing discharges: storm/sewage/consents; 4. Managing chemicals: storage/controlling spills; 5. Waste management: internal/contractors/hazardous; 6. Visual impact: use of land; 7. Review activities for environmental impact; 8. Review compliance with environmental legislation; 9. Promoting sustainable procurement; and 10. Influencing suppliers and customers. 																
Your Environmental Champions <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td><i>Tourism, Arts and Cultural Services</i> - Alison Mahwhinney, Jayne Clarke, Rosalind Lowry</td><td><i>Waste, Energy & Building Services</i> - Neil Patrick, Steven Bailie, Joe Jordan</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Climate and Sustainability</i> - Catherine Hunter</td><td><i>Assets</i> - Alison Penny</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Policy</i> - Lesley Kerr</td><td><i>Planning & Building Control</i> - Emma Ferguson</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td><i>Finance</i> - Claire Loy, Karl Wade</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Human Resources & Organisational Development</i> - Ciara McBride</td><td><i>Community Planning and Development</i> - Lisa Thompson</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Corporate Services</i> - Laura-Jane McCloy, Danielle Hollinger</td><td><i>Parks and Open Spaces</i> - Lisa Kirkwood, Lindsay Houston</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>BRCD</i> - Hugh McNally, <i>Capital Works</i> - Andrew McMullan, <i>Regeneration</i> - Eamon McMullan</td><td><i>Public Protection, Health & Wellbeing</i> - Catriona Muldoon, Terry Diamond, Emma McCabe</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Digital Innovation & Procurement/Finance</i> - James Sweeney</td><td><i>Communications</i> - Aisling Maguire</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Tourism, Arts and Cultural Services</i> - Alison Mahwhinney, Jayne Clarke, Rosalind Lowry	<i>Waste, Energy & Building Services</i> - Neil Patrick, Steven Bailie, Joe Jordan	<i>Climate and Sustainability</i> - Catherine Hunter	<i>Assets</i> - Alison Penny	<i>Policy</i> - Lesley Kerr	<i>Planning & Building Control</i> - Emma Ferguson		<i>Finance</i> - Claire Loy, Karl Wade	<i>Human Resources & Organisational Development</i> - Ciara McBride	<i>Community Planning and Development</i> - Lisa Thompson	<i>Corporate Services</i> - Laura-Jane McCloy, Danielle Hollinger	<i>Parks and Open Spaces</i> - Lisa Kirkwood, Lindsay Houston	<i>BRCD</i> - Hugh McNally, <i>Capital Works</i> - Andrew McMullan, <i>Regeneration</i> - Eamon McMullan	<i>Public Protection, Health & Wellbeing</i> - Catriona Muldoon, Terry Diamond, Emma McCabe	<i>Digital Innovation & Procurement/Finance</i> - James Sweeney	<i>Communications</i> - Aisling Maguire	<p>Council has 12 environmental objectives for 2024/25 (overleaf). These are reviewed quarterly by the Environment Champion Team. End of year progress summary shows all 12 objectives 2024/25 as green.</p> <p>What can YOU do?</p> <p>If <u>office based</u>, please consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid single-use plastics, use items that can be re-used; • Be energy conscious - close doors/windows/turn down thermostats; • Turn of monitors/computers/lights at end of the day; • Use recycling bins where possible; • Don't litter! • Avoid travelling to meetings where possible; and • Avoid using chemical cleaners where possible. <p>If <u>outdoor based</u>, please consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing fuel use where possible, optimise your route and driving efficiently; • Pollution prevention when re-fuelling/using chemicals; and • Keeping accurate records of any pollution/fire event. <p>Everyone has a role to play! Contact your personal Environmental Champion for further information, or to provide new ideas to improving Council's environmental performance.</p> 
<i>Tourism, Arts and Cultural Services</i> - Alison Mahwhinney, Jayne Clarke, Rosalind Lowry	<i>Waste, Energy & Building Services</i> - Neil Patrick, Steven Bailie, Joe Jordan																
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ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS 2024/25

Ref	Climate Action Plan Theme	UN SDG	Sub-theme	Objective	Target	Responsible Officer
Obj1	Buildings & Energy	7, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Improve the energy efficiency of Council buildings to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.	Deliver 3 large LED lighting projects.	Joe Jordan
Obj2	Buildings & Energy	7, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Maximize the use of renewable energy sources to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.	To deliver 3 solar projects	Joe Jordan
Obj3	Buildings & Energy	7, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Deliver an energy efficiency education programme to Council staff.	Deliver to 100% of staff over 2 years	Joe Jordan
Obj4	Buildings & Energy	12, 13, 17	Water	Implement water-saving technologies into Council's Capital Works Programme.	Include water saving technologies in design-stage of capital projects in 2024/25.	Joe Jordan
Obj5	Buildings & Energy	6, 7, 9, 12, 13	Estate Review	Maximize the efficient use of buildings and facilities.	Complete review of energy /thermal efficiency of Council estate	Joe Jordan Steven Bailie
Obj6	Transport	9, 11, 12, 13	Transport	To reduce fuel usage across fleet by 5% each year, over the next 3 years, compared to 2022/23	To deliver Eco-Driver training to fleet officers as part of CPC. HVO trial.	Nat Woodside
Obj7	Resource Management	12	Scope 3 Emissions	To collate MEA staff commuter miles for 2023/24 [baseline figure] and 2024/25.	To determine both a baseline and 2024/25 Scope 3 emissions from commuter miles.	Catherine Hunter
Obj8	Economy	6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	Sustainability Water Quality Energy Efficiency Improved biodiversity	To develop the ECOS Centre as a sustainability hub	Apply for test bed funding to develop green hydrogen, environmental education, hydrogen-powered refuse vehicle and renewable energy	Karen Hastings Frank McGrogan Joe Jordan Catherine Hunter
Obj9	Protecting the Environment	11, 12, 13, 17	Fairtrade - Working towards eliminating poverty	Highlight organisations and retailers that stock Fair Trade products in our Borough	To retain Fairtrade status and engage with schools and residents during Fairtrade Fortnight so that awareness would be raised.	Lindsay Houston
Obj10	Protecting the Environment	13, 14, 15	Biodiversity	Encourage more habitats, halting biodiversity loss	By the end of 2024 the oyster population will have increased in the Borough.	Lindsay Houston
Obj11	Protecting the Environment	13, 14, 15	Sustainability	Delivery Climate Canopy Project.	Through Climate Canopy Project by the end of 2024 - 100,000 trees will be planted across the Borough. We will use the WT Tree Equity	Lindsay Houston

					Score to direct our planting to ensure a fairer distribution and we are also encouraging diversity of tree stock planted across the Borough. Tree strategy ready for consultation and implementation later in 2024.	
Obj 12	Good Governance and Community Leadership	8, 10, 12, 13, 17	Procurement	Undertake review of MEA Procurement Policy in line with new Procurement Regulations 2024.	To ensure all contract managers have understanding and mechanism to set minimum quality standards in contracts.	James Sweeney Catherine Hunter Joe Jordan

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council - Environmental Policy

In maintaining its responsibility to provide high quality services, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council recognises environmental management to be of equal importance to other prime management considerations. As such, we acknowledge that our activities and services impact, directly and indirectly, on the environment. In this respect, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council accepts its obligation to minimise its environmental impacts through co-ordinated environmental management.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is committed to:

- Preventing pollution through efficient energy management, waste minimisation and efficient resource consumption;
- Responsible plastic management;
- Promoting environmental improvements throughout our Borough;
- Complying with relevant environmental legislation, regulations and appropriate sector best practice initiatives;
- Continual environmental performance improvement through setting and achieving realistic objectives and targets;
- Communicating this policy to all employees and those who work on our behalf; and
- Making this environmental policy available to interested parties, on request.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council will implement and review this policy within the framework of a systematic environmental management system.

Valerie Watts
Interim Chief Executive

Cllr Jackson Minford
Mayor

June 2025

Corporate Plan 2024-28 - Planet

1. Empower, educate, and work in partnership with our citizens, communities, and businesses, to progress the borough towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
2. Support local communities to create an environmentally resilient and sustainable borough that is equipped to deal with emergency situations, including climate adaptation.
3. Protect our natural environment, enhance biodiversity, and retain or increase Council's current levels of carbon capture.
4. Lead by example and reduce the impact of our own operations to progress our organisation towards net zero emissions by 2040, by embedding sustainability and climate adaptation into all decision making.
5. Deliver an effective and efficient waste service that supports citizens, communities, and businesses to reduce waste and promote a more circular economy.

Community Plan 2017-2032 - Environment pillar implemented across all other pillars (encourage environmentally responsible behaviour).

Local Development Plan 2030 - supports Economic, Social and Environmental objectives.

Climate and Sustainability Action Plan 2023-27 – supports delivery of 93 actions within this plan.

MEA Adaptation Plan 2023 -27 – supports delivery of actions within this plan.

Business in the Community NI Climate Action Pledge – supports delivery of projects to help decarbonise Council's Scope 1 and 2 emissions.

Meets requirements of ISO 14001:2015 - Demonstrates annual improvement in environmental performance.

External credibility - Informs the Arena Network survey, environmental performance benchmark across NI organisations. MEA holds Gold status (Nov 2023).

Annual Environmental Performance and Carbon Footprint Report - Publicly accessible, good PR, demonstrates leadership, posted on website, carbon footprint, holistic view, incorporating work across all Council services.

Agile Working Framework - Digital transformation.

Local Government Act - Performance criteria around efficiency and sustainability.

Contributes to Council's Sustainable Development Duty - environment, economic, social.

Programme for Government - Outcome: we live and work sustainably – protecting the environment. Indicators: Increase environmental sustainability. Increase household recycling rate.

Environmental Management System ISO14001:2015

2025-26 Objectives & Targets

Ref	Climate Action Plan Theme	UN SDG	Sub-theme	Objective	Target	Responsible Officer
Obj1	Buildings & Energy	7, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Improve the energy efficiency of Council buildings to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.	Target of 10 EE projects	Joe Jordan
Obj2	Buildings & Energy	6, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Maximize the use of renewable energy sources to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.	Target of 3 solar projects 6 will be delivered by year end.	Joe Jordan
Obj3	Buildings & Energy	6, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Deliver an energy efficiency education program to Council staff.	Deliver to 100% of staff over 2 years.	Joe Jordan
Obj4	Buildings & Energy	12, 13, 17	Water	Implement water-saving technologies into Councils Capital Works Program.	Delivered- Projects are typically designing in water saving technology as standard.	Joe Jordan
Obj5	Buildings & Energy	6, 7, 9, 12, 13	Estate Review	Maximize the efficient use of buildings and facilities.	Complete review of energy/ thermal efficiency of Council estate.	Joe Jordan
Obj6	Transport	9, 11, 12, 13	Fuel usage	To reduce fuel usage across fleet by 5% each year, over the next 3 years, compared to 2022/23.	To deliver Eco-Driver training to fleet officers as part of CPC. HVO trial.	Nat Woodside
Obj7	Resource Management	12	Reuse	To review and dispose of office- based assets from Sentry Hill and LEDCOM.	To promote the waste hierarchy- reuse office-based assets through a network of sustainable options.	Alison Penny / Catherine Hunter
Obj8	Protecting the Environment	6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	Harbours & Marinas	Improve water quality and encourage blue carbon sequestration.	By the end of 2025, have a seagrass pontoon installed in Glenarm Marina.	Ryan Hack
Obj9	Protecting the Environment	1, 12, 13, 17	Tree Nurseries	Expansion of community tree nurseries across the borough.	Development of 3 nurseries (locations tbc)	Lindsay Houston

Obj10	Protecting the Environment	13, 14, 15	Nature Recovery Plan	Support nature recovery across the borough.	Development of Nature Recovery Plan for Larne Town Park.	Lindsay Houston
Obj11	Protecting the Environment	13, 14, 15	Community Garden	Expansion of MEA Community Garden network.	Development of 1 community garden (location tbc)	Lindsay Houston

Environmental Management System ISO14001:2015

2024-25 Objectives & Targets

Ref	Climate Action Plan Theme	UN SDG	Sub-theme	Objective	Target	Responsible Officer
Obj1	Buildings & Energy	7, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Improve the energy efficiency of Council buildings to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.	Deliver 3 large LED lighting projects.	Joe Jordan
Obj2	Buildings & Energy	6, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Maximize the use of renewable energy sources to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.	To deliver 3 solar projects	Joe Jordan
Obj3	Buildings & Energy	6, 9, 12, 13	Energy	Deliver an energy efficiency education programme to Council staff.	Deliver to 100% of staff over 2 years	Joe Jordan
Obj4	Buildings & Energy		Water	Implement water-saving technologies into Council's Capital Works Programme.	Include water saving technologies in design-stage of capital projects in 2024/25.	Joe Jordan
Obj5	Buildings & Energy	6, 7, 9, 12, 13	Estate Review	Maximize the efficient use of buildings and facilities.	Complete review of energy /thermal efficiency of Council estate	Joe Jordan Steven Bailie
Obj6	Transport	9, 11, 12, 13	Transport	To reduce fuel usage across fleet by 5% each year, over the next 3 years, compared to 2022/23	To deliver Eco-Driver training to fleet officers as part of CPC. HVO trial.	Nat Woodside
Obj7	Resource Management		Scope 3 Emissions	To collate MEA staff commuter miles for 2023/24 [baseline figure] and 2024/25.	To determine both a baseline and 2024/25 Scope 3 emissions from commuter miles.	Catherine Hunter
Obj8	Economy	6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	Sustainability Water Quality Energy Efficiency Improved biodiversity	To develop the ECOS Centre as a sustainability hub	Apply for test bed funding to develop green hydrogen, environmental education, hydrogen-powered refuse vehicle and renewable energy	Karen Hastings Frank McGrogan Joe Jordan Catherine Hunter

Obj9	Protecting the Environment	1, 12, 13, 17	Fairtrade - Working towards eliminating poverty	Highlight organisations and retailers that stock Fair Trade products in our Borough	To retain Fairtrade status and engage with schools and residents during Fairtrade Fortnight so that awareness would be raised.	Lindsay Houston
Obj10	Protecting the Environment	13, 14, 15	Biodiversity	Encourage more habitats, halting biodiversity loss	By the end of 2024 the oyster population will have increased in the Borough.	Lindsay Houston
Obj11	Protecting the Environment	13, 14, 15	Sustainability	Delivery Climate Canopy Project.	Through Climate Canopy Project by the end of 2024 - 100,000 trees will be planted across the Borough. We will use the WT Tree Equity Score to direct our planting to ensure a fairer distribution and we are also encouraging diversity of tree stock planted across the Borough. Tree strategy ready for consultation and implementation later in 2024.	Lindsay Houston
Obj 12	Good Governance and Community Leadership	8, 10, 12, 13, 17	Procurement	Undertake review of MEA Procurement Policy in line with new Procurement Regulations 2024.	To ensure all contract managers have understanding and mechanism to set minimum quality standards in contracts.	James Sweeney Catherine Hunter Joe Jordan

Obj 1: Energy

Improve the energy efficiency of Council buildings to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.

Target: Target of 10 EE projects (11 now delivered).

Completed:

- Peoples Park external lighting
- STLC - Pool areas completed (entire centre now upgraded)
- Showgrounds - Internal lighting (high use areas) completed
- Showgrounds - External lighting (amenity, bulkheads etc.) completed
- Carrick Civic centre - Internal (suitable areas/ ceiling grid dependant)
- Carrick Town Hall - Internal (excluding conference room low burn)
- Civic & Town Hall - External building and courtyard
- Oakfield CC

Planned:

- Larne LC Pool area (completes)
- The Braid (various areas)

Estate wide EE review including thermal performance investment opportunities- CWI & loft / void insulation.

- Lighting controls for dusk to dawn lighting also estate wide.



Obj 2: Energy

Maximize the use of renewable energy sources to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.

Target: Target of 3 solar projects 6 will be delivered by year end.

Q4 Jan - March 2025 delivery:

- Portglenone Marina
- Waveney Rd HRC & Nursery
- The Braid - put on hold for wider review of Net Zero opportunity - M&E system
- 2 Solar PV arrays to get addition of co-located storage
- Sullatober Transfer (20kWh)
- Multi-story car pk (20kWh)

4 new solar systems

4 new BESS arrays

Still finalising sites but will continue with a focus on waste on decarbonisation of waste and possibly parks sites.



**Mid & East
Antrim**
Borough Council

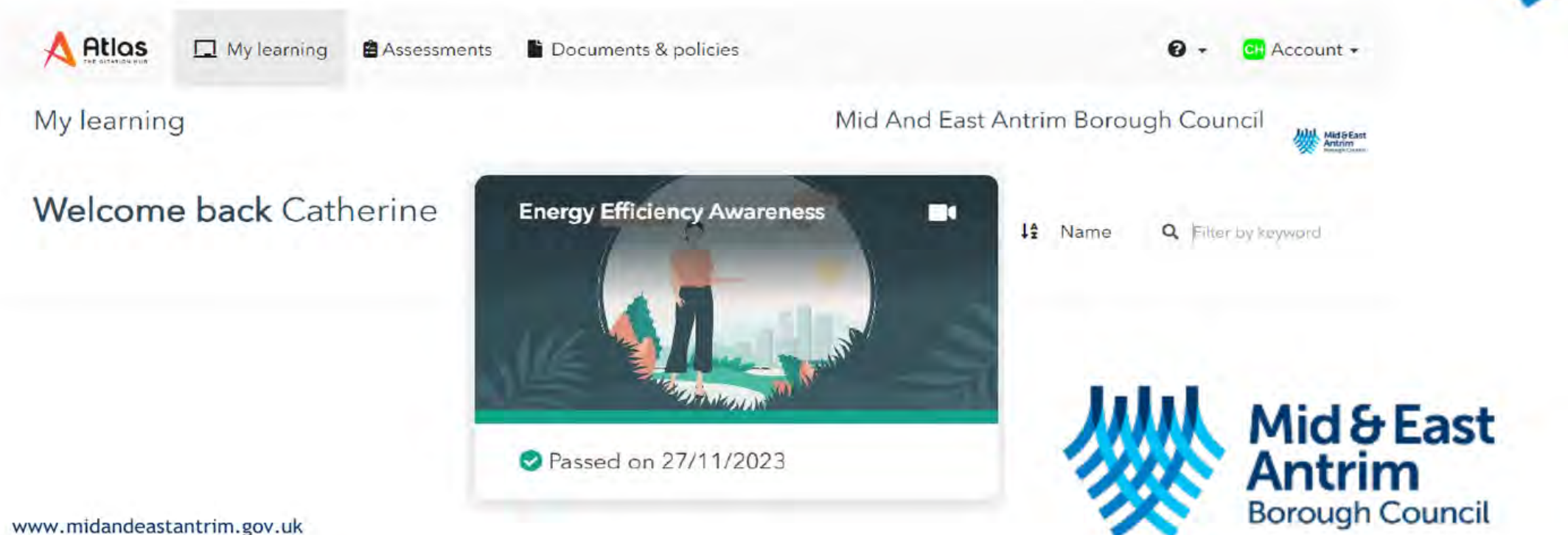
Obj 3: Energy

Deliver an energy efficiency education programme to Council staff.

Target: Deliver to 100% of staff over 2 years.

317 staff has successfully completed the Energy Efficiency Awareness module with a further 279 still to complete.

Deirdre Graham, Learning and Development Advisor inviting staff to complete.



The screenshot displays the Atlas learning management system interface. At the top, there are navigation links: Atlas, My learning, Assessments, and Documents & policies. On the right, there are icons for help and a user account labeled 'CH Account'. Below the navigation bar, the text 'My learning' is on the left, and 'Mid And East Antrim Borough Council' is on the right, accompanied by the council's logo. A large welcome message reads 'Welcome back Catherine'. In the center, a certificate for the 'Energy Efficiency Awareness' module is shown, indicating it was 'Passed on 27/11/2023'. To the right of the certificate, there are search and filter options: 'Name' and 'Filter by keyword'. At the bottom left, the website address 'www.midandeantrim.gov.uk' is displayed. At the bottom right, the 'Mid & East Antrim Borough Council' logo is prominently featured.

Obj 4: Water

Implement water-saving technologies into Councils Capital Works Programme.
Target: Delivered- Projects are typically designing in water saving technology as standard.

- Water saving technologies incorporated into design spec for capital projects, & minor works refurbishments.
- Carnfunnock CP - will have both sensors and waterless technology being specified.
- Future public toilet refurbs & new builds, if pilot is successful.



Obj 5: Estate Review

Maximize the efficient use of buildings and facilities.

Target: Complete review of energy /thermal efficiency of Council estate.

The review is ongoing with a range of attributes being considered for each building including incl. age, insulation, lighting, primary heating systems, any secondary heat sources including renewable energy sources and windows).

EPCs - with rising energy costs, they are a useful tool to see where the property is lacking in energy efficiency and how you can make improvements.

Disposals have begun, and recommended improvements to the thermal envelope, heating controls added & lighting upgraded.

Staff movements:

- Env Health from Smiley into Sir Thomas Dickson (Dec 2024) - complete
- HR moving to The Braid (June 2025)
- Finance moving to The Braid (June 2025)

Obj 6: Transport

To reduce fuel usage across fleet by 5% each year, over the next 3 years, compared to 2022/23.

Target: To deliver Eco-Driver training to fleet officers as part of CPC. HVO trial.

- Q3 Oct-Dec 2023 = 174189.8 litres
- Q3 Oct-Dec 2024 = 170931.8 litres (3,258 litres savings)

Eco Driver Training continues to be rolled out. 190 drivers through CPC have completed over 2024/25.

Telematics - now rolled out across all MEA fleet.

HVO Trial - vehicles currently being delivered March 2025 onwards.

Nat has secured a new gas analyser which will monitor gas output and particulate matter.



**Mid & East
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Obj 7: Resource Management

To collate MEA staff commuter and business miles for 2023/24 (baseline figure) and 2024/25.

Target: To determine both a baseline and 2024/25 Scope 3 emissions from commuter and business miles.

Work ongoing with HR to determine Council business miles for 2024/25 (completion in March 2025).

Commuter miles calculated for 2023/24 - will re-calculate based on agile working policy of 3 days in office (and pro rata).

Use of gov.uk carbon conversion 2024 factor for both types of transport.



Obj 8: Resource Management

To develop the ECOS Hub as a sustainability hub.

Target: Secure c£2.5 grant funding for Council under the Hytech NI project

An Invest NI approval decision is anticipated in Summer 2025. This could unlock £2.5m funding to develop skills and demonstration offer around renewables, green hydrogen production and usage and wider environmental education at the existing Ecos Business Hub and Conferencing Centre in Ballymena. The proposal would also provide funding for Council to trial a range of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

The proposed project aligns closely with Council's i4C Innovation and Cleantech Centre and Hydrogen Training Academy initiatives.

HyTech NI Project – Ballymena test-bed focus



A collaborative £18m project supported by the NI Complementary Fund which includes for a NI Hydrogen Technology Accelerator led by academia and a range of hydrogen economy 'commercialisation' test beds in Ballymena with Council and industry partners as follows;



Hydrogen Fuel **Mobility** Testbed
(via a shared H² Refueling Station)



Hydrogen **Blending** Testbed
(in closed loop section of local gas network at St Patrick's)



Hydrogen **Skills** Testbed
(Future CleanTech sector & Hydrogen economy skills training at the Ecos Demonstration Hub, Ballymena)



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HytechNI project (if Business Case approved) launch in early 2024

Obj 9: Fairtrade

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Highlight organizations and retailers that stock Fair Trade products in our Borough.
Target: To retain Fairtrade status and engage with schools and residents during Fairtrade Fortnight so that awareness would be raised.

Monday 9 September - Sunday 22 September
 MEA schools - Fair Trade competition by submitting a:

- Fair Trade Project
- Fair Trade Painting/ Drawing or Collage or
- Fair Trade Poem



Advertised on our social media channels, Facebook (1,200 followers) and Instagram (550 followers) and sent to all schools in the borough.



Obj 10: Protecting the Environment

Encourage more habitats, halting biodiversity loss.

Target: By the end of 2024 the oyster population will have increased in the Borough.



900 oysters in 30 cages installed.

The restoration initiative could see up to 900 million oyster larvae released into surrounding waters every year. In addition to supporting the expansion of wild populations, the oysters will help boost biodiversity and improve water quality by filtering pollutants

Network of nurseries:

Glenarm Marina, Carrick Marina, Belfast Harbour, Bangor Marina

Obj 11: Protecting the Environment

Delivery Climate Canopy Project.

Target: Through Climate Canopy Project by the end of 2024 -100,000 trees will be planted across the borough.

Tree & Woodland Strategy being developed, will be ready for consultation early 2025, and implementation in Summer 2025.

Climate Canopy - Q4

Tree numbers: 16,680

Hectares: 12.29

Schools: 6

Com. Groups: 10

Site visits to schools: 1

Site visits to community groups: 2



Obj 12: Sustainability

31

Undertake review of MEA Procurement Policy in line with new procurement Regulations going live on 24th February 2025.

Target: To ensure all contract managers have understanding and mechanism to set minimum quality standards in contracts.

New regulations and procurement processes - open, competitive flexible.

Competitive Flexible procedure will give CM's more scope to consider environmental, sustainability needs of MEA when they are preparing documentations, allowing site visits, presentations, and demonstrations of systems to be included in tender specifications.

Procurement training on new regulations will be mandatory and rolled out across the Council to all relevant officers involved in procurement of goods services and works.

Officers attended SIB/SNI Sustainable Procurement training on 4 March - resources available on SIB website.



Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Environment and Carbon Footprint Report 2024/25

Local authorities are in a leading position to demonstrate CO₂ reductions through their activities and behaviour as an example of best practise to residents and local businesses. By calculating their own emissions and making in-house reductions, in addition to increasing awareness and supporting local businesses and residents, carbon emissions can be reduced across each local authority area and therefore across the country as a whole, meeting the government's climate change targets.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and improving environmental performance year on year. This is demonstrated through its accreditation to ISO 14001:2015, the international standard for environmental management.

Council's environment policy can be viewed on the Council website at <https://www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/council/policies-and-documents/policies/environmental-policy/>

Council has adopted 2019/20 as its carbon baseline year.
It should be noted that from 1 April 2024 a revision to the Agile Working Policy requires staff to work in the office 3 days per week (previously 2).

Energy Use (Scope 1 & 2)

Year	Energy use (Electric gas oil)	tCO ₂ e (LGA Accounting Tool)	No. employees	tCO ₂ e per employee
2024/25	20,790,645 kWh	4,107	766	5.36
2023/24	21,102,645 kWh	4,380	816	5.92
2022/23	22,840,333 kWh	4,457	830	5.37
2021/22	23,229,518 kWh	4,680	837	5.59
2020/21	17,509,843 kWh	3,714	878	4.23
2019/20	24,552,132 kWh	5,307	880	6.03

Council has reduced its energy consumption by 2% compared to previous year (and by 16% compared to 2019/20 baseline year) due to energy efficiency measures and the implementation of renewable energy projects.

Transport (Scope 1)

Year	Total fuel used by vehicle fleet (litres)	tCO2e (LGA Accounting Tool)	No. employees	tCO2e per employee
2024/25	698,194	1,752	766	2.17
2023/24	698,433	1,768	816	2.17
2022/23	723,504	1,853	830	2.23
2021/22	766,639	1,926	837	2.30
2020/21	713,089	1,816	878	2.07
2019/20	714,228	1,853	880	2.11

Council's fleet fuel consumption decreased by 1% from previous year (and by 2.3% to the baseline year). A HVO trial is currently underway. Based on current calculations (2024/25), Council has the opportunity to reduce annual fleet fuel emissions from 1,752 tonnes CO2e (using diesel) to approximately 132 tonnes CO2e by switching entirely to HVO fuel.

Carbon Footprint

Year	Total tCO2e (LGA Accounting Tool)	tCO2e per employee
2024/25	5,859	7.64
2023/24	5,950	7.5
2022/23	6,308	7.6
2021/22	6,606	7.9
2020/21	5,530	6.3
2019/20	7,159	8.1

Council has reduced its carbon footprint by 2% compared to the previous year (and by 19% compared to the 2019/20 baseline year). This has been achieved through the introduction of energy efficiency measures, electricity being generated from more renewable sources and behavioural change of staff. The carbon emission per staff member has slightly increased due to drop in employee figures from 816 (2023/24) to 766 (2024/25).

With ever increasing services (e.g. new public toilets, community centres / pavilions, 3 & 4 G pitches etc) along with the leasing of additional buildings means carbon savings achieved are significant against the carbon emission baseline year (2019/20), which had lower demand.

Waste (Scope 3)

Year	Waste generated per employee (kg)	% Recycled	tCO2e from waste landfilled	tCO2e from waste landfilled per employee
2024/25	121.14	60.55%	0	0
2023/24	95.3	52.74%	35.3	0.4
2022/23	115.3	50.2%	48.9	0.06
2021/22	68.0	68%	19.53	0.02
2020/21	69.0	68.7%	19.32	0.02
2019/20	139.7	73.2%	33.7	0.04

Internal waste arisings has increased on previous year due to an increase in material shredded with large office moves and also staff numbers decreasing after voluntary severance. Staff have achieved an internal recycling rate of 60.55%.

Water (Scope 3)

Year	Water Consumption (m3)	No. of Employees	Water Consumption per employee (m3)
2024/25	50,886	766	66.4
2023/24	49,769	816	61
2022/23	64,003	830	77.1
2021/22	49,897	837	59.6

2020/21	37,870	878	43.1
2019/20	66,764	880	75.9

Water consumption has increased slightly by 8% compared to the previous year (but decreased by 13% compared to 2019/20 baseline year). An internal desktop audit has been completed to identify historic and possible live water loss events. One such water loss event was at Brown’s Bay, potentially involving a third party.

Business Miles (Scope 3) - 2024/25 baseline year of 265,175.9 miles, 33,147 litres of fuel and 83 tonnes of CO2e.

Commuter Miles (Scope 3) - 2024/25 baseline year of 10,733 litres of fuel and 27 tonnes of CO2e.

Key Achievements 2024/25

Environmental Education

- We delivered a series of waste management / sustainability comms campaigns annually, in partnership with [WRAP](#). In terms of waste management specifically, we promoted the new DAERA/WRAP designed [My Recycling NI](#) website, which clearly demonstrates end destinations for waste/recycling streams - this provides information and gives confidence to our residents as to the actual end destination of their recycling efforts. We continue to be a member of the Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN) who promote sustainable reuse and repair as a practical and effective way of tackling Northern Ireland’s waste generation and develop opportunities in the Circular Economy.
- Council continues to support the **Eco Schools Programme** through online learning to all 74 registered MEA schools, including Wrigley’s Litter Less Campaign, Translink Travel Challenge, Single-Use Plastic Project. Council provided £10,942 to KNIB for 2024/25 academic year to support a new Big Wheelie Bin Challenge to encourage school pupils (and their families) to recycle.
Council and Eco Schools - Charlene McKeown (Environmental Education Manager) delivered an Eco Schools Cluster meeting on the 17 September 2024 which brought together over 30 school teachers and delivery partners.
The Eco Schools team undertook 75 school visits (up from 55 previous year), delivered coastal projects to 3 coastal schools, delivered Wheelie Big Challenge to 10 schools, and awarded new Green Flag awards to 60 schools. Ulidia Integrated College secured Ambassador School for the third year. 39% (up from 25%) (29, up from 19 schools) of schools have a current Green Flag. 50 Silver Certificate, 59 Bronze Certificates. Ulidia College retain the Ambassador Eco Schools Award.
We continue to keep all MEA schools up to date with funding opportunities including the DAERA Climate Challenge Fund, the Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme and the DAERA Marine Litter Capital Grant. We also keep schools up to date with training opportunities including DAERA/KNIB Climate Change Programme and Carbon Literacy Programme.
- Food For Thought Competition 2025 - engaging with secondary schools in the Borough with the aim to promote food sustainability as part of a wider STEM based Activate Your Curiosity programming with local manufacturers that includes the now annual Brian Cox

Summer School. Winners designed a new food for thought logo, printed on t-shirts and the winning two schools visited the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) at their Greenmount Campus in Antrim.

- Hosted by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, the Summer Science School is the second event to have been held in Northern Ireland and we were delighted to have Professor Cox in attendance. In addition to Professor Cox, keynote speakers included inspiring TED Talks by industry and academic leaders including Dr. Erin Higgins, Astrophysicist at the Armagh Observatory & Planetarium; Male Midwife Vince Rosales; Fiona Simpson and Suzanne Leslie from Amazon Web Services and Richard Furey from local employer Yelo to name but a few.
- Student Projects - Council hosted x1 BSc Environmental Awareness student from QUB to assist with ISO14001 delivery alongside other sustainable initiatives.

Community Engagement

- Five climate & sustainability workshop sessions delivered between April and June 2024 to five community groups (U3A, The Inner Wheel, Cairncastle Women's Institute, Ballymena Probus Club, The Carson Project). 'Starting the Loop' (an educational and sign-posting circular-economy event) was delivered to 5 local businesses and social enterprises on 26 September 2024 in Lanre Town Hall. Community engagement commenced October 2024 to support the implementation of the Christmas Toy Container campaign. We have delivered environmental education sessions to 10 local community groups, businesses and social enterprises up to 31 December 2024. Further engagement was held with across Mid and East Antrim, including the Collaborative Growth Network (CGN) through the Net Zero Innovations and Delivery piece with Connor O'Dornan. The event on the 16 January was hosted in ECOS Sustainability Hub and was delivered to 12 local businesses starting out on their Climate Action Plan development.
- Council awarded £10,782 to 10 projects across the borough (currently being delivered), through the **Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme** in partnership with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful - projects are to support communities to improve their local area and promote civic pride among residents.

Communications

- We continue to engage with our residents through social media/press releases/website info/Bin-ovation app delivering waste reduction and recycling comms campaigns to help to reach EU recycling targets (50% by 2020 [achieved], 55% by 2025 (not achieved, currently 50.67%, 60% by 2030).
- Between 14 - 20 October 2024 we delivered Recycle Week which focussed on 'Rescue Me!' recyclates with human personalities. We supported this campaign through social media (FB, Twitter, Instagram), press release, Council website update, Bin-ovation app update, as well as 'sharing' online posts issued by WRAP.
- Throughout Oct - Dec 2024 we delivered Christmas/New-Year-related comms on reducing waste and encouraging recycling. We also delivered a campaign on the 'Christmas Toy Container' project, which encouraged our residents to gift pre-loved/unwanted toys to our recycling centres, which were then provided to local charities to raise funds or were directly gifted to local community groups for families across the borough. We diverted 3.1 tonnes during this campaign in 2024 (3.2 tonnes in 2023, 5.2 tonnes in 2022, 2 tonnes in 2021, 2.3 tonnes in 2020 and 1 tonne in 2019).
- In March 2025 we delivered a WRAP supported 'Food Waste Action Week' comms campaign aimed at encouraging residents to reduce the amount of excess food shopping, to meal plan, to store food properly and to use up leftovers more effectively. This campaign theme was to 'Choose What You'll Use', highlighting the benefits of buying loose fruit and

vegetables and inspiring people to do this wherever they can. We supported this campaign through social media (FB, Twitter, Instagram), press release, Council website update, Bin-ovation app update, as well as 'sharing' online posts issued by WRAP.

Recycling

- Council's current recycling rate is 50.73% (2024/25). We've met the 2020 EU target (50%) but haven't met the 55% by 2025. The new Climate Change (N) Act 2022 includes a more ambitious target of 70% for all municipal waste. Proposed expansion into municipal waste collections from businesses etc in borough.
- April 2024 has seen the introduction of a new one-Council confidential shredding contract with ShredBank. This not only ensures proper document disposal, it promotes recycling of this material, with carbon savings provided. This contract has been extended into 2025/26.

Litter

- KNIB Cleanliness Survey: Jul-Sept 2024 - Council scored 70%, which is on par with July-Sept 2023.
- Council continues to support all litter picking volunteer groups across the borough, with a lot of focus on the Eco Rangers in Larne and Carrickfergus, County Antrim Countryside Custodians (Ballymena area) who continue to tackle polluting litter, enhancing our borough. We also supported the KNIB 'Big Spring Clean' throughout March and April 2025.
- In terms of resident complaint reporting re: fly-tipping and littering, we've seen a steady decrease in levels (2024-25 = Reports of fly tipping: 294, Complaint substantiated on investigation: 143, Reports of Litter: 48, Complaint substantiated on investigation: 18).

Environment

- Council achieved Platinum level at the 2024 (up from Gold in 2023) Business in the Community NI Environmental Benchmarking Survey. Council is entering the Awards again in June 2025 with the aim to retain 'Platinum' level, based on the reduced carbon emissions and wide range of environmental projects delivered this last year.
- ISO14001 - Council continue to be accredited to ISO 14001:2015 International Environmental Management Standard across all services, with 8 new sites being audited in August 2024. We were recredited until 2027.
- Under ISO14001, we have delivered the following over 2024/25:

1. **Improve the energy efficiency of Council buildings to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.**

Target: Target of 10 EE projects (11 now delivered).

Completed:

Peoples Park external lighting
 STLC - Pool areas completed (entire centre now upgraded)
 Showgrounds - Internal lighting (high use areas) completed
 Showgrounds - External lighting (amenity, bulkheads etc.) completed
 Carrick Civic centre - Internal (suitable areas/ ceiling grid dependant)
 Carrick Town Hall - Internal (excluding conference room low burn)
 Civic & Town Hall - External building and courtyard
 Oakfield CC

Planned:

Larne LC Pool area (completes)
 The Braid (various areas)
 Estate wide EE review including thermal performance investment opportunities- CWI & loft / void insulation.

Lighting controls for dusk to dawn lighting also estate wide.

2. Maximize the use of renewable energy sources to help deliver carbon reduction targets and reduce costs.

Target: Target of 3 solar projects 6 will be delivered by year end.

Q4 Jan - March 2025 delivery:

Portglenone Marina

Waveney Rd HRC & Nursery

The Braid - put on hold for wider review of Net Zero opportunity - M&E system

2 Solar PV arrays to get addition of co-located storage

Sullatober Transfer (20kWh)

Multi-story car pk (20kWh)

4 new solar systems

4 new BESS arrays

Still finalising sites but will continue with a focus on waste on decarbonisation of waste and possibly parks sites.

3. Deliver an energy efficiency education programme to Council staff.

Target: Deliver to 100% of staff over 2 years.

317 staff have successfully completed the Energy Efficiency Awareness module with a further 279 still to complete.

4. Implement water-saving technologies into Councils Capital Works Programme.

Target: Delivered- Projects are typically designing in water saving technology as standard.

Water saving technologies incorporated into design spec for capital projects, & minor works refurbishments.

Carnfunnock CP - will have both sensors and waterless technology being specified.

Future public toilet refurb & new builds, if pilot is successful.

5. Maximize the efficient use of buildings and facilities.

Target: Complete review of energy /thermal efficiency of Council estate.

The review is ongoing with a range of attributes being considered for each building including incl. age, insulation, lighting, primary heating systems, any secondary heat sources including renewable energy sources and windows).

EPCs - with rising energy costs, they are a useful tool to see where the property is lacking in energy efficiency and how you can make improvements.

Disposals have begun, and recommended improvements to the thermal envelope, heating controls added & lighting upgraded.

Staff movements:

Env Health from Smiley into Sir Thomas Dickson (Dec 2024) - complete
 HR moving to The Braid (June 2025)
 Finance moving to The Braid (June 2025)

6. To reduce fuel usage across fleet by 5% each year, over the next 3 years, compared to 2022/23.

Target: To deliver Eco-Driver training to fleet officers as part of CPC. HVO trial.

2023-24: 697,835.5 litres
 2024-25: 675,186.7 litres, 4% decrease.

Eco Driver Training continues to be rolled out. 190 drivers through CPC have completed over 2024/25.

Telematics - now rolled out across all MEA fleet.

HVO Trial - vehicles currently being delivered March 2025 onwards.
 Transport Manager has secured a new gas analyser which will monitor gas output and particulate matter.

7. To collate MEA staff commuter and business miles for 2023/24 (baseline figure) and 2024/25.

Target: To determine both a baseline and 2024/25 Scope 3 emissions from commuter and business miles.

Work ongoing with HR to determine Council business miles for 2024/25 (completion in March 2025).

Commuter miles calculated for 2023/24 - will re-calculate based on agile working policy of 3 days in office (and pro rata).

Use of gov.uk carbon conversion 2024 factor for both types of transport.

8. To develop the ECOS Hub as a sustainability hub.

Target: Secure c£2.5 grant funding for Council under the Hytech NI project

An Invest NI approval decision is anticipated in Summer 2025. This could unlock £2.5m funding to develop skills and demonstration offer around renewables, green hydrogen production and usage and wider environmental education at the existing Ecos Business Hub and Conferencing Centre in Ballymena. The proposal would also provide funding for Council to trial a range of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

The proposed project aligns closely with Council's i4C Innovation and Cleantech Centre and Hydrogen Training Academy initiatives.

9. Highlight organizations and retailers that stock Fair Trade products in our Borough.

Target: To retain Fairtrade status and engage with schools and residents during Fairtrade Fortnight so that awareness would be raised.

Monday 9 September - Sunday 22 September
 MEA schools - Fair Trade competition by submitting a:

Fair Trade Project

Fair Trade Painting/ Drawing or Collage or
Fair Trade Poem

Advertised on our social media channels, Facebook (1,200 followers) and Instagram (550 followers) and sent to all schools in the borough.

10. Encourage more habitats, halting biodiversity loss.

Target: By the end of 2024 the oyster population will have increased in the Borough.

900 oysters in 30 cages installed.

The restoration initiative could see up to 900 million oyster larvae released into surrounding waters every year. In addition to supporting the expansion of wild populations, the oysters will help boost biodiversity and improve water quality by filtering pollutants.

Network of nurseries:

Glenarm Marina, Carrick Marina, Belfast Harbour, Bangor Marina.

11. Delivery Climate Canopy Project.

Target: Through Climate Canopy Project by the end of 2024 -100,000 trees will be planted across the borough.

Tree & Woodland Strategy being developed, will be ready for consultation early 2025, and implementation in Summer 2025.

Climate Canopy

Tree numbers: 16,680

Hectares: 12.29

Schools: 6

Com. Groups: 10

Site visits to schools: 1

Site visits to community groups: 2

12. Undertake review of MEA Procurement Policy in line with new procurement Regulations going live on 24th February 2025.

Target: To ensure all contract managers have understanding and mechanism to set minimum quality standards in contracts.

New regulations and procurement processes - open, competitive flexible.

Competitive Flexible procedure will give CM's more scope to consider environmental, sustainability needs of MEA when they are preparing documentations, allowing site visits, presentations, and demonstrations of systems to be included in tender specifications.

Procurement training on new regulations will be mandatory and rolled out across the Council to all relevant officers involved in procurement of goods services and works.

Officers attended SIB/SNI Sustainable Procurement training on 4 March - resources available on SIB website.

Looking forward to 2025/26:

- Establishing new ISO14001 2024/25 environmental objectives/targets: energy efficiency, renewable technologies (energy), water, estate review, fleet, office equipment disposal

(circular economy), biodiversity (seagrass pontoon), community tree nurseries, nature recovery, community gardens.

Climate

- Council developed a new Climate and Sustainability Action Plan 2023-27 which commits Council to achieve net zero by 2040 and support the Borough to net zero by 2050. It involved extensive collaboration across all service areas and includes six key themes: Good Governance and Community Leadership, Economy, Transport, Resource Management, Protecting the Environment and Buildings & Energy. The Plan will deliver key actions to help deliver climate mitigation (including carbon reduction targets) and climate resilience, ensuring both Council services and communities are prepared for the impacts of climate change. This Plan continued to be delivered over 2024/25.
- In 2023/24 Council officers also developed a new MEA Adaptation Plan using the Climate NI 'NI Adapts' Planning toolkit which aims to support organisations to undertake a methodological approach to 'adaptation' with the overall aim of enabling NI to build resilience to the potential negative impacts of climate change, whilst allowing us to take advantage of any possible opportunities. This Plan continued to be delivered over 2024/25.
- Working with Net Zero Innovations and Delivery Manager to develop business engagement for carbon reduction and to explore non-technical barriers to decarbonise Council.
- Council has continued to deliver actions to meet the new Fleet Strategy which focus on reducing fleet emissions, drive efficiencies to ensure a cost and effective fleet and continue to ensure a safe and complaint fleet. Council officers are undertaking an HVO trial with Kennedy Fuels over 2024 and into 2025.
- Council has adopted a 'cradle to grave' (sustainable) tyre management system with Michelin. Headline figures for 2024 include savings of 10 tonnes of CO₂e, 4.5 tonnes reduction in material use, 3.1 tonnes reduction in waste, 4,624 litres fuel savings. Tyres are re-grooved and re-used and eventually recycled in road making materials. Council is using less tyres and the longevity reduces particulate air pollution.
- *Climate Mitigation:*
 - Populating Climate Essentials toolkit to review carbon emissions by service/buildings etc - strategic decision-making tool - all baseline data (2019/20) up to 2023/24 now uploaded for MEA buildings and fleet fuel, 2024/25 to follow.
 - Supporting new agile working (incl. space utilization review).
 - Supporting cleantech and green hydrogen developments with Economic Development.
- *Climate Adaptation:*
 - **MEA Adaptation Plan 2023-2037** - year 2 (of 4) now completed. Actions progressing well.
 - **ArcPro Climate Project** - This project is well established - the Acting Climate and Sustainability Manager and the GIS Officer have worked further using ArcPro GIS to develop an online map viewer - focus has been on flooding-related impacts across Council assets. Further to this, specific staff provided asset-relevant information on the current value in terms of biodiversity, leisure, income (tenants etc), if essential services are based there e.g. finance, IT, payroll, waste management etc), and also current mitigation measures e.g. water pumps, freeze protection, generators etc. Further work will be done on this in 2025/26 to determine the current level of risk, and then residual risk after implementing the mitigation. This process will also focus attention on assets which require further investment in terms of resource,

capital etc. Severe Weather Plans have been developed for high-risk sites and are being used in the service area's Business Continuity Plan. This project was presented to the Regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG) as a best practice example of translating complex climate-related concepts into tangible mapping format for easier interpretation.

- **MEABC/DCSDC Community Resilience Pilot** - toolkit now ready and can be tested with local community groups.
- **Training** - We continue to promote the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Carbon Literacy Training to local community groups, schools, Elected Members and Council staff throughout 2024/25.
- Council has responded to multiple consultations requests from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), including:
 - DfE Energy One Stop Shop (Nov 2022)
 - DfE Draft Circular Economy Strategy for NI (February 2023)
 - DAERA Climate Regulations for Northern Ireland (June 2023)
 - DAERA Draft Regulations Extended Producer Responsibility [October 2023]
 - DAERA WEEE Regulations [March 2024]
 - DAERA SPPS & Climate Change [March 2024]
 - DAERA Offshore Renewables Installation [March 2024]
 - DAERA Onshore Petroleum Licensing Policy for Northern Ireland [April 2024]
 - DAERA Rethinking Our Resources: Measures for Climate Action and a Circular Economy in NI [June 2024]
 - DAERA Blue Carbon Action Plan [June 2024]
 - DESNZ UK Emissions Trading Scheme [August 2024]
 - Defra Code of Practice for Sampling & Reporting at Materials Recover Facilities (MRFs) [October 2024]
 - Development of a Just Transition [December 2024]
 - DESNZ UK ETS Carbon Leakage [March 2025]
 - DfC Fuel Poverty [March 2025]
 - DAERA NI Climate Action Plan (Summer 2025)
 - DAERA NI Waste Management Strategy [TBC]

Sustainability

- **Sustainable Food Places** - A total of 5 community fridges are now in operation organised and facilitated by volunteers in partnership with the Council. All fridges have set up important relationships with local businesses which supply the bulk of the food available for those who need it. In addition, where available, locally grown fruit and vegetables are donated from local home growers or allotment holders.
- **(Ongoing) Social Supermarket** - serving the entire Borough and helping those most in need during the current cost of living crisis. Based at the newly established MEA Community Hub in Ballymena, the 'Mid and East Antrim Affordable Food Club' was established in October 2022 and continues to operate into 2025, thanks to funding from the Department for Communities, distributed through Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. The Affordable Food Club offers a membership scheme, which gives members access to food at a reduced cost alongside a wraparound service to enable them to address any challenges that contribute to their food insecurity. This is the first '**Affordable Food Club**' in Northern Ireland. Since October, membership has been growing steadily with over 200 members. Membership covers the entire Mid and East Antrim Borough. For those members across the Borough that cannot shop in person, they can access the Club online and avail of the service through the project's click & collect service. This is assisting the Club in growing their membership across every part of MEA.

- **Capital Works:** St. Patrick's Barracks - Capital Works asking us re: BREEAM - movement towards consideration of sustainability in design and operation of major development in Ballymena. Project design progressing well.
- **Funding** - Council secured funding to develop a new 'Community RePaint' project whereby residents can drop off un-used/partially used paint tins to our five Household Recycling Centres where it will be provided to local community groups and schools for projects. This project supports the waste hierarchy by promoting reuse. The project is operating well and is well used by local schools, community groups and individuals. Quarterly returns undertaken.
- **Funding** - Council secured (£22,500) funding from Keep Britain Tidy's Chewing Gum Task Force Grant to purchase new equipment to tackle gum staining across the borough. The funding also provided anti-gum staining signage to promote positive behavioural change.

Circular Economy Initiatives

- **Dry recycling collection** service to 60k households - processor [Bryson Recycling](#) - [link](#) to end destinations.
 - 2024/25: 12,070 tonnes recycle from MEA
- **Organic recycling collection** service to 58k households - processor [Natural World Products](#) - converted into [compost](#) and sold on market, and also provided back to Council for use in parks and open spaces, as well as provision to local community groups and schools for environmental improvement projects. NWP also support the annual National Compost Awareness Week which Council promotes.
 - 2024/25: 21,500 tonnes recycled from MEA
- **Household Recycling Centres (x5) and Bring Centres (32)** - collect a range of [HRC materials](#) and [Bring Bank materials](#). Materials transferred to local processors (and onto re-processors, in some instances). Processors are tendered each year to establish one year contracts.
 - **Example** - mattresses processed by [USEL](#) - a NI social enterprise who is the Leading Provider in Helping People with Disabilities or Health Conditions Gain Employment. Recycle all components of mattresses - produce new mattresses, provide bedding to equine sector.
 - **Example** - DIY materials and furniture items collected by [Habitat for Humanity](#) - ReStore Shop - The low-cost, do-it-yourself stores sell donated new and used building supplies and home improvement materials at 50 percent to 75 percent of the normal retail price. As well as raising funds for our work, the stores enable local people to improve their homes for less cost, provides opportunities for volunteers from different abilities and backgrounds, and diverts tons of reusable waste from landfill. Total provided: 35.68 tonnes over 2024/25.
 - **Example** - RePaint Community - providing half to ¾ full paint tins to local community and school projects. Reducing landfill and supporting local projects.
- **Projects - MEA Christmas Toy Container Project** - Council officers realised the huge potential for diverting pre-loved and unwanted toys from landfill, especially on the run up to Christmas, when families are planning to purchase new toys. The Mid and East Antrim Christmas Toy Container project will be running this year for the second year. Partners: local charities, local community centres, MEA waste team, comms team.
 - 2019 (pilot year): 1 tonne of toys diverted
 - 2020: 2 tonnes of toys diverted
 - 2021: 2.3 tonnes of toys diverted
 - 2022: 5.2 tonnes of toys diverted
 - 2023: 3.2 tonnes of toys diverted (families selling on marketplaces instead)
 - 2024: 3.1 tonnes of toys diverted
- **Projects - MEA School Uniform Scheme** - Mid and East Antrim's Community Planning Partnership and Waste Management team teamed up with Mid and East Antrim Community Advice Services (MEACAS) and Volunteer Now to help provide families with good quality, clean and pre-worn school uniforms. MEA Poverty Action Group (PAG) are also involved. This project has been running since 2019.

- 2021 - 1,156 uniform items gifted to 700 individuals, savings c. £24,000
 - 2022 - 2,568 uniform items gifted 929 individuals, saving c. £40,000
 - 2023 - 5,369 uniform items gifted to 1,676 individuals, saving c. £96,000
 - 2024 - 2,977 uniform items gifted to families, saving c. £50,000
- There are other projects ongoing which also support the circular economy, e.g. Belfast Regional City Deal (BRCD) projects which will embed sustainable practices in their design, construction and operation. Specifically look at waste management in these developments, sourcing local products, re-using and recycling materials, where possible.
- The above 'Environment' and 'Climate' updates have cross-cutting themes with sustainability.

Economic Development

- The **HyTech NI Project** represents a collaboration between Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University and industry underpinned by £15million funding leverage from the NI Complementary Fund. The Outline Business Case for the project was submitted to Invest NI in February 2025 and will be independently appraised over the coming months before a final funding decision is anticipated in late 2025.

The Universities are leading on the creation of a hydrogen technology accelerator while Council and local industry partners are developing three hydrogen demonstrators in Ballymena around the themes of mobility/transport, gas blending and skills training. These demonstrators will serve as pathway finder projects in the transition to net zero and position the Borough as a hub for manufacturing and supports in the future hydrogen economy.

- The **i4C Innovation and CleanTech Centre**, funded under the Belfast Region City Deal, has now received a contract for funding for c£20.5m. The i4C Centre will include: Grade A office space, co-working office space, workspace/labs for short term SME rental and an innovation lab, providing hands on support for entrepreneurs and SMEs. Designs for the building are progressing and Council's Capital Projects team are working towards a BREEAM 'excellent' standard for the c5,200sq m building. The i4C Centre will be a driver for an enhanced enterprise and innovation support ecosystem in the Mid and East Antrim Borough and will be a hub for CleanTech sector supports for Northern Ireland, aligned to the global transition to net zero. The project will also be a flagship building for the St Patrick's Barracks regeneration site located in the heart of Ballymena. Officers are currently progressing the procurement exercise to secure a dedicated centre operator to manage the building and programming upon completion.
- The **Hydrogen Training Academy (HTA)** continued to be operational in 2024/25 with accredited training delivery being led by Northern Regional College. Council continues to work in partnership with NRC and other HTA partners on delivery of the OCN accredited Level 3 in Hydrogen Technologies and Applications, providing the H2 Gas Safe Lab and equipment for the H2 Fuel Cell Skills Lab to support the training delivery. There have now been more than 350 trainees accredited, including 85 at Level 5 and more than 280 at Level 3. A Level 5 in Green Technologies has also been developed by NRC, with the first class of 15 trainees completed in June 2025 and more cohorts planned from September 2025 onwards. More than 250 organisations and 600 people have now engaged in the HTA project since November 2021.
- The **MEANZ Business Project**, a Fast Followers project funded as part of the Innovate UK Net Zero Living Programme, has been ongoing since July 2023 and is due to be completed in June 2025. This 'MEANZ Business' project has supported both Council and businesses to achieve a higher level of net zero readiness and increased capacity, helping to realise organisational sustainability targets faster and support the national transition towards net zero.

The project has included delivery of a tailored programme of information and best practice sharing, including a best practice visit to Birmingham for local SMEs, an eight part Net Zero Insights webinar series with subject experts and company case studies with more than 180 attendees to date, and a six part Net Zero Insights video series, highlighting the work which local companies are doing on their journey to net zero.

The project has also delivered on a range of Council led decarbonisation projects including a net zero skills mapping exercise internally, a data and digitalisation pilot project to help inform Council's sustainability efforts and a bespoke renewable technologies capacity building programme for Council's Planning Department. A Carbon Baseline exercise has also been carried out to provide a comprehensive, data-led report on carbon emissions across the Borough, with a particular focus on key industrial sectors such as manufacturing, engineering, construction and energy. This report provides baseline data to help inform future business support programmes delivered by Council as part of our wider integrated Economic Development strategy.

A Communication and Engagement Plan has also been developed for the HyTech NI gas blending demonstration project, to inform how best to communicate the project to residents, off-takers and stakeholders. This plan will help to ensure effective engagement and communication throughout the project and has been informed by similar gas blending demonstration projects in Great Britain, building on lessons learned in Keele and Winterton.

Finally, a range of industry facing decarbonisation projects have also been supported by the MEANZ Business project, including supporting the CleanTech Collaborative Growth Network companies on their emissions reporting, carbon accounting and decarbonisation challenges and delivery of facilitated training on environmental, social and governance challenges which they are facing. A bespoke Emissions Reporting Toolkit has also been developed and a capacity building programme delivered for local companies on Carbon Awareness and Business Sustainability Essentials, with more than 80 trainees completing training.

Biodiversity/Community

- Conservation grazing programme continues at Keeran Moss peatland as per conservation management plan. This enables sustainable management of this important habitat and reduces the need for mechanical management.
- Circa 40,000 trees planted on public land 2024/25.
- 1 x Green Flag community award retained for Shellinghill Park & Millennium Walk in Cullybackey.
- 3 x schools completed Schools Growing Club programme (6 sessions per school = 18, approximately 80 pupils engaged).
- Over 200 active allotment holders on our 3 allotments sites.
- Over 6000 participants attending events across the borough and throughout the year.

Council/Committee:	Environment & Economy
Date:	23 June 2025
Report Title:	Scoping Opinion on North Channel Wind Ltd Floating Offshore Wind Proposal under Marine Works (EIA) Regulations 2007
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Karena Catterson, Harbours & Marinas Manager
Approver:	Shaun Morley, Director of Operations

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval and provide feedback on a consultation received from DAERA, Marine & Fisheries Division, Marine Licensing for a proposal to develop floating offshore wind projects.

2. Background

- 2.1. The applicant of this project, North Channel Wind (NCW) Limited, has asked the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) for a Scoping Opinion under Regulation 13 of the Marine Works (EIA) Regulations.
- 2.2. As part of this consultation process, Council is now in receipt of a Scoping Opinion Feedback Form to provide comment.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. NCW is proposing to develop two floating offshore wind farms in the North Channel and the Irish Sea. The project array area of interest is in the North Channel and will be located near Glenarm Marina on the Co. Antrim coast in approx. 120-130m of water depth. NCW has a site area of approx. 176km² and is anticipated to accommodate 46-68 turbines, depending on size.

4. General Considerations/Implications

- 4.1 Comment has been provided in relation to Section 4: Stakeholder Engagement & Consultation, Section 12: Shipping & Navigation and Section

16: Infrastructure & Other Users of the Sea, as detailed in the Response Form.

5. Recommendation or Decision

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Scoping Opinion Feedback Sheet is submitted to DAERA for this consultation.

6. Appendices / Links

Appendix 1 - DAERA MFD Marine Licensing Scoping Opinion Response Sheet

All information for this consultation can be found at <https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/daera/263f3024/>

DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division Marine Licensing Consultee Response Sheet

CON/043/2526

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council – Harbours and Marinas Department

3 Quayside, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, BT38 8BJ

___.06.2025

(Please fill out all relevant parts - Comments received may be supplied to any third party, on request.)

Please provide your Scoping Opinion comments for this project.

Section 4 – Stakeholder Engagement:

We need to be included in all relevant future meetings and/or sent presentations etc.

Section 12 – Shipping and Navigation:

Scoping Questions 12.2.8

- 1) The report has only used AIS data to track leisure vessels. In my experience, only around 1 in 3 of the visiting vessels we get at Glenarm Marina have AIS installed. We keep a record of visitor numbers as a matter of course, these can be shared if requested.
- 2) There is some concern about vessels re-routing to avoid the installation, but this may only have a negligible negative impact.
- 3) Should AIS be installed on perimeter wind turbines? What plans are there for Aids to Navigation?
- 4) MEA Harbours and Marinas are missing from the list of consultees.

Section 16 – Infrastructure and Other Users of the Sea:

Scoping Questions 16.1.8

- 1) The report has only used AIS data to track leisure vessels. In my experience, only around 1 in 3 of the visiting vessels we get at Glenarm Marina have AIS installed. We keep a record of visitor numbers as a matter of course, these can be shared if requested.
- 2) Yes – no issues.
- 3) More information is needed with regards to potential displacement of leisure craft and also the potential impact on Glenarm Marina of additional suspended sediment in the water.
- 4) Yes – no issues so long as we are involved in the consultation process.

Under what legislation/regulations do you have comments to make?

NIL

Is there mitigation which you could recommend? Please specify.

Consideration for AIS to be installed on perimeter turbines.
More information on proposed Aids to Navigation.

Are there any European Designations affected by this project? What features are affected and how are they affected?

N/A

Do you recommend monitoring to be put in place? Please specify

- 1) Better monitoring / data collection with regards to leisure traffic.
- 2) Monitoring of suspended sediment caused by the project. Also, likely direction of travel (modelling).

Describe this monitoring (inc. type, frequency, limits, distribution)?

- 1) AIS coupled with MEA figures to monitor leisure vessel traffic.
- 2) Turbidity Buoys for sediment as well as computer modelling to track expected direction of travel and therefore where it will be deposited.
- 3) MEA BC should carry out hydrographic surveys of Glenarm Marina and Carnlough Harbour during the course of 2025. These can then be compared to our 2022 surveys to get a baseline of expected siltation. This can be compared to actual siltation observed during the construction phase of the project.

Are there any timing restrictions which you would apply to the project?

N/A

Do you have a requirement for any further information to be forwarded to you?

Confirmation that we are included on the relevant consultee lists.

Any other comments

Please submit completed response forms to MarineLicensingTeam@daera-ni.gov.uk

Council/Committee:	Environment & Economy
Date:	23 June 2025
Report Title:	Town Centre Investment Plans Overview – Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	John McVeigh, Head of Capital Works
Approver:	Philip Thompson, Director of Operations

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Elected Members on the progress towards the delivery of the Town Centre Investment Plans and Town Centre Strategies for Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus since their adoption.

2. Background

- 2.1. At the September 2021 Borough Growth Committee, Elected Member approved the Investment Plans and Town Centre Strategies for Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne, noting the plans provide a clear strategic direction for how Council plan to progress investment over the next 10-year period.
- 2.2. Each Town Centre Investment Plan and Strategy is specifically shaped by a range of local, regional and national strategies and policies to establish its own individual context. Each Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy is built around five core intervention areas, each designed to support long-term regeneration and economic vitality. These themes provide a strategic framework for project development and investment.
- 2.3. Initially commissioned in Autumn 2019 to review and update the previous DSD Masterplans for each of the 3 town centres in the Borough, work on developing the Investment Plans was delayed because of the COVID lockdowns in 2020-21. The experience of the COVID lockdowns also influenced the shaping of the Plan documents, which were subsequently finalised in summer 2021.
- 2.4. The Plans were developed in partnership with DfC's Regional Development Office, and with input from across various departments within Council, including Town Centre Development, Development Planning, and Community Planning. At final draft stage, the Plans were

also subject to external review from our statutory Community Planning partners.

- 2.5. Governance is provided by a multi-stakeholder Steering Group, which meets monthly. The group includes representation from Council departments, Elected Members and town centre stakeholders (e.g. Larne Trader's Forum, Ballymena BID, Larne Renovation Generation, and Positive Carrickfergus), ensuring a coordinated approach to project delivery. The group provides strategic direction; monitors progress across all projects and supports effective decision-making.
- 2.6. In addition to the formal stakeholder engagement provided for through the Revitalise Steering Group, Council Officers also engage directly with a wider range of stakeholders including Elected Members, community and business groups, property and business owners, as well as statutory partners, in bringing forward actions that contribute to the delivery of the Investment Plans.
- 2.7. Since the adoption of the Plans, Council has been able to secure over £1m in funding from DfC towards public realm schemes in the Borough, and a further £1.2m towards Town Centre Revitalisation activities. Council officers are currently working on applications for a further 3 projects, seeking almost £770,000 to be delivered over the next 2 financial years.
- 2.8. Once Council match funding and direct private sector investment are considered, this would represent an anticipated total investment in excess of £3.6m between 2023/24 and 2026/27 in projects that have either already been delivered or are currently programmed.
- 2.9. Since 2022, Council has delivered a wide range of projects across all three main town centres that have contributed towards delivery of the Investment Plans and Town Centre Strategies. These have included;
 - The Town Centre COVID 19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme
 - The Carrickfergus Townscape Heritage Initiative
 - Town Centre Revitalisation initiatives (DfC co-funded)
 - Town Centre Public Realm Environmental Improvement Schemes (DfC co-funded)
 - Completed Programmes and Projects
 - Town Centres COVID 19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme
 - Council secured £1.42m in financial support from DfC, DfI, and DAERA to support the recovery of our town centres from the impact of the COVID lockdowns, and to help businesses and residents adapt to this.

- 2.10. This funding was secured in 2 tranches, from September 2020, through to March 2023 and was agreed towards a wide-ranging programme of interventions.
- 2.11. A substantial element of the programme was an allocation of over £460,000 to a Small Grants Scheme (providing grants ranging from £500 to £2,000) to help businesses address the challenges of operating through the pandemic. Operating across 4 calls, this Scheme provided support to a total of 305 businesses between 2020 and 2021.
- 2.12. This Grant Scheme was further supported by the provision of a range of complimentary Council delivered interventions designed to improve the attractiveness of the town centre to residents and businesses to be able to return to the town centres in a safe manner.
- 2.13. Some of the interventions included;
 - Purchase of a range of play equipment for use in town centres as part of a range of animation activities in each town;
 - Purchase and installation of dedicated storage facilities in each town – used to store play and other equipment such as outdoor event seating, parasols, and gazebos, for use in town centre animation activities;
 - Improvements to the Tower Centre car park in Ballymena to enable contactless operation; and
 - Purchase of water bowzers to support maintenance of town centre planting schemes.
- 2.14. Carrickfergus Townscape Heritage Initiative:

The Townscape Heritage Initiative concluded successfully in Autumn 2024. This National Lottery Heritage Funded grant programme promoted the repair, restoration and sustainable re-use of vacant buildings that contribute to the townscape character and physical and economic regeneration of Carrickfergus Conservation Area.

Alongside the National Lottery Heritage Fund investment, NIHE and Council match funding supported eight properties in Carrickfergus Conservation Area to be successfully repaired and restored through a conservation works programme. The scheme achieved a total investment of c £3.6m, including over £1m in private sector investment in the restoration of these properties.

Following completion of the scheme, Council Officers explored the potential for additional or successor funding to support the continued regeneration of heritage assets within Carrickfergus and the wider Borough. However, the National Lottery Heritage Fund advised that its

current strategic funding priorities no longer support initiatives of this nature. As a result, no further funding has been secured through this route.

2.15. Public Realm Scheme

Delivery of public realm schemes has progressed utilising the designs and proposals originally developed under the legacy Councils of Ballymena, Larne, and Carrickfergus. Since the adoption of the Investment Plans, 2 schemes have been delivered;

- Point Street, Larne (Phase 1) was completed in May 2023 at a cost of £446,000
- Castle Street and Bridge Street, Ballymena was completed in January 2024 at a cost of £730,000

2.16. Ongoing Projects

Council Officers are actively progressing a range of projects aligned to the strategic priorities within the Investment Plans. These are currently under development or delivery:

Town Centre Revitalisation

Building on the lessons learned from delivering the Town Centre COVID-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme, Council, in partnership with DfC, brought forward a further series of projects to help revitalise our town centres which have been struggling in the post-Covid trading environment, and with the cost-of-living issues affecting business and public alike. The activities and projects funded through the programme are intended to make Town Centres a more attractive place to visit and to help stimulate Town Centre footfall and economic activity.

Council secured £373,050 of funding towards a programme of activities, to be delivered in 2023/24 - 2024/25. This initial Town Centre Revitalisation Programme included the following:

- Delivery of a town centre Shopfront Improvement Grant Scheme
- Pop Up Shops programme
- Town centre animation activities, including a Christmas Programme
- Installation of Gobo feature lighting projectors in Carrickfergus and Ballymena
- Town Centre Noticeboards
- Town Centre Audio Systems for Ballymena and Carrickfergus.

Five separate funding applications have been approved by DfC for the following Revitalise projects in FY24/25.

A. Public Artwork in Larne and Ballymena.

Additional funding of £54,000 was received to deliver a Street Art Festival in Larne and three murals in Ballymena. An abstract piece in Ballymoney Street, a giant Flamingo in Greenvale Street, and outdoor adventurer in Church Street. Public feedback received by the artists and subsequently by Council Officers, has been extremely positive.

B. Pop Up Park, Larne

Following discussions with DfC and the Steering Group, it was agreed to change the scope of the previously reported Greening the Town Centre Project and focus on an application for a Pop up Park on a gap site in Larne, to be used as a pilot. The Pop-Up Park is being developed as part of ongoing efforts to activate underused spaces and improve the town centre environment. The park will provide temporary green space with seating and planting, creating a welcoming area for rest and social interaction. This initiative will enhance public space, encourage footfall, and contributing to the overall animation of the town centre. Funding of up to £153,945, or 90% of project costs has been secured from DfC towards this project, and a lease for the site was agreed with the property owner in May 2025. Procurement documents for the design of the pop-up park, including community consultation, are currently being finalised. Council Officers continue to engage with the owners of other brownfield town centre sites to explore options for further similar schemes as meanwhile use projects.

C. Shop Front Grant Scheme, phase 2

Following the success of the first phase of the Shop Front Grant Scheme, which saw 78 businesses benefiting from £250,711 of grant funding, an application to DfC was approved for £315,000 to deliver a second phase. The scope of the second phase was increased to include architectural design support for applicants requiring planning permission and/or advertising consent approval and a complementary town centre marketing/advertising campaign. The geographical scope was also increased to include Greenisland. Phase 2 is now nearing completion and grants totalling £240,000 have been awarded to 77 businesses, supporting an overall investment of £324,000, as well as providing applicants with the necessary technical assistance support required to complete Advertising Consent or Planning applications were necessary.

D. Artificial Christmas Trees

DfC awarded £87,750 of funding towards the purchase and installation of three 10m Artificial Christmas Trees for Market Place, Carrickfergus, Broadway, Larne and outside the Braid in Ballymena. In addition, white picket fences were included for Carrickfergus and Larne, to both provide a barrier between the public and the trees, and to add to the

visual impact of the trees. These trees were purchased and installed in time for use for Christmas 2024. All the trees have been extremely well received by local businesses and the public, with only one report of vandalism in Larne which was rectified the following day.

E. Enhanced Seasonal Lighting

Following on from the success of the Christmas Tree project, a further £135,000 of funding has been secured from DfC to enhance the existing lighting schemes and develop a seasonal lighting trail in Carrickfergus. All lighting has now been procured with a view to installation and use for the 2025 Christmas season. The new seasonal festive lighting project focuses in the following areas:

- Recently delivered public realm schemes;
- Scheme extensions which were not previously covered;
- Locations where the existing provision has been publicly perceived as weak and;
- The creation of a new seasonal lighting trail in Carrickfergus.
- All lighting has now been procured with a view to installation and use for the 2025 Christmas season.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

Current Projects being developed;

3.1. Dunluce Street, Larne

Dunluce Street has experienced long-term decline, with high levels of vacancy and dereliction impacting its role as a key connector between Riverdale and Larne town centre. Despite past proposals—including a hotel-led regeneration scheme and a public realm plan supported by the wider public—progress has stalled due to a lack of business consensus and the eventual collapse of the hotel development. The closure of the street for 18 months following the structural failure of a derelict building further exacerbated challenges for local businesses. While the site has recently been approved for housing and is in the process of being sold, its future remains uncertain.

In response, Council Officers have developed the “Spruce Dunluce” initiative—an interim project designed to cosmetically improve the street and restore confidence while a longer-term public realm scheme is explored. The project includes façade cleaning and painting, vegetation removal, hoarding installation with interpretive artwork, planting, and seating. This

initiative addresses immediate visual and environmental concerns while aligning with Intervention Area 5 of the Larne Town Centre Investment Plan, focused on repurposing civic space and reducing the impact of dereliction. It complements wider regeneration efforts including the Shopfront Improvement Scheme, a nearby pop-up park, and plans to extend public realm improvements along Point Street.

3.2. Revitalisation Scheme 2025 – 2027

Council is preparing to launch an expanded Shopfront Improvement Scheme. Building on the success of previous initiatives, this new scheme will offer increased grant support to help improve the appearance of business frontages across all three town centres. The aim is to enhance visual appeal, support local businesses, attract new businesses and contribute to the overall vibrancy of the town centres.

Street Art continues to play a role in enhancing the visual appeal of town centres across the Borough. Delivered in partnership with local artists, the initiative brings vibrant, creative murals and installations to prominent and underutilised spaces. New pieces are planned for Larne, Ballymena and Carrickfergus, contributing to local identity, improving the streetscape, and encouraging increased footfall in each town centre. The proposed schemes being developed with also include a dedicated programme of youth engagement activity in both the Carrickfergus and Larne projects.

A further scheme is currently in development to be delivered in the 2025/26-2026-27 financial year subject to funding, is to upgrade the current Town Centre CCTV system in Ballymena and extend coverage to include CCTV coverage in Larne and Carrickfergus town centres for the first time. This scheme is still in the early stages of development with no confirmed costs at this point.

3.3. Forward Planning for future projects and programmes.

In partnership with DfC, Council Officers are also working on bringing forward new project proposals to be delivered from 2026/27 onwards. These include proposals to develop a capital grant scheme to address vacancy and dereliction across our town centres, as well as a range of public realm improvement schemes in each town.

3.4. Vacancy and Dereliction - Re-Occupancy Grant

Council Officers are currently conducting research into the development of a Re-occupancy Grant Scheme, which will form part of a wider strategy to address persistent vacancy and dereliction in town centres. The proposed scheme aims to support property owners in bringing vacant or underutilised buildings back into productive contributing to the revitalisation of town centres. It may have a number of different elements, depending on the specific needs and issues identified. Project scoping is underway, including ongoing engagement with DfC, and with colleagues in other council areas

to learn from experiences elsewhere in developing and delivering similar interventions. Officers are also engaging directly with property owners and agents to identify any ongoing development plans for properties and/or any barriers or constraints that are prohibiting development. This research will then be used to inform any proposed programme design and delivery approach.

3.5. Forward planning public realm schemes

Officers are currently developing procurement documentation to appoint ICT teams to undertake design work for the following proposed schemes, with a view to project delivery starting in 2026/27 onwards;

Point Street Phase 2, Larne to extend the recently completed scheme from the Point Street/Narrowguage Road junction out to Bridge Street

Carrickfergus Marina public realm scheme to upgrade the current public realm and consider improved linkages between the marina, the harbour, and Carrickfergus town centre.

Springwell Square and Fairhill Square pedestrian zones, Ballymena

Braid River Walkway, Ballymena to develop a more attractive and usable riverside pathway, upgrading the existing pathway to Galgorm, and improving active travel linkages between Harryville, Ballymena town centre, and ECOS.

These schemes are closely aligned to the objectives set out in the Investment Plans and reflect Council's ongoing commitment to creating more attractive, accessible and people-focused town centres.

Two further schemes, Dunluce Street in Larne, and Bryan Street in Ballymena have not previously been progressed due to issues regarding the narrow street layout and current traffic flow and on street parking provision. It is proposed to carry out detailed traffic modelling studies in each of these areas in order to inform further consultation with DfI Roads and PSNI Traffic in relation to potential options to develop/upgrade these areas.

4. General Considerations / Implications

4.1. Financial implications – Delivery of the Town Centre Investment Plans is heavily dependent on external co-funding. DfC are the primary source of majority funding for the projects outlined above. However new opportunities may emerge through Peace Plus, UK Prosperity Fund and UK Levelling Up Fund.

The 25/26 FY Capital Plan has included a contribution to support project development work such as the preparation of feasibility studies or project designs to bring forward projects to the point of delivery. Additional funding

is set aside to provide the necessary 10% match funding normally required to deliver DfC co-funded projects.

- 4.2. Staffing Implications - The Capital Regeneration Team, working with the Town Centre Development team, is currently delivering a wide range of projects across all three town centres. However, the team is working with limited staff resources, which can affect the pace at which new projects are developed and delivered. With additional support, there would be greater capacity to progress further regeneration activity and take forward more opportunities as they arise.

5. Recommendation or Decision

Elected Members are asked to –

- (i) note the progress on delivery of investment plans. A further report will be tabled at future Committee to update Members.

6. Appendices / Links

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Appendix 1 | Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan & Strategy |
| Appendix 2 | Larne Town Centre Investment Plan & Strategy |
| Appendix 3 | Carrickfergus Town Centre Investment Plan & Strategy |



**Ballymena Town Centre
Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy
2021-2031**

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1 Introduction

This document sets out an updated Investment Plan for Ballymena Town Centre. The Investment Plan update was commissioned by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (the Council) and resourced by the Department for Communities (DfC) which carries the Northern Ireland Executive's responsibility for regeneration.

Venture International Ltd (Venture) and the Paul Hogarth Company were commissioned to facilitate the update of the existing Ballymena Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan which was published in 2010 and which has provided the strategy and framework for public investment in Ballymena Town Centre over a ten-year timeframe to 2020; it will be superseded by this ten year Investment Plan which covers the 2021 to 2031 timeframe.

The Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy work collaboratively to help deliver on an agreed vision for Ballymena which has been developed based on an analysis of the performance of Ballymena Town Centre and feedback from a range of stakeholders with a clear interest in the Town Centre including users, those investing in the Town Centre and those with a responsibility for regenerating and developing the town.

2 Ballymena Town Centre Review and Planning Process

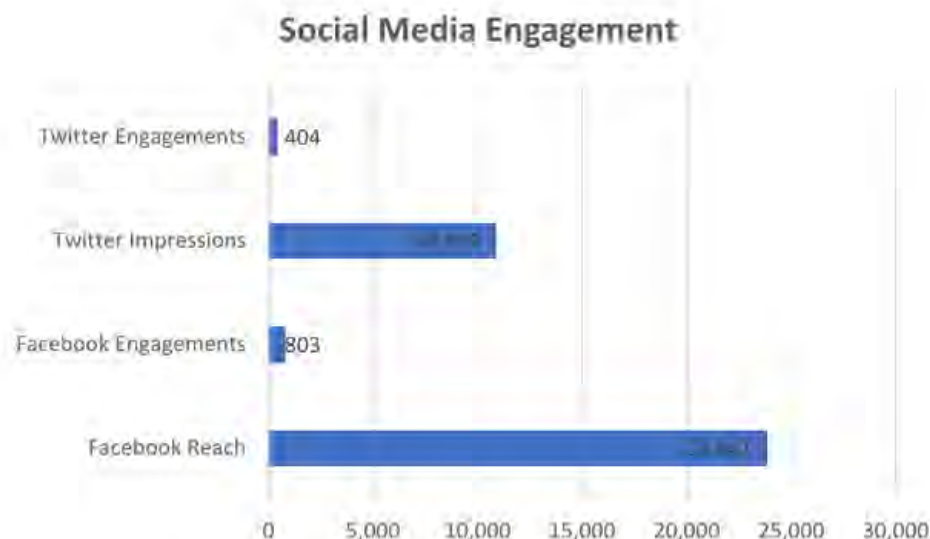
The following process was implemented to complete the update of the current Ballymena Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan and create a new investment framework and plan to support the most effective use of public sector investment to create the conditions for regeneration and renewal in Ballymena Town Centre:



Central to the development of this updated Town Centre Investment Plan has been the engagement of the public (the people who use the Ballymena Town Centre for a range of reasons but largely for retail, accessing services, as a working environment or as a place to meet and socialise) people who own and manage retail and service businesses and people with a remit and responsibility for promoting and regenerating the town. The level of public engagement informing and directing this updated Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan was:

Engagement: Public & Retailers/Traders





The total extent of public engagement with the process to update the Ballymena Investment Plan and direct the Town Centre Strategy was 1,385 citizens and traders/retailers.¹

This level of engagement ensures that the updated Investment Plan and supporting town Centre Strategy have been developed with the benefit of the current experience and aspirations of the key stakeholders in Ballymena town Centre. Their input has provided direction on the vision for the town centre and on what and where public investment should focus.

¹ It is noted that the public engagement process for Ballymena Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy was carried out in tandem for a similar process in Larne and that the same social media campaign was used to support both processes hence the same level of research

3 Ballymena ... its Development Journey

The 'City of Seven Towers', as Ballymena has come to be known, has been inhabited since prehistoric times. However, most archaeological evidence in the area dates from the early Christian/early Medieval period (c. 400-1200 A.D.). The name Ballymena derives from the Gaelic meaning 'townland in the middle of the ford', as the town was settled on a gentle slope from the north bank of the Braid River. In 1630, Sir Robert Adair, the owner of the Ballymena estate, was appointed High Sheriff of County Antrim. He built a castle on the hill at the east end of Castle Street, since demolished.

Forty-seven Industrial Heritage Record sites exist within a 4km radius of the Town Centre. Some are associated with the defunct Ballymena-Larne narrow-gauge track and road bridges, though most are related to textile production: flax mills, scotching mills, beetling mills and weaving/spinning mills. Some of this textile production was also carried out in people's homes.

Today, Ballymena is most well known as a regional shopping destination. This reputation started perhaps as early as the 1800's when the Ordnance Survey Memoirs stated, 'the shops are very numerous, the main streets being crowded with them, many of them are very good and afford all the necessaries and most of the luxuries of life.' Even today, people travel significant distances to shop in Ballymena. Ballymena has grown in regional importance as a public sector and manufacturing hub that employs a significant part of the local population. Due to Ballymena's regional importance, a variety of studies and policies have been undertaken in order to ensure the success of its town centre.



4 Review of the Progress Against the 2010 to 2020 Ballymena Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan

As part of the updated process it was appropriate to review the progress made in delivering the actions and projects set out in the 2010 to 2020 Regeneration Masterplan; this is not completed as an evaluation process but rather to confirm:

- What was achieved?
- What actions remain to be delivered?
- Are these outstanding actions still relevant.....given that circumstances and the role of town centres can and do change as does the motivations for visiting and using our town centres

The review was carried out as follows:

- Assessing the outgoing 2010 to 2020 Regeneration Masterplan to confirm what has and has not been completed
- Engaging with the DfC Officers with responsibility for regeneration for Ballymena
- Engaging with the Councillors representing Ballymena Town
- Engaging with Ballymena BID
- Consulting with the appropriate Council officers with responsibility for regeneration and Town Centre development

The following diagram confirms the progress against the actions and projects set out in the 2010 to 2020 Ballymena Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan:

Ballymena Regeneration Masterplan 2010-2020

BALLYMENA MASTERPLAN PROJECTS



DESCRIPTION	POSITION
GENERAL TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVES (not shown on masterplan)	
1 Environmental Improvements	completed
2 Signage and Interpretation	completed (not 100% coverage)
3 Accessibility Strategy	completed
4 Cycle Provision Programme	unaware of progress
5 Town Centre Branding & Marketing	unaware of progress (some activity has been progressed)
6 Festivals, Events & Activities	unaware of progress
7 Transport Assessment	completed
8 Town Centre Frontage Improvements	unaware of progress (2012/14 revitalisation programme)
9 Town Centre Safety Initiative	unaware of progress
10 Evening Economy Initiative	unaware of progress
11 Link Road Landscape Improvements	unaware of progress
12 Braid River Greenway	unaware of progress
13 Braid River Clean up & Management	completed
14 Retail Capacity Study	completed
15 Living Over Shops Scheme (LOTS)	completed
16 Ballymena Primary & Community Care Infrastructure	completed
MASTERPLAN PROJECTS	
17 Trostan Avenue Housing & Mixed Use Development	completed
18 Bridge Street Development & Public Square	completed
19 Bridge Street Gateway Improvement	unaware of progress
20 Landmark Pedestrian Bridge	completed
21 Riverfront Developments	completed
22 Braid River Bridge Upgrades	completed
23 Riverfront Public Realm	completed
24 Henry Street Linkage	completed
25 Ballymoney Road Development	completed
26 Housing at Lamont Playing Fields	completed
27 Public Realm Upgrades to Pentagon	unaware of progress
28 Bus Stop Facility Upgrade	completed
29 PSNI Site Development	completed (PSNI stakeholders of St Patrick's Barracks Site)
30 North Road Development	completed
31 North Road Pedestrian Crossing	unaware of progress
32 Bus & Train Station upgrade	completed (Park & Ride work on-going)
33 Galgorm Road Public Realm	completed
34 Council Office Site Redevelopment	completed (Currently investigating new site)
35 Riverfront Housing Development	completed
36 Alexander Street Development	completed
37 Springwell Street Development	completed
38 Springwell Street Public Square	completed
39 High Street Developments	unaware of progress (work ongoing at previous Kilpatrick House)
40 Tower Centre Upgrade	unaware of progress (not as envisaged)
41 Broadway Bandstand	completed
42 Church Tower Access & Restoration	unaware of progress (grant application)
43 Church Tower Landscape	unaware of progress (grant application)
44 Development adjacent to Church Tower	completed
45 Eastward Street Linkages	unaware of progress (Work to redevelop St Patrick's Barracks ongoing)
46 Eastward River Crossings	unaware of progress (Work to redevelop St Patrick's Barracks ongoing)

Ballymena Masterplan – Analysis (Appendix C)

Appendix A sets out a detailed assessment of the progress on a project by project basis from the 2010-2020 detailed in the diagram above Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan. It is important to set the review of the outgoing 2010 Ballymena Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan progress in context as follows:

- Regeneration frameworks set out a range of high level indicative projects which all have the potential to contribute to the vision and direction set out in the Masterplan
- The delivery of the full range of projects can and is dictated by the available capital funding and by the willingness of landowners to develop their assets in line with the vision and direction presented by the Masterplan (if the land is not in public ownership)
- Contexts and conditions (including the economy and the needs and aspirations of town centre stakeholders and users can and will change over a ten year timeframe rendering some of the indicative projects no longer appropriate

A review of Appendix A confirms that there is a range of reasons why some of the project proposals did not proceed as per the Masterplan and these can be summarised as follows:

- The building or site was in private ownership and they were not in a position to progress any development (this was due to a lack of finance, the failure to identify a sustainable or viable use or a lack of willingness to pursue a development option within the timeframe of the Masterplan)
- There were technical challenges which impacted on the potential to deliver the project
- The capital costs were outside that which could be accessed via public funding programmes across the duration of the 10 year Masterplan

These challenges are common across town centre investment planning and the Council and its stakeholders and partners must be cognisant of similar challenges across the implementation of the updated Investment Plan for the 2021-2031 timeframe.

Ultimately the appropriateness the projects from the 2010 to 2020 Ballymena Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan which have still to be delivered will be determined by the public and stakeholder engagement processes which help to :

- Establish consensus on a vision for Ballymena Town Centre
- Determine how people want to use Ballymena Town Centre and how it needs to develop to meet these aspirations
- Confirm the challenges facing town centres across NI and the UK and the emerging thinking of how town centres can develop to address these challenges (e.g. continued rise in online retailing, aging population profile, evolving hospitality aspirations)

It is recognised that the process (particularly the public engagement activities) leading to the development of an updated 2021 to 2031 Investment Plan for Ballymena Town Centre was implemented during a timeframe when the Covid 19 global pandemic restrictions were in place. However, this should not dominate a ten year investment plan (actions to support the recovery of the Town Centre and its businesses post the immediate impact of Covid 19 are included in the accompanying Town Centre Strategy).

5 Understanding Ballymena Town Centre the 2021 Context and Baseline

Ultimately any ten year town centre investment plan and strategy seeks to answer three fundamental questions:

- Where are we starting from?....the current baseline position
- Where do we want to be?.....the vision and direction for the regeneration and development of the town
- How will we get there?....the development framework and proposals which set out what the 2021 to 2031 Investment Plan sets out to accomplish

This section of the 2021 to 2031 Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and Strategy sets out the current baseline for Ballymena in 2021 and specifically the following:

- Strategic context for the updated Investment Plan
- Context for the role and function of our town centres
- Population and demography of the town
- Scale and make up of its commercial sector
- Perception of the town from the perspective of the public who use the town
- Perception of the retail and commercial sectors in the town

Strategic Context for the Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy

A range of local and national strategies and policies have been examined to establish the context within which the Ballymena 10 Year Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy is shaped. Appendix B contains the full strategic context, and the strategies and policies reviewed are listed below:



As a summary the updated Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy will help to contribute to the direction set out in this range of strategies at both regional and Borough levels helping to translate the direction and aspirations set out in them to a tangible reality for the citizens who look to Ballymena Town Centre for their retail, service and social/hospitality needs whilst also providing experiences for those visiting the Borough and more specifically Ballymena.

The following table sets out how the updated Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy will deliver, practically, against the key aims and objectives of the vision statements and documents for the retail sector and for development/planning the economy and tourism for the Mid and East Antrim Borough:

Strategy	The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centres Contribution.....
Northern Ireland Programme for Government (PfG)	<p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan will deliver on a range of PfG outcomes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will prosper through a regionally balanced economy • We will live and work sustainably • We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest
New Decade New Approach	<p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create the conditions for growth and employment • Will help to bring a balance to the regional (and Borough) economy
DfC Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025	<p>This strategy was developed to establish the framework for collaborative working across government and with its Arm's Length Bodies and communities in delivering a common purpose of Supporting People, Building Communities and Shaping Places.</p> <p>The public realm investments in the Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan links to the Wellbeing and Inclusion theme. The strategy states 'We help everyone within our communities to live positive, fulfilled lives surrounded by diverse opportunities to work, enjoy themselves and get involved'.</p> <p>The Investment Plan will help create the conditions in Ballymena Town Centre to deliver on this aspiration.</p> <p>The strategy places emphasis on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to improve our built environment and heritage, creating authentic, inclusive, sustainable and animated spaces

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress a programme of public realm and revitalisation schemes in the regional regeneration areas and adequately address dereliction <p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and supporting Town Centre Strategy will practically deliver on these strategic objectives</p>
Retail NI – Regeneration NI Creating 21st Century Towns and City Centres	<p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a coordinated approach to the development and regeneration of the town centre Local authority leadership of the development and regeneration of the town centre
Mid and East Antrim Community Plan 2017-2032	<p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support urban regeneration of the town centre positioning it to support diversified economic activity and a strong nighttime economy Promote and position Ballymena Town Centre as a place to live, work, invest in and visit
Mid and East Antrim Corporate Plan 2019-2032	<p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing a high quality urban environment where people want to live, work, enjoy and invest Provide public shared green and civic space and connectivity with natural assets
Mid and East Antrim Local Development Plan(LDP)	<p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan will directly contribute to the LDP vision by providing a connected town for people to live in, work, enjoy ,invest and visit</p>
Amplify – the Economic Development Vision for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	<p>The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support town centre enterprises start up and growth Will provide flexible spaces to support enterprises Will support a more diversified Borough economy with a modern retail and service sector

Evolving Role of Town Centres

The role and function of the town centre has always evolved.....however, it must be recognised that at some points in time the pace of the evolution is much more pronounced and therefore often has more impact in our town centres.

Based on all assessment the town centres across the UK, NI and the Borough are in the midst of one of the most significant evolutions that they have experienced. The out-workings will have a long-term impact on the roles our town centres play in the lives of our citizens and visitors to the Borough and its towns. Consequently our vision for them and the way we invest in them (the Investment Plan) to deliver on this new vision and how we lead their development (the Town Centre Strategy) to meet the requirements of our town centre users must reflect what has brought about these changes.

To understand why this Investment Plan and the supporting Town Centre Strategy have to enable the town to navigate through a significant cycle of change we need to look back to the previous approach to the planning of our town centres; planning policy in the 1990s led to the growth of out of town retailing and began to divide the focus of retail across the town between town centre and edge of town and out of town retail environments.

From mid-2000 onwards our town centres have had to deal with a new and sustained challenge from online retailing; estimates indicate that online retailing has gathered a sustained momentum accounting for 7.8 % of retail in 2011 to 33% by December 2020 (Source Office of National Statistics).

Combined with the two factors detailed above the third scenario which contributes to the now significant evolution of our town centres is the Covid-19 global pandemic; it is too early to predict or fully understand the impact it will have on our town centres or indeed our wider society and economy. However, we can be certain that it has accelerated the migration to online retailing. There is also an early indication that the progression to e-commerce business models (partly attributed to the pandemic and partly to the adoption of new business technologies) will also have an impact on our town centres. As an example Bank of Ireland has announced the closure of 15 branches across NI including one (Ballymena) in the Mid and East Antrim Borough. Therefore, it is likely that some of the traditional town centre businesses will have a lesser requirement for either main street premises or indeed any form of physical presence in our town centres. This by extension will reduce the level of footfall and could lead to additional vacancy.

However, the current challenges must be seen in the context that town centres have developed and evolved over time and this Investment Plan will help create the conditions for Ballymena Town Centre to continue to adapt and evolve. To inform the Investment Plan and the Town Strategy a review of the emerging thinking and approaches to the repurposing of the town centre was undertaken. At a headline level this provides confidence about the future role and functioning of town centres across the UK, NI and the Borough.

The Westminster government has recognised that town centres are facing a range of challenges. It has established the Town Centre Task Force to act as a catalyst to develop

meaningful interventions leading to the regeneration of our town centres as sustainable urban living, commercial and leisure/social environments. The Task Force has been supported by the introduction of the Future High Streets' Fund and the Towns' Fund.

A review of the high street footfall data for 2019-2020 published by the Town Centre Task Force in August 2020 confirms that retail is declining as the dominant driver of visitors to our town centres; 44% of towns across the UK are now classed as multi-functional which represents a rise of 8% over the previous year.

The patterns of not only how but also when people access our town centres is beginning to change at a level which is significant. For a number of decades (and especially in NI due to the impact of the Troubles on how our town centres functioned) typically town centres were 9 am to 5 pm retail and commercial environments. The Task Force data identifies that this is changing and that 16% of daily footfall is in the evening. There is also increasing evidence of nighttime footfall associated with 24 hour services and a developing hospitality offer and changes in work patterns, behaviours and cultures.

The Northern Ireland Executive has also recognised that its town centres face challenges but equally a range of opportunities to regenerate, redevelop and repurpose. It established the NI High Street Task Force which held its first meeting on 24th February 2021. Its stated vision ("Sustainable city, town and village centres which are thriving places for people to do business, socialize, shop, be creative and use public services as well as being great places to live").....this gives a sense of where and how the Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy for Ballymena should develop.

A review of the range of thinking and discussion papers about the future of town centres across the UK sets out the argument that over the past few decades town centres have developed as 'clone centres' offering similar rather than differentiated offers.

The range of sources identifies that our town centres will increasingly be a place for people to live; with an acknowledgement that new approaches must be taken to diversify the range of housing types and options available in our town centres. Typically town centres currently provide either high-density low-cost housing units or individual houses which are some of the most expensive in the local authority area. Clearly town centres in NI have had more specific challenges associated with the Troubles which reduced their attractiveness as living spaces. Evolving towns will provide a much more diversified range of housing types in and around the town centre.

Whilst our town centres are likely to become more multi-functional retail will still be a core function of the evolving town Centre; retail is likely to be experiential and more focused on providing high quality retail experiences for the local community which provides an alternative to a more sterile online experience ...or linked to the Borough or regional tourism offers. The focus on town specific destination retail experiences will be part of the characteristics of our new town centres. Progressively sustainable retailers will examine mixing online business models with a more conventional offer.

Provision of a strong hospitality offer, and nighttime economy is likely to be a main element of our town centres as they develop. This will include developing pockets of green and civic space which facilitate people to spend more time in town centres meeting people and engaging in social activities and connectivity.

Mixed use may continue to be a part of the approach to the development and regeneration of our town centres; however, it will have less, if any, focus on retail and will provide developments which combine a mix of living accommodation, community facilities, health and wellbeing facilities and creative/maker spaces.

The Covid 19 pandemic has provided a range of challenges and experiences. Accepting that the key challenge is public health it has reinforced how we miss and by extension value social connection.

Appendix C contains web links to the data and articles reviewed to inform this section of the updated Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and the supporting Town Centre Strategy.

Ballymena Town in Figures

Based on the published data for the town the following summarises Ballymena Town Centre in numbers from both demographic and trading perspective.

Ballymena Town Centre has a total population of 29,467 based on the 2011 census and is the largest town in the Borough. A review of its demography confirms:

- 21% of the population is under 17
- 61% of the population is between 18-64 years
- 18% of the population is over 65 years

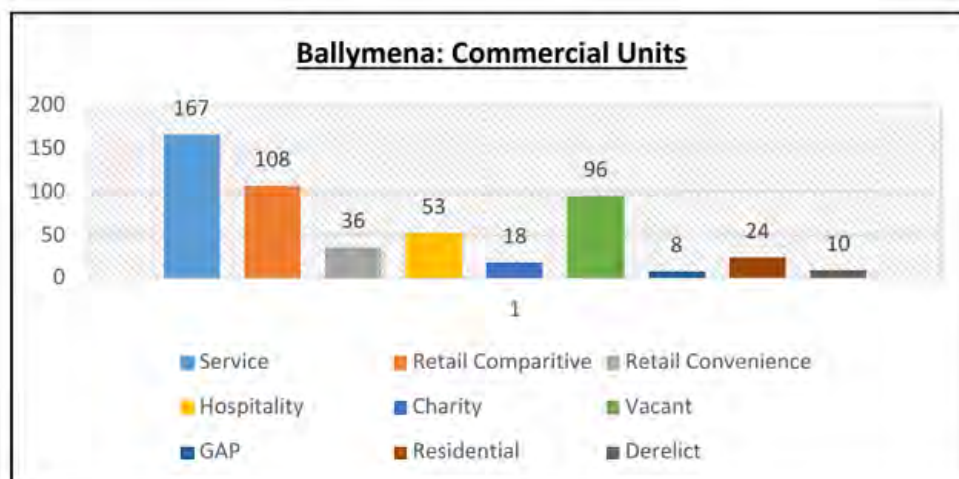
Performance of Ballymena Town Centre

Council completed town centre health checks for each of the key towns in 2019. This provides an objective assessment of the performance of Ballymena Town Centre as the third largest town in the Borough.

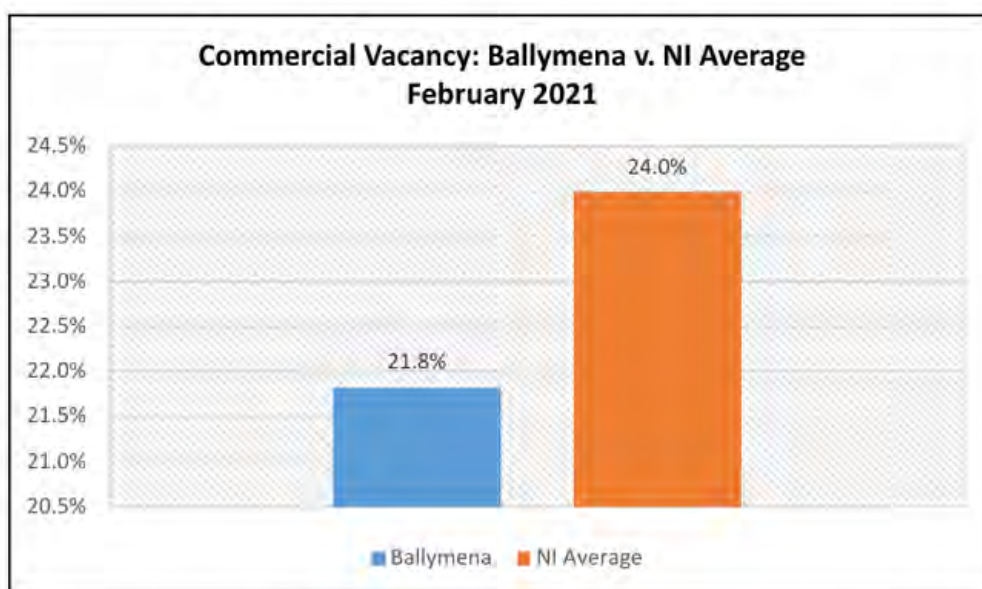
The retail turnover of Ballymena Town Centre is approximately £313.7 m per annum ... though it is recognised that the Nexus town centre health check assessment was completed before the 2020/21 Covid 19 global pandemic which in all likelihood will have a short to medium (up to three years) impact on the retail turnover of the town.

The make-up of commercial units in Ballymena town Centre is set out below:

Entering the 2021 to 2031 timeframe Ballymena Town Centre has 282 commercial units across a range of eight categories as follows:



The DfC Northern Ireland Town Centre Database for February 2021 confirms that Ballymena has a lower level of commercial vacancy than the norm for Northern Ireland. The comparison is:



Source: DfC - The Northern Ireland Town Centre Database (2021)

Based on the assessment of town centre vitality and viability through the health check assessment of Ballymena Town Centre, and an evaluation of market shares, and retention rates, a set of recommendations has been provided. These recommendations also stem from our analysis of retail and leisure trends and from discussions with local stakeholders.

The independent town health check report offered the following recommendations for the LDP:

- Promote the development of more leisure services, such as restaurants and bars, in the town centre to continue to strengthen the leisure services offer of Ballymena Town Centre and continue to reduce the reliance on comparison goods shopping as

the main draw for visitors, as we continue to see trends away from traditional comparison goods shopping. This could be achieved by avoiding the introduction of planning policy that is prescriptive to only allowing A1 units in the town centre, or core areas within it

- Promote a thriving evening economy within Ballymena Town Centre by encouraging leisure services such as pubs, bars, and restaurants through planning policy that specifically encourages the improvement of the evening economy. This might be achieved by including policies that specifically allow leisure uses within core town centre areas and promote uses that are active in the evenings.
- Promote the provision of more convenience floorspace in the town centre to reduce the reliance on out of centre supermarkets, particularly Tesco Superstore at Ballymena Road Link, and help to promote more linked trips within the town centre. Promotion of convenience goods stores might be achieved by allowing the amalgamation of vacant units for provision of a larger food store within the town centre. This should be given priority over the provision of additional new convenience floorspace
- Promote policies for mixed use developments in appropriate locations throughout the town centre, including for residential led mixed-use developments, to increase footfall within the town centre

General Recommendations:

- Work with owners of buildings and landlords to provide incentives, such as rent free periods for businesses taking up existing vacant units within the town centre to reduce the number of vacant units overall, and to help improve the perception of the town centre

Listening to Our Stakeholders

Central to getting the vision and focus of the Ballymena Town Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy right is developing it based on the direction and needs of the town centre stakeholders; the citizens who use Ballymena Town Centre and the retailers and traders who provide the range of retail, hospitality and services in it.

The public engagement processes were designed and promoted to secure a high level of stakeholder input and direction. Appendices D and E set out a full analysis of public and retailers/traders perceptions of Ballymena Town Centre and their vision for how it can evolve and develop to meet their needs and aspirations over the next decade to 2031.

The perception of the users of Ballymena Town Centre (the public engagement process asked people to respond based on their experiences and user patterns pre the Covid 19 pandemic) is summarised in the following diagram:

The respondents were asked to rate Ballymena Town Centre against a range of 10 factors with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good. The graph below sets put the response and weighted averages against each factor:



As would be expected Ballymena town centre users expressed a range of views across the factors, the highlights were:

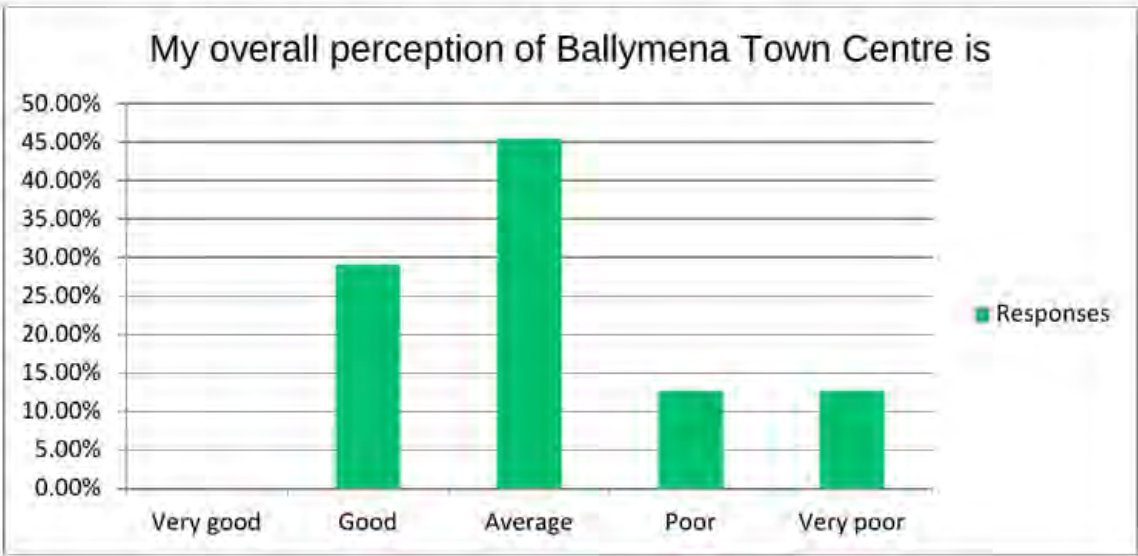
- The view on facilities is balanced with 29 rating average, 15 good and 16 poor or very poor.
- The retail mix is considered to be positive with 52 (87%) rating it average or better with 29 (48%) good or very good. The response on destination stores reflects a similar view with 62% average or above and 43% good or very good.
- Promotion activity was rated below average by 28 (47%) of respondents, average by 21 (35%) and good or very good by 11 (18%).

- There were particular negative responses in relation to the tourist offering and the evening economy 44 (73%) and 49 (82%) respectively considering these to be poor or very poor.
- 78% (47) consider parking to be average or better with (50%) rating it good or very good.
- The customer experience is considered positively with 54 (90%) rating average or better and 30 (50%) good or very good.
- Ease of use is also rated positively with 50 (83%) rating average or better and 28 (47%) good or very good.

The quality of the environment was rated below average by 26 (43%) of respondents, average by 28 (47%) and good or very good by 6 (10%).

Perception of the Retail and Commercial Sectors in the Town

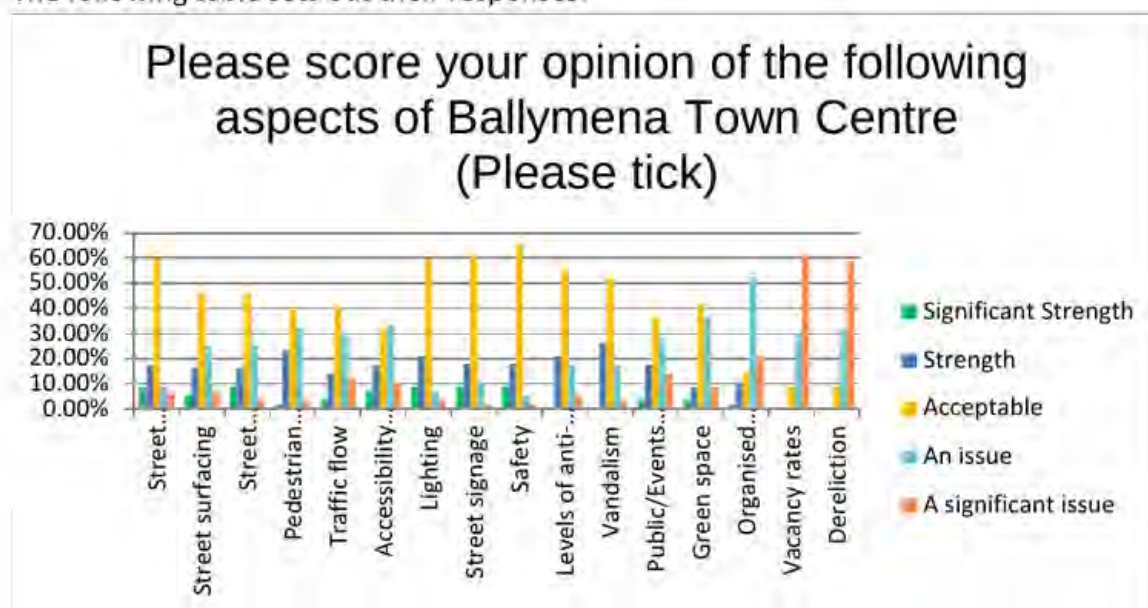
Retailers and people owning and operating businesses in Ballymena Town Centre were also asked to rate their perception of the Ballymena Town Centre against a range of factors and their responses are summarised below:



The retailers and traders were asked to rate their opinion of Ballymena town centre against a Range of 16 factors. The following rating scale was used:



The following table sets out their responses:



The outputs of the public and retailers' and traders' surveys provides direction for the Ballymena Investment Plan and Ballymena Town Centre Strategy (2021-2031).

The combined responses provide a series of common priorities which need to be addressed in both the Investment Plan (investment of public funds in capital projects to regenerate and develop Ballymena Town Centre in line with the agreed vision and priorities established via the review and public engagement processes) and the Town Centre Strategy. The direction can be summarised as follows:

- Ballymena should seek to reinforce its position as an important (and destination) retail town based on a breadth of offer and high quality experiences
- Ballymena should seek to expand the range of reasons/motivations for people (from and external to the Borough) to visit its Town Centre. Key drivers of visitor footfall should be supported with emphasis on a strong hospitality offer and evening/nighttime economy, outdoor spaces (green/civic) for people to meet and spend time and a programme of events/festivals and activities based on its story, culture and heritage
- The presentation of the town centre is a priority for almost all who contributed to the public engagement processes; the Investment Plan should seek to complete outstanding areas of the public realm, address dereliction and the increasing levels of vacant commercial properties. There is also potential to repurpose smaller pockets of space (e.g. brown field sites) as green outdoor spaces to support social connection and increasing dwell time in the town centre
- There is a clear understanding that the role of Ballymena will/must change. Opportunities for people to live and work in the town centre should be examined and included in the Investment Plan
- The economy of the town centre should be supported to diversify through provision of flexible space options for enterprises, creatives and for people to work (co-working)

- Feedback from the public engagement processes confirms that there are significant opportunities to connect Ballymena town Centre with other significant public, green, recreational spaces adjacent to the town centre (e.g. Ecos site and the emerging St Patrick's Barrack's site. Safe walking/cycling routes should be developed which seek to link the community with both the town centre and those important 'experience, social and recreational site' via sustainable travel approaches

This Investment Plan recognises that there are planned capital and infrastructure investments in Ballymena. These will complement the development proposals set out in this plan and include:

- Translink's proposals for a new integrated Bus and Rail station for the town
- The Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) is operating above design capacity. NI Water plans to upgrade the wastewater network to address this issue
- The Education Authority (EA) is currently examining the case for a major capital development project for Carniny PS and has approved investment in Dunclug College
- NIHE is delivering a range of housing schemes in or within walking distance of the town centre including sites at Broughshane Street, George Street, Broadway Avenue, Cushendall Road, Galgorm Road and Doury Road Estate

6 Ballymena Town Centre by 2031

The review of the existing Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan and the range of public engagement activities have helped provide a sense of direction and purpose for the 2021-2031 Investment Plan (and Town Centre Strategy). The vision for Ballymena Town Centre set out in the 2010 Regeneration Masterplan was:

‘To build on the existing strengths of Ballymena to maintain the vitality and viability of the Town Centre while fostering a positive identity and a rich and sustainable variety of offerings for both residents and visitors alike.’

The public engagement processes confirmed that the existing vision is still appropriate and should be retained across the 2021-2031 timeframe of the updated Investment Plan.

The 2021-2031 (retained) vision is supported by the following outcomes; outcomes are a statement of how we want Ballymena Town Centre to be, how it will function for its range of stakeholders and how it will be perceived by visitors to it and users of it. The capital investment proposals will seek to deliver the following outcomes for Ballymena Town Centre over the 2021 to 2031 timeframe:

- Sustain Ballymena’s position as a retail destination through evolving the range of shops and experiences
- A well-presented commercial and civic environment with reducing dereliction and levels of commercial vacancy
- Increased range of motivations for people to visit Ballymena Town Centre including a strong destination/hospitality sector and nighttime economy
- A more diversified town Centre economy through provision of workspace options supporting flexible work practices and cultures
- A well connected town centre with sustainable/active travel routes to facilities, spaces and environments in the town centre and around the town
- Improving visitor offer connected to the town centre which encourages more people to visit, stay longer and spend more
- Ballymena has a range of active travel and public transport travel infrastructure and options which position it as a key destination town
- Ballymena is an age and dementia friendly, welcoming town providing a great experience for all, including our most vulnerable citizens

The following table and associated images bring together the challenges and issues raised by the analysis, consultation and engagement process for the Ballymena Investment Plan (see attached Masterplan Analysis)

7 Updated Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan

This section of the updated Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan for the 2021 to 2031 timeframe translates the vision and outcomes into a range of practical development proposals which have:

- The potential to deliver on the vision
- Been tested and refined via the public engagement processes

The Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan 2021-2031

The following schematics and visuals set out the overall direction of Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan and a range of seven development proposals which work in an inter-related manner to deliver the vision for a repurposed Ballymena Town Centre. The Investment Plan is focused round five themes which have been informed via the review and public engagement processes. They provide both co-ordination and consistency for the Investment Plan ensuring that public investment against the agreed vision and outcomes for Ballymena Town Centre. The following diagram sets out the five interrelated Investment Plan Themes:



The following visual presents the seven investment proposals in the context of Ballymena Town Centre establishing their spatial relationship with both the town centre and between each of them:

BALLYMENA

DRAFT 17/11/20



A. LINKAGES (GETTING THERE)

- Walking Strategy – wayfinding and orientation system
- Cycling Strategy – facilitating cycling through infrastructure and events
- Bus & Train Station Upgrade - upgrade of transport interchange
- Henry Street Linkage – public realm improvements
- Galgorm Road Linkage – public realm improvements
- Link Road Improvements – public realm improvements
- Demesne Avenue Linkage – public realm improvements

B. SITES (LIVING THERE)

- Frontages and Living Over the Shops – targeted investment at key locations
- Bridge Street – comprehensive mixed use development
- Trostan Avenue – comprehensive mixed use development
- Alexander Street – comprehensive mixed use development
- St Patricks Barracks - comprehensive mixed use development

C. ANIMATION (BEING THERE)

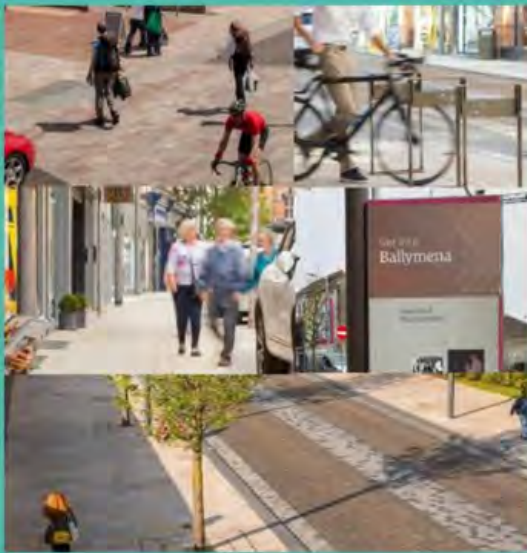
- Church Tower – restoration and public access
- Riverside Spaces – riverfront public realm and activities
- Street Animations – Placemaking activities to increase footfall

Venture
the paul hogarth company

Mid & East
Antrim
Borough Council
Partnership for
Communities

A. LINKAGES (GETTING THERE)

- i. **Walking Strategy – wayfinding and orientation system**
Improving legibility and navigation for pedestrians and drivers throughout the town centre with a coherent signage scheme and communicating the history through interpretation panels.
- ii. **Cycling Strategy – facilitating cycling through infrastructure and events**
Continuing efforts to realise a cohesive cycle network through the town centre, linking adjacent neighbourhoods and open spaces.
- iii. **Bus & Train Station Upgrade - upgrade of transport interchange**
High quality upgrade to existing facilities as well as a welcoming arrival / public realm space.
- iv. **Henry Street Linkage – public realm improvements**
Pedestrian and vehicular link between the riverfront and Henry Street in Harryville.
- v. **Galgorm Road Linkage – public realm improvements**
Public realm upgrades to Galgorm Road creating a more pleasant link between the bus, train station and town centre.
- vi. **Link Road Improvements – public realm improvements**
Improvement to the environmental quality of the link roads around the town centre, including Larne Link Road, North Road and Parkway.
- vii. **Demesne Avenue Linkage – public realm improvements**
Pedestrian and vehicles links between the town centre, adjacent housing, St Patrick's Barracks and the ECOS Centre.



B. SITES (LIVING THERE)

- i. **Frontages and Living Over the Shops – targeted investment at key locations**
Coordinated improvement programme of building frontages including surface treatments, architectural details and signage. Living over shops scheme would enable landowners to apply for grants to convert or upgrade living accommodation in the town centre.
- ii. **Bridge Street – comprehensive mixed use development**
Mixed use development with public square. Improvement of Bridge St traffic island featuring a gateway building, public art and better pedestrian environment.
- iii. **Trostan Avenue – comprehensive mixed use development**
Development wrapping a multi-storey car park with mixed uses on the ground floor.
- iv. **Alexander Street – comprehensive mixed use development**
Mixed use development with servicing and car parking included within.
- v. **St Patrick's Barracks – comprehensive mixed use development**
Comprehensive mixed use masterplan development of the former army barracks site.



DRAFT 17/11/20

C. ANIMATION (BEING THERE)

- i. **Church Tower – restoration and public access**
Works to restore the tower, ensuring safe access for visitors. Landscape improvements and maintenance to the graveyard.
- ii. **Riverside Spaces – riverfront public realm and activities**
High quality public realm space, implementation of a greenway along the river and a river clean up and long term management.
- iii. **Street Animations – Placemaking activities to increase footfall**
Development of a varied programme of high quality events to take place in and around the town centre, focusing on promoting inclusivity.







A. Refurbishment of Targeted Vacancy and Dereliction

BALLYMENA


- Targeted building refurbishment to remove blight and reoccupy vacant buildings e.g. apartments. Take advantage of regeneration opportunities which create a more attractive town centre environment, encourage town centre living, and protect and enhance the built heritage of the town centre.
 - Retrofitting - sustainable development
 - Improved building appearances
 - Improved built heritage
 - Town centre investment
 - Add to mix of uses
 - Encourage vibrant town centre
 - Increased footfall

Commercial & Business	✓
Town Centre Living	✓
Green & Public Spaces	
Connections & Access	
Key Sites / Opportunity Sites	✓


B. Development of Key Sites

BALLYMENA

- Pop up park including green space, (seating, planting, events and play space) flexible work units, parking and programming for events to diversify and create activity in the Town Centre on currently underused sites.
- Pre cursor to residential led mixed use masterplan for sites such as Wellington St, Alexander St, Bridge St and Trostan Avenue.



Christchurch, New Zealand



Barcelona, Spain

Increased Jobs

Increased Footfall

Increased Biodiversity

Overlooked & Usable Public Spaces

Adding to Mix of Uses

Town Centre Investment

Space for Meeting & Interacting

Events Space

Commercial & Business ✓

Town Centre Living ✓

Green & Public Spaces ✓

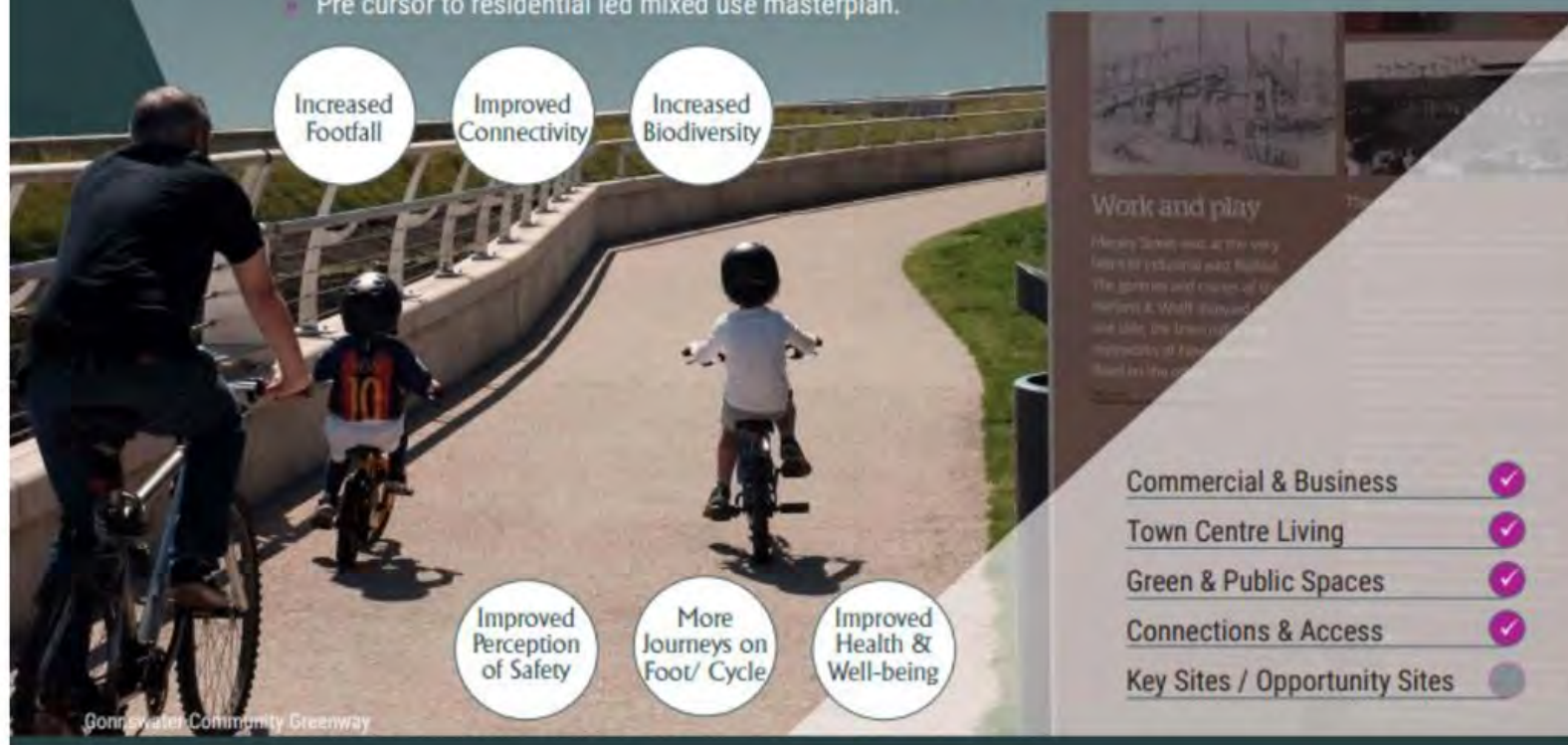
Connections & Access ✓

Key Sites / Opportunity Sites ✓

C. Braid River and Henry Street

BALLYMENA

- Improved and attractive pedestrian / cycle connections linking the town centre with the river and Henry Street. To include the creation of high quality spaces along the riverfront which adds activity, encourages interaction and reconnects the town with this currently underused natural asset.
- Pre cursor to residential led mixed use masterplan.



Increased Footfall

Improved Connectivity

Increased Biodiversity

Improved Perception of Safety

More Journeys on Foot/ Cycle

Improved Health & Well-being

Work and play

Henry Street was at the very heart of industrial and fishing. The gutters and canals of the riverfront & Wall Street and the old site, the Union Mill, were the heart of the town's industry at the time of the canal.

Commercial & Business	✓
Town Centre Living	✓
Green & Public Spaces	✓
Connections & Access	✓
Key Sites / Opportunity Sites	

Gonnawater Community Greenway

D. Church Tower - Restoration & Access

BALLYMENA



- Increased Heritage Awareness
- Increased Footfall
- Improved Existing Green Space
- Increased Town Centre Attractions

- ✳ Works to restore the tower, ensuring safe access for visitors. Landscape improvements, maintenance, lighting and interpretation of the graveyard.

- Commercial & Business ✓
- Town Centre Living ✓
- Green & Public Spaces ✓
- Connections & Access ✓
- Key Sites / Opportunity Sites ✓

E. Street Animation

BALLYMENA

- Development of a varied programme of high quality events to take place in and around the town centre, attracting footfall and activity including the use of the band stand. Focus should be given on a year long programme promoting inclusivity, welcoming all to the town centre.



Increased
Events

Improved
Perceptions

Increased
Footfall &
Spend

Increased
Social
Interaction

Increased
Dwell Time

Commercial & Business



Town Centre Living



Green & Public Spaces



Connections & Access


Key Sites / Opportunity Sites



F. Walking & Cycling Strategy

BALLYMENA

- Improving legibility, navigation and continuing efforts to establish a cohesive cycle and pedestrian network through the town centre, linking adjacent neighbourhoods and open spaces. Moving towards walking and cycling becoming the natural choice for travelling in and around the town centre through established, attractive and safe routes.



- Improved connectivity
- Increased perceptions of safety
- Increased footfall
- More journeys made on foot/cycle
- Improved health and well-being

Commercial & Business	✓
Town Centre Living	
Green & Public Spaces	✓
Connections & Access	✓
Key Sites / Opportunity Sites	

G. Bus & Train Station Upgrades

BALLYMENA

- High quality upgrade to existing facilities including an attractive arrival / public realm space to provide a welcoming gateway to both visitors and residents and encourage a shift to more sustainable forms of transport
- Public realm upgrades to Galgorm Road reconnecting and creating a more pleasant link between the bus, train station and town centre.

Enhanced Visitor Experience

Enhanced Civic Pride

Increased Footfall & Spend

Improved Perceptions

Modal Shift away from Vehicles

Commercial & Business ✓

Town Centre Living

Green & Public Spaces ✓

Connections & Access ✓


Key Sites / Opportunity Sites

Holmwood Train Station

H. Public Realm Extensions

BALLYMENA

- Extending the streetscape improvements to encourage movement to and from the town centre, strengthening existing links and transforming the visual quality of connections. To include signage and cycling provision.



- Enhanced Visitor Experience
- Enhanced Civic Pride
- Increased Footfall & Spend
- Improved Perceptions
- Modal Shift to Walking/ Cycling

- Commercial & Business ☒
- Town Centre Living ☐
- Green & Public Spaces ☒
- Connections & Access ☒
- Key Sites / Opportunity Sites ☐

Source: Belgium

Leadership Resourcing and Decision Making

The updated Investment Plan for Ballymena complete with its themes and investment proposals establish a vision for the town centre and a framework to deliver on that vision. Once agreed by all of the stakeholders and adopted by the Council focus must then be placed on implementation.

The following table sets out an implementation plan for the 2021-2031 Ballymena Town Centre Investment Strategy. It has been developed based on the learning captured from the implementation of the 2010-2020 Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan and the collective experience of the Council and DfC regeneration teams.

The implementation plan underpinning the delivery of the updated 2020-2030 Investment Plan is:

Focus	Implementation Activities
Leadership	<p>Ultimately the success and impact of the Investment Plan against the agreed vision for Ballymena Town Centre and the associated outcomes depends on the quality and experience of the leadership available to implementation processes and activities.</p> <p>Council will bring together the combined competencies, capabilities and Ballymena Town Centre knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid and East Antrim Borough Council • DfC's Regeneration team • Ballymena Chamber of Commerce and Trade • Ballymena BID <p>They will come together to lead, co-ordinate and inform the delivery of the updated 2021-2031 Investment Plan. Council and its stakeholders will be responsible for the following elements of the implementation of the Investment Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritisation of development proposals • Development of design options • Technical assessment of proposals and associated • Completion of all technical and legal assessment and compliance issues • Costing agreed design options and bidding for the required capital delivery funding • Procurement and contract management • Communication and public engagement for both the Investment Plan and for specific development proposals • Annual review and refinement of the Investment Plan
Prioritisation	<p>There are many factors to be considered when deciding which of the development proposals should be delivered and when. Good practice</p>

	<p>dictates that the team leading the implementation of the Investment Plan should be revisited each year based and revised based on the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership and availability of the target site • Willingness of the site owner to progress the development proposal • Technical deliverability • Capital cost and capital funding availability <p>It is proposed that an annual review of the Investment Plan is undertaken and that this is used to revisit and agree the priorities for the incoming year</p>
Review	<p>Regular review must be a central part of the implementation of the Investment Plan.</p> <p>An annual review of the progress against the Investment Plan.</p> <p>The review process will entail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of progress against the Annual Delivery Plan • Engagement with the public and town centre retailers and traders via online and face to face processes to confirm perceptions and any emerging issues • Commissioning external evaluation for any significant capital project delivery (PPE)
Communication	<p>Communication is key to effective implementation of any town centre investment and especially around the delivery of specific proposals .The Council has a Communications Unit which was centrally involved in the public participation processes which informed this Ballymena Town Centre Investment Plan. Council's stakeholders will work alongside the Council Communications Unit to develop an appropriate annual communication and engagement plan which will seek to maintain a high level of public awareness of the Investment Plan and its delivery.</p>

Ballymena – Project Implementation

The Investment Plan Projects represent priority actions for the physical regeneration of Ballymena Town Centre between the period 2021 – 2031. Together they target key issues identified through analysis and are each positioned to catalyse a wider process of regeneration and investment.

Responsibility for delivery will fall to local and central government, as well as the private sector, drawing upon the capacity, skills and responsibilities of each. It is therefore essential that each party works closely with one another through a centralized oversight and project management body, helping to maximise coordination, continuity and synergies between investments.

Design quality must remain an utmost consideration for each project, ensuring that any intervention is of a high quality, constituting a long-term investment in Ballymena that build investor confidence.

Each project must also be designed in partnership with local stakeholders, ensuring that they have a genuine opportunity to help shape proposals and play their part in the process of transformation.

PROJECT		LEAD	KEY STAKEHOLDERS	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME	FINANCIAL SCALE
A	REFURBISHMENT OF TARGETED VACANCY AND DERELICTION	DFC and Private Sector	M&EABC	2021 – 2031	££
B	DEVELOPMENT OF KEY SITES	Private Sector	DFC NIHE M&EABC	2021 – 2031	£££
C	BRAID RIVER AND HENRY STREET	DFC	M&EABC DFI Rivers Agency	2022 – 2025	££
D	CHURCH TOWER	DFC	M&EABC DFC HED	2022 – 2023	£
E	STREET ANIMATION	M&EABC	Private Sector	2021 – 2031	£
F	WALKING AND CYCLING STRATEGY	DFI	M&EABC	2022	£
G	BUS AND TRAIN STATION UPGRADE	DFI	M&EABC Translink	2022 – 2026	££
H	PUBLIC REALM EXTENSIONS	DFC	M&EABC DFI	2023 - 2031	££

£ <1M ££ 1-10M £££ >10M

8 Ballymena Town Centre Strategy

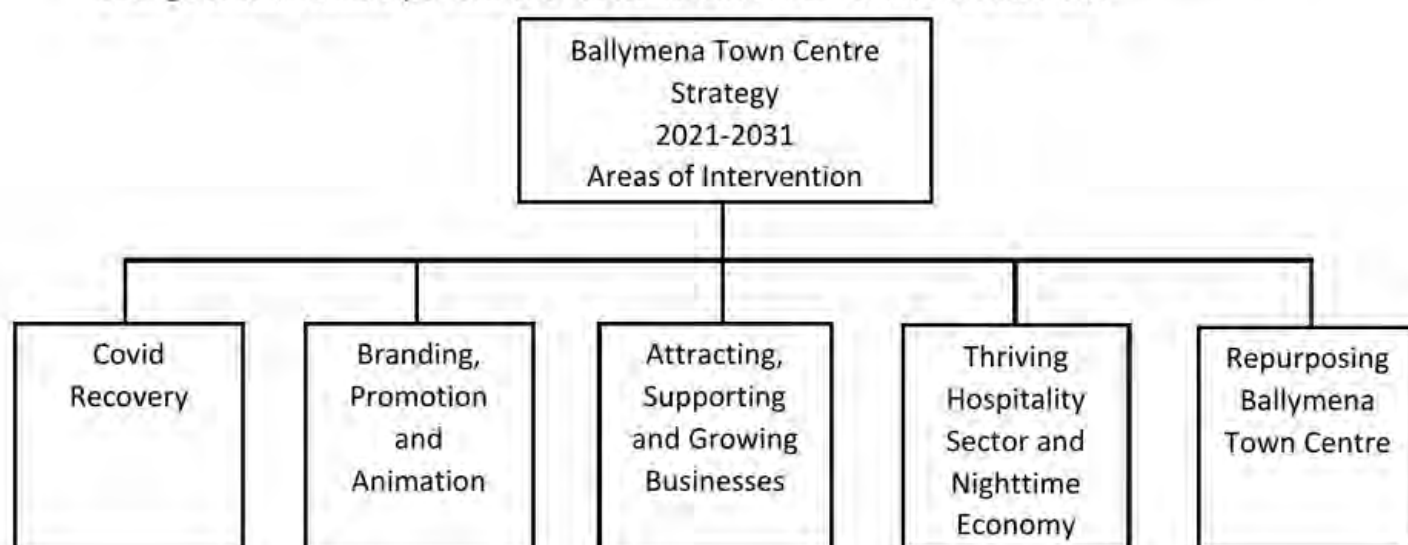
This section of the updated Investment Plan for Ballymena Town Centre sets out the Town Centre Strategy for the 2021-2031 timeframe. The Town Centre Strategy focuses, largely, on revenue investment to help to develop the Ballymena Town Centre offer and the experiences it provides for local citizens who use it to access their retail requirements and services, the businesses who choose Ballymena town centre as a base for their commercial activity (retail and service) for people who work in and around the town centre and for those who visit Mid and East Antrim Borough and more specifically the attractions in an around Ballymena.

The Town Centre Strategy has been developed based on:

- Feedback from town centre users and businesses gained through the public engagement processes underpinning both the Updated Investment Plan and this Town Centre Strategy
- The experience of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's Town Centre Support Team
- The experience of DfC's Regeneration Team

It is recognised that the Town Centre Strategy has been developed at a point where Covid 19 restrictions are still in place with mid 2021 likely to be the starting point for any non-essential town centre trading activity with the possibility that hospitality services may being to operate sometime soon after. On that basis it is reasonable to assume that the initial focus of the Town Centre Strategy will be on supporting the town centre and its businesses to recover from the impacts of the global pandemic. However, given that this is a 10 Year Town Centre Strategy it is important that the impact of Covid does not dominate the overall Strategy.

The Ballymena Town Centre Strategy has been developed around five Areas of Intervention which align to the feedback from the combined public engagement processes and a review of a range of town centre performance data. The five Areas of Intervention are:



Intervention Area One: Covid Recovery

Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballymena builds on its position as one of Northern Ireland's premier retail destinations Ballymena Town Centre businesses are supported to develop recovery and development strategies which helps them to sustain and then rebuild 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council with local partners in Ballymena will implement the Council led Covid 19 Recovery and Revitalisation Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This Plan will focus on a range of investments, activities and supports to bring about a confidence in people to use the town centre, enhance the town centre to provide activities, spaces and features which can be delivered in line with any restrictions associated with the global pandemic. Key activities will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitation of 'spill out' space and promotion of evening/night-time economy through provision of outdoor furniture, awnings, canopies, dividers and heaters Development of a parklets scheme; using on street parking bays to create space for café/pub alfresco provision where existing pavements are too narrow Putting People First; making Ballymena town centre more welcoming and functional through the provision of additional street furniture, additional mobile charging points, hand sanitisers 	MEABC	DfC; Ballymena Chamber of Trade and Commerce and Ballymena BID	DfC	Up to March 2022 (and subject review past this timescale)

	<p>and electronic bollards to create part time pedestrianised zones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entertainment zones: using appropriate space in Ballymena to create outdoor performance and cinema areas combined with the provision of outdoor games zones (including table tennis, large scale draughts/dominoes/chess). This will include examining mobile skateboard and scooter parks• Animation activities: including provision of town centre audio systems and events and stage equipment for music festivals and ad hoc events• Shop front scheme: improve the presentation of existing shop frontage• Develop pop up exhibition space in vacant units and gap sites• Development of urban parks on (gap, brown field) sites which are available, underused strategically located and affordable• Ambient lighting: including the provision of permanent character lighting schemes in key pedestrian areas• Programme of marketing support for traders including 'shop local' vouchers, town centre maps and the development of a website for each town				
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Intervention Area Two: Branding, Promotion and Animation					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballymena develops it offer as a destination retail, heritage, spa and golf town Ballymena continues to present itself as a family friendly town combining green spaces, parks, retail and hospitality Linkage and co-promotion promoted between Ballymena Town Centre and key events and attractors in the wider area Position and communicate Ballymena as an age and dementia friendly town centre 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Agree a brand and annual communications plan for Ballymena Town Centre, aligned to the Council Tourism Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a design and branding brief based on the vision and public engagement underpinning the Investment Plan for Ballymena Town Centre Build on the Ballymena branding strategy and secure the annual resources required to build the brand Evaluate recognition and impact of the brand for visitors to Ballymena over the duration of the Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy Evolve the brand proposition based on the evaluation feedback 	MEABC Comms Unit	DfC and Ballymena BID	TBC	Short to Medium
Ballymena combines spaces and places which support the development of an annual programme of events, festivals and activities which improve the quality of life for its residents and attracts visitors to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with retailers (the BID and Chamber) and the community and voluntary sector to develop a co-ordinated annual animation plan Focus placed on in town and edge of town (e.g., spa, golf) events which bring footfall directly to the town or create the potential to link people to Ballymena Town Centre Investment to support Ballymena Town Centre to be an inclusive and welcoming space 	MEABC	DfC	TBC	Short and ongoing

stay longer, spend more and return.	for vulnerable people including older citizens and those with dementia				
Develop a social media campaign providing positive messaging about Ballymena and its events, promotions and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a social and digital media programme to support the brand Link the promotional activities to the annual events and animation plans and to the Tourism Strategy for the Borough 	MEABC	Tourism and Comms units		Short and ongoing
Develop a creative sector partnership to help animate and bring life to the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring together urban sports, heritage and arts sectors to develop an annual series of pilot activities to bring life to Ballymena Town Centre creating footfall for both the retail and night time economy sectors in the town (e.g., urban beach, urban sports, street theatre and UK and European Heritage Day events) 	MEABC	DfC	TBC	Medium
Intervention Area Three: Attracting, Supporting and Growing Businesses					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballymena Town Centre presents a range of workplace options to suit evolving work practices including decentralized and working closer to home practices Ballymena Town Centre provides space to support higher levels of in town business birth rates Businesses based in Ballymena Town Centre have access to training and support which helps them to address challenges and develop opportunities thus increasing the rate of in town centre business survival and growth 				

Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Examine the potential for flexible/co-working space projects in Ballymena Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review a range of town centre co-working models and capture learning which can be applied in Ballymena Examine the possibility of an extension of the LEA (Ballymena Business Centre) provision in Ballymena Town Centre to increase the range of workspace options 	MEABC	Local Enterprise Agency	Site and specification specific	Medium
The Department of Finance has announced that there will be a programme to roll out new regional civil service hubs...including one in Ballymena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm the requirements and identify property options in Ballymena Town Centre which can meet the Department's specifications Establish dialogue with the Department and confirm the process to deliver the Ballymena regional civil service hub 	MEABC	DfC	Time investment	By 2022
Provision of town centre support programmes for retail and service businesses including support to adopt ecommerce and digital transformation strategies	<p>MEABC has undertaken a number of consultation events with retailers and traders in all of its town centres including Ballymena. This should inform the focus and delivery formats for business support. Based on the most recent feedback from retailers and traders this should include support focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective use of social media Digital marketing and online commerce business processes Visual merchandising Effective grant and funding applications 	MEABC	DfC and the NI College Network	TBC	Short and ongoing

	This support should be available via a range of delivery formats with an emphasis on online content which owner managers can access when they need it				
Examine town centre incentives for new businesses and expanding businesses if policy changes relating to Covid 19 recovery allow for such financial instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine models to make vacant space available to start up enterprises with low barriers to entry (and exit) Identify opportunities to link business development support to financial assistance 	MEABC	DfC and LEA/INI	TBC	Medium
Intervention Area Four: Thriving Hospitality Sector and Night-time Economy					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballymena is recognised as a place to go to engage in a range of social activities People visit and stay longer, spend more and return due to a strong and evolving hospitality and night-time economy sector People feel safe and regardless of age and ability when they visit Ballymena Ballymena has a reducing level of anti-social behavior and one of the lowest across NI 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Pilot nighttime events and promotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine opportunities to develop a range of outdoor and park based events which connect people back to Ballymena Town Centre (ECOS, Peoples Park and the St Patrick's Barracks site) 	MEABC	DfC and community arts, heritage and environmental organisations (local and regional)	TBC	Medium and ongoing

Examine approaches to creating a safe evening and nighttime environment free from anti-social behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop safe premises and events campaign • Promote responsible town centre user campaigns 	MEABC	PCSP	TBC	Medium
Examine lighting approaches in design of public and civic space which contributes to a safer evening and nighttime environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve safety through ambient lighting and reduction of pockets of poor light near venues and transport pick up and set off areas and to and from carparking 	MEABC	DfC /PSNI and PCSP	TBC	Medium
Provide an annual hospitality and experience making training programme for businesses and staff in the hospitality sector and for those in retail and events who provide experiences for visitors (in partnership with peer businesses across Ballymena and Carrickfergus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on the Council's engagement with businesses to date to confirm their support needs. Develop a specific programme for tourism and hospitality businesses linked to Ballymena Town Centre • Seek opportunities to support and develop volunteers who help to host and deliver community led events in Ballymena to help present the town as a quality visitor destination and a place where experiences are made 	MEABC	DfC and Volunteer Bureau	TBC	Medium and ongoing

Intervention Area Five: Repurposing Ballymena Town Centre					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballymena Town Centre continues to evolve and support new ways of living, working and socialising People live in Ballymena Town centre in increasing numbers Reliance on retail is balanced by the increasing importance of new commercial activity The development of Ballymena reflects new patterns of transport and a focus on reducing our collective carbon footprint 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Invest in small scale capital projects to open infill sites/space or address dereliction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop series of pocket parks in Ballymena Town Centre 	MEABC	DfC and landowners (public and private)	TBC	Medium
Promote mixed use development models, residential accommodation and creative, community or health and wellbeing space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a profile of need for specific interest groups and identify mixed use models in other town centres which can be used to inform the development of approaches in Ballymena 	MEABC	DfC, NIHE, Housing Associations and NHSCT	TBC	Medium to long
Examine projects which repurpose underused and vacant commercial properties as flexible studio, creative and co-working spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop pop up shops Examine temporary exhibition space and makers studio space 	MEABC	Local Enterprise Agency and Community Arts sector	TBC	Short and ongoing
Examine the potential for a LOTS Scheme to increase the availability and quality of town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and shortlist a number of property options Promote the scheme and support owners to develop and implement viable schemes 	MEABC	DfC, NIHE, Housing Associations and property owners	Property and scheme specific	Medium

centre accommodation	living					
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**Mid & East
Antrim**
Borough Council

**Larne Town Centre
Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy
2021-2031**

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1 Introduction

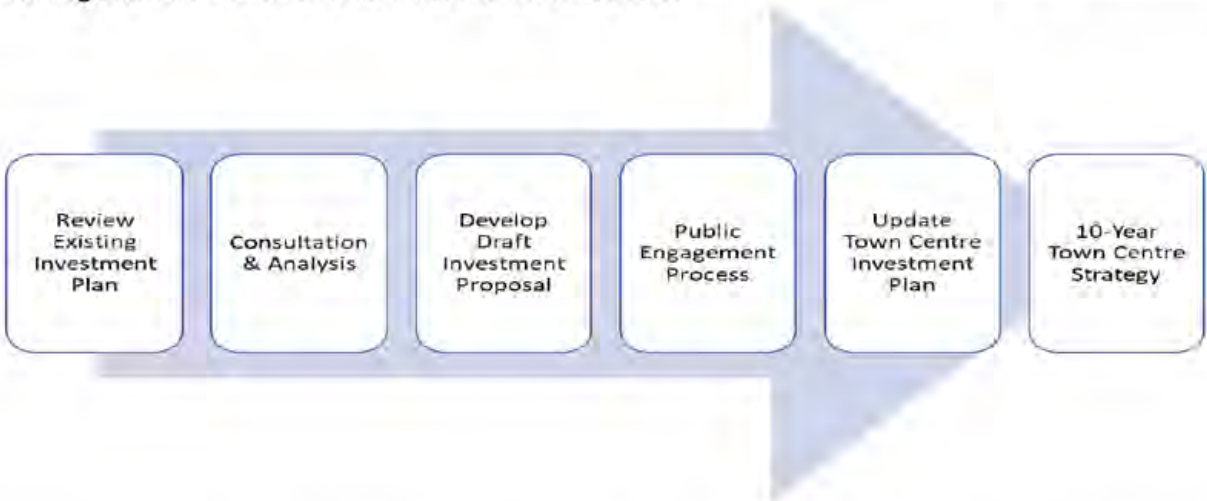
This document sets out an updated Investment Plan for Larne Town Centre for the 2021-2031 timeframe. It also includes a Town Centre Strategy for the same 10-year timeframe. The Investment Plan (update) and Town Centre Strategy were commissioned by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (the Council) and resourced by the Department for Communities (DfC) which carries the Northern Ireland Executive's responsibility for regeneration.

Venture International Ltd (Venture) and the Paul Hogarth Company were commissioned to facilitate the update of the existing Larne Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan which was published in 2010 and which has provided the strategy and framework for public investment in Larne Town Centre over a ten-year timeframe to 2020; it will be superseded by this updated 10-Year Investment Plan for the 2021 to 2031 timeframe.

The Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy work collaboratively to help deliver on an agreed vision for Larne which has been developed based on an analysis of the performance of Larne Town Centre and feedback from a range of stakeholders with a clear interest in the Town Centre including users, those investing in the Town Centre and those with a responsibility for regenerating and developing the town.

2 Larne Town Centre Review and Planning Process

The following process was implemented to complete the update of the current Larne Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan and create a new investment strategy and framework and plan to support the most effective use of public sector investment to create the conditions for regeneration and renewal in Larne Town Centre:

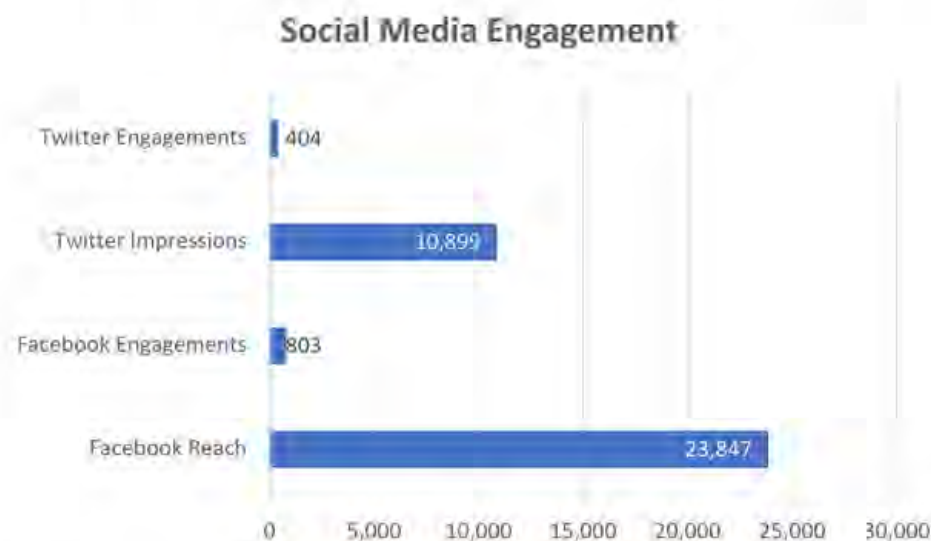


Central to the development of this updated Town Centre Investment Plan has been the engagement of the public (the people who use the Larne Town Centre for a range of reasons but largely for retail, accessing services, as a working environment or as a place to meet and socialise) people who own and manage retail and service businesses and people with a remit and responsibility for promoting and regenerating the town. The level of public engagement informing and directing this updated Larne Town Centre Investment Plan was:

Engagement: Public & Retailers/Traders



The total extent of public engagement with the process to update the Larne Investment Plan and direct the Town Centre Strategy was 1,385 citizens and traders/retailers.



The total extent of public engagement with the process to update the Larne Investment Plan and direct the Town Centre Strategy was 1,385 citizens and traders/retailers.¹

This level of engagement ensures that the updated Investment Plan and supporting Town Centre Strategy have been developed with the benefit of the current experience and aspirations of the key stakeholders in Larne Town Centre. Their input has provided direction on the vision for the town centre and on what and where public investment should focus.

3 Larne ... its Development Journey

The history of the development of Larne Town helps to set the context for this Investment Plan which will continue the regeneration and development of this important coastal town in Mid and East Antrim Borough.

Larne owes much of its success to its strategic coastal location; the natural harbour providing the origins of the town, and its development into a port during the industrial revolution providing catalyst for growth and prosperity. The port gave rise to rail and road connections which further strengthened Larne's strategic role as a centre for industry and commerce, as well as tourism.

¹ It is noted that the public engagement process for Larne Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy was carried out in tandem for a similar process in Ballymena and that the same social media campaign was used to support both processes hence the same level of research

Larne has a unique geography. It is set at the tip of the western headland, opposite the eastern headland of Islandmagee. Together these headlands form a narrow channel to Larne Lough; a largely enclosed body of tidal water. The town sits on a partly natural, and partly reclaimed, coastal shelf, from which the land rises up to the hills and ridges. These surround the coast and set it in a basin. Expansive views extend out eastwards across the Irish Sea towards Scotland. Further around the coast, there are many examples of dramatic coastal scenery including the famous Giant's Causeway and Gobbins Path.

The relative shelter and deep water of Larne Lough make it a natural harbour. Thousands of years ago it was used to harbour fishing boats and this gradually led to the establishment of Larne as a fishing village. Fishing was the main industry in the area up until the 18th Century when the harbour developed into a port for trade and emigration.

The town centre itself developed along a tight sequence of streets, each with a strong east to west orientation across the natural north to south fall of the land. These streets were interconnected by a series of narrow lanes. The central streets developed as the centre of commerce with trade coming from the local working population as well as travelling visitors. The architecture of the town presents a number of notable buildings such as the Town Hall, St. Cedma's Church, Larne Town Hall and the Carnige Library.

In the latter part of the 19th Century James Chaine promoted the first commercial ferry connections between Scotland and Ireland which facilitated further growth and established Larne as a centre for industrial development. More latterly, the Larne - Stranraer crossing was the first in the world to use drive-on, drive-off cargo boats which significantly improved efficiency.

Along with the ferry boats, the industrial revolution also arrived in Larne in the latter part of the 19th Century with the establishment of large-scale industries such as Brown's Weaving Factory, Aluminium Works, Eccles Dyeworks, Acetylene Works, Picken's Shipbuilding Works and Kane's Engineering Foundry. Larne provided an ideal situation for such industries on account of its coastal location; important both for the export and import of goods and materials, as well the water resource necessary for the industrial processes. Furthermore, the establishment of the rail link to Carrickfergus, and later Belfast, further strengthened Larne's industrial capacity.

In the 19th Century Larne also evolved as a centre for Tourism. It is reputed to be the home of tourism on account of local entrepreneur Henry McNeill being one of the first to set up guided tours, taking visitors for day trips up the coast and into the glens. With the good connections into the town that the ferry, rail and road links brought, combined with the attraction of County Antrim's exceptional coastal scenery, Larne presented an obvious location for tourism. Hotels developed within the town centre, which itself became something of a resort, with local businesses benefitting from the passing trade.

Larne's status as a centre for industry saw it become the first settlement in Northern Ireland to get electric light in 1891. It has since developed as a nationally important centre for energy

with Ballylumford Power Station supplying 80% of the Province's power. More recently Larne has become home to a number of international renewable energy companies; namely RES and B9, as well as local business Newmills Hydro Generation Ltd.

Post war decline of the heavy industries had a huge impact on the urban fabric of the town, leaving large scale town centre sites either disused or vacant. Housing came to fill many of these sites while some such as the Old Bleachworks and Howden's Quay still remain vacant today.

While Larne does not have a great collection of historical landmarks, the greatest feature of Larne's history has been the individual characters that have pursued a vision and in so doing brought prosperity to the town. Larne now needs future visionaries to take up this mantle once again.

The historical development of Larne has drawn on the natural resource of the area; the original fishing village and existing port using the natural harbour of Larne Lough and the overseas connections this enabled. This natural resource still exists as one of Larne's greatest assets.

While the Port of Larne remains busy and prosperous, the vitality of the town centre has gradually suffered decline. The reasons for this need to be identified so that the masterplan can work to overcome these issues and bring vitality back to the town centre.

Townscape

There is great opportunity in relation to the Townscape of the town. The traditional commercial streets remain largely intact and form the historic core of the town. While there is opportunity for infill and repair this will largely conform to the existing scale and form of the street. This presents a distinct and well-defined character. Other key sites around the town centre present the opportunity for a new townscape to develop. There is sufficient space and capacity within the town centre to accommodate a number of medium and large-scale developments. The design of these sites should establish a new character that sets out a positive message about the town of Larne. There should be a strong relationship between the built form and the public realm. In particular the key sites at Waterfront and Riverdale should be used to good effect.

This Investment Plan also recognises the planned capital investments by a range of statutory organisations. This includes:

- NI Water plans to upgrade the Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) as it is currently operating above design capacity. This in turn, will help support additional development in Larne Town
- The Education Authority is currently completing a Business Case for a major capital development project for Roddensvale Special School
- NIHE will action the demolition of the last remaining tower block (Latharna Tower Block) at Riverdale. It also has an agreement with Radius Housing to develop 25 units

housing units for older people on the site of the former Gardenmore House Tower Block and a new social housing scheme within walking distance of the town centre (84 Curran Road)



1833



1859



1891



1990



1925

4 Review of the Progress Against the 2010 to 2020 Larne Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan

As part of the updated process, it was appropriate to review the progress made in delivering the actions and projects set out in the 2010 to 2020 Regeneration Masterplan; this is not completed as an evaluation process but rather to confirm:

- What was achieved?
- What actions remain to be delivered?
- Are these outstanding actions still relevant ... given that circumstances and the role of Town Centres can and do change as does the motivations for visiting and using our town centres

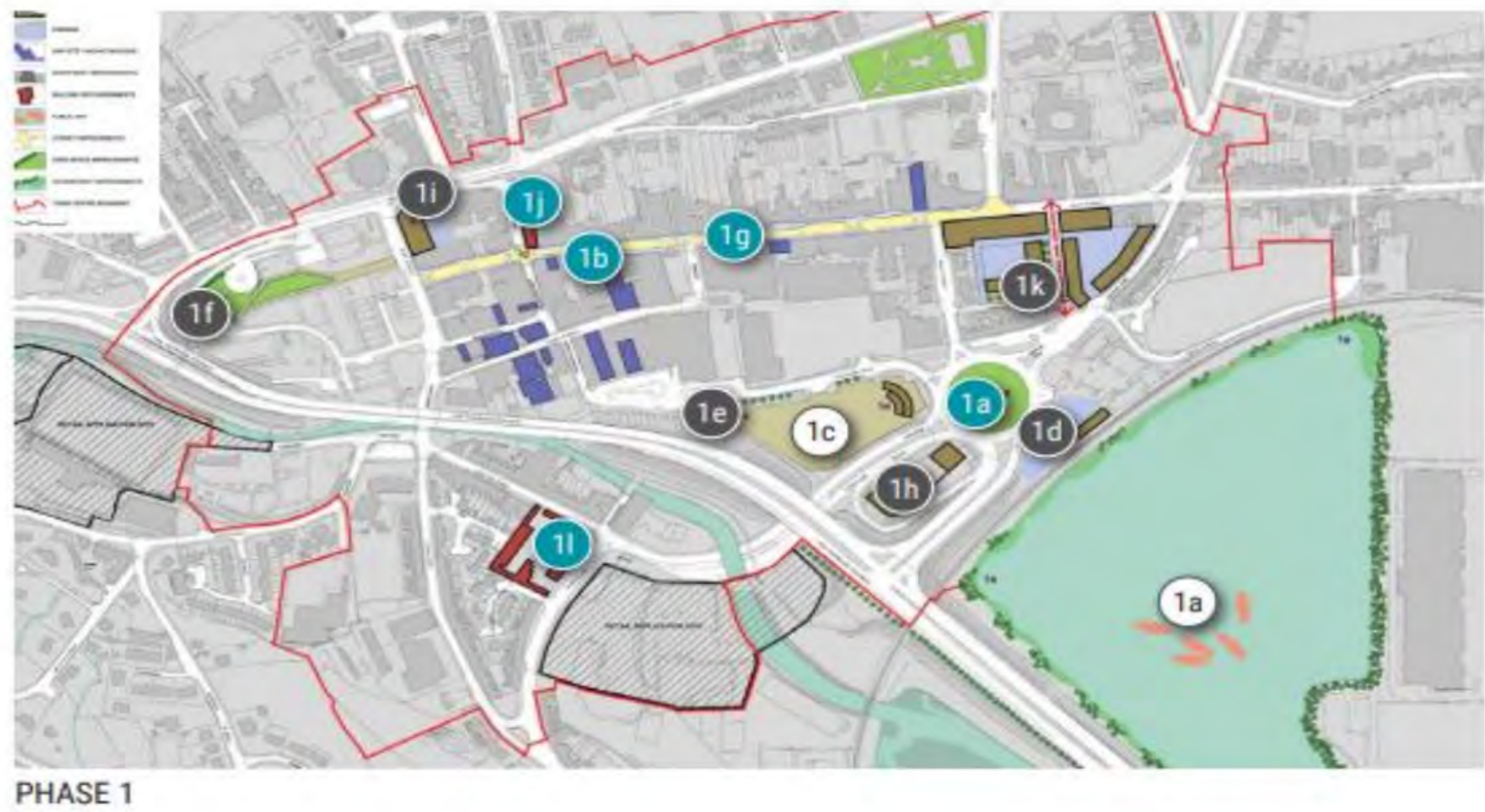
The review was carried out as follows:

- Assessing the outgoing 2010 to 2020 Regeneration Masterplan to confirm what has and has not been completed
- Engaging with the Councillors representing Larne Town
- Engaging with the Larne Town Councilors
- Consulting with the appropriate Council officers with responsibility for regeneration and Town Centre development

Appendix A sets out a detailed assessment of the progress on a project by project basis from the 2010-2020 detailed in the diagram above Larne Town Centre Masterplan.

The following diagram confirms the progress against the actions and projects set out in the 2010 to 2020 Larne Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan:

Larne Regeneration Masterplan 2010-2020

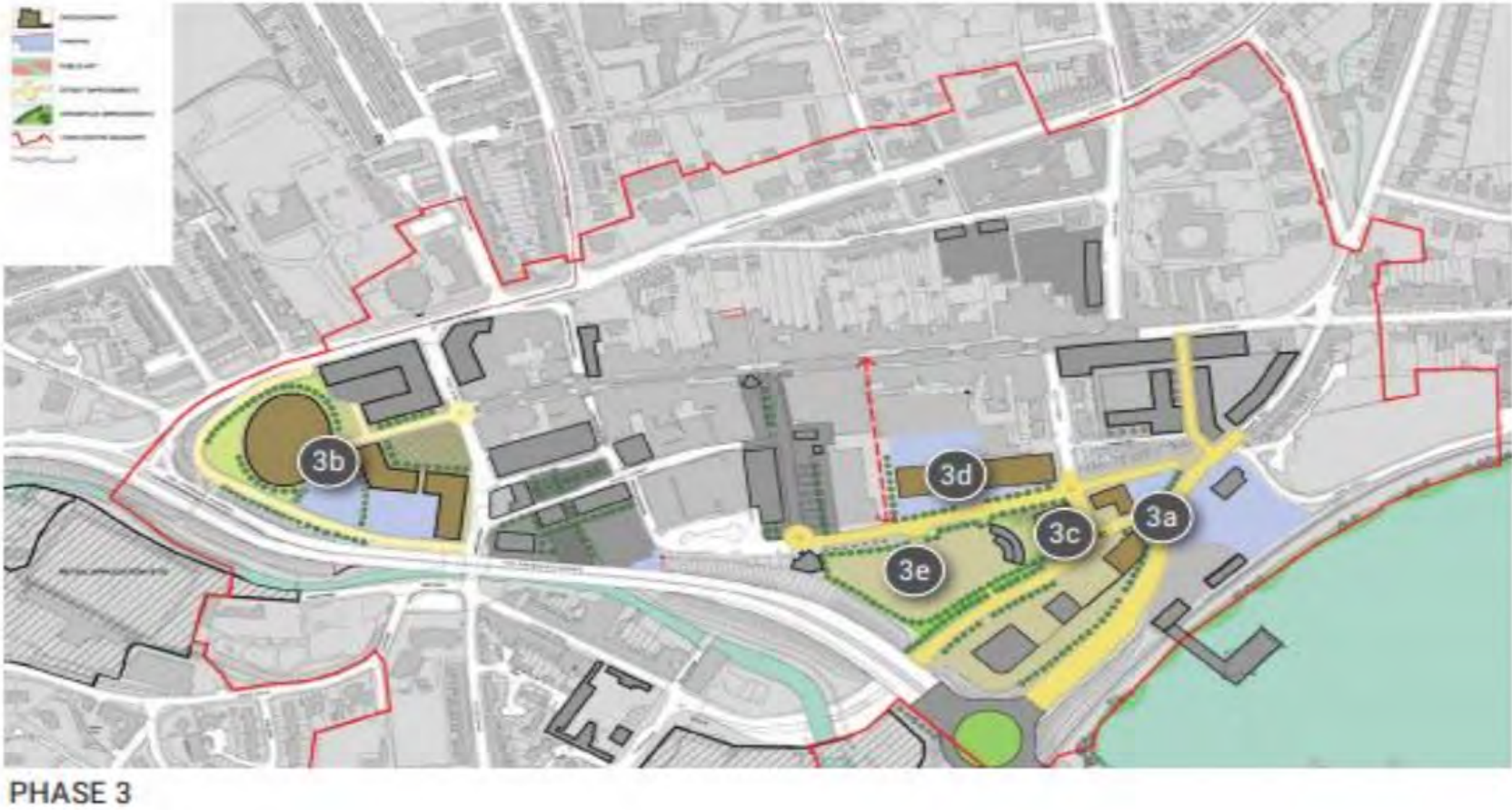


Larne Regeneration Masterplan 2010-2020


























PHASE 2

Larne Regeneration Masterplan 2010-2020



Assessment of implementation against the outgoing Larne Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan

PHASE 1 DESCRIPTION		POSITION
 completed  uncompleted  on-going		
1a	Larne Lagoon - Planting/ Signage	unaware of progress
1a	Larne Lagoon - Public Art	
1b	Shop Front / Gap Site Improvements	
1c	Events Space	unaware of progress
1d	Local Transport Hub	
1e	Tourist Information Centre	
1f	Community Gardens	
1g	Main Street Improvements	
1h	Fire Station Relocation	
1i	High St / Pound St Redevelopment	
1j	Town Hall Refurbishment	
1k	East Main St Redevelopment	
1l	Market Yard Refurbishment	
2a	Harbour Highway Roundabout	 (no but road realignment changes)
2b	Broadway Extension / Redevelopment	unaware of progress

PHASE 1 DESCRIPTION		POSITION
2c	Dunluce St / Point St Redevelopment	
2d	Riverdale / High St Redevelopment	
2e	Youth Centre	
2f	Urban Sports Park	
2g	Larne Lagoon Centre	unaware of progress
2h	Agnew St / Exchange Road Redevelopment	
2i	Community Garden	
2j	Events Space	unaware of progress
2k	Local Transport Hub	
3a	Circular Road Reconfiguration	
3b	Riverdale Redevelopment	
3c	Waterfront Redevelopment - Circular Road	
3d	Laharna Retail Park Redevelopment	
3e	Events Park	

Larne Masterplan – Analysis (Appendix C)

It is important to set the review of the outgoing 2010 Larne Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan progress in context as follows:

- Regeneration masterplans set out a range of high-level indicative projects which all have the potential to contribute to the vision and direction set out in it
- The delivery of the full range of projects can and is dictated by the availability of capital funding and by the willingness of landowners to develop their assets in line with the vision and direction set out in by the Masterplan (if the land is not in public ownership)
- The Context and conditions (including the economy and the needs and aspirations of town centre stakeholders and users) can and will change over a 10-year timeframe rendering some of the indicative projects no longer appropriate

A review of Appendix A confirms that there are a range of reason why some of the project proposals did not proceed as per the Masterplan and these can be summarised as follows:

- The building or site was in private ownership and they were not in a position to progress any development (this was due to a lack of finance, the failure to identify a sustainable or viable use or a lack of willingness to pursue a development option within the timeframe of the Masterplan)
- There were technical challenges which impacted on the potential to deliver the project
- The capital costs were outside that which could be accessed via public funding programmes across the duration of the 10 year Masterplan

These challenges are common across town centre investment planning and the Council and its stakeholders and partners must be cognisant of similar challenges across the implementation of the updated Investment Plan for the 2021-2031 timeframe.

Ultimately the appropriateness of the projects from the 2010 to 2020 Larne Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan which have still to be delivered will be determined by the public and stakeholder engagement processes which helps to:

- Establish consensus on a vision for Larne Town Centre to 2031
- Determine how people want to use Larne Town Centre and how it needs to develop to meet these aspirations
- Determine which of the outstanding projects from the current Masterplan are still relevant and have the potential to contribute to the delivery of the new vision and outcomes for Larne Town Centre

It is recognised that the process (particularly the public engagement activities) leading to the development of an updated 2021 to 2031 Investment Plan for Larne Town Centre was implemented during a timeframe when the Covid 19 global pandemic restrictions were in place. However, this should not dominate a 10-year investment plan (actions to support the recovery of the town centre and its businesses post the immediate impact of Covid 19 are included in the accompanying Town Centre Strategy).

5 Understanding Larne Town Centre ... the 2021 Context and Baseline

Ultimately any 10-year town centre investment plan and strategy seek to answer three fundamental questions:

- Where are we starting from? ... the current baseline position
- Where do we want to be? ... the vision and direction for the regeneration and development of the town centre
- How will we get there? ... the development framework and proposals which set out what the 2021 to 2031 Investment Plan sets out to accomplish

This section of the 2021 to 2031 Larne Town Centre Investment Plan sets out the current baseline for Larne in 2021 and specifically the following:

- Strategic context for the updated Investment Plan
- Context for the role and function of our town centres
- Population and demography of the town
- Scale and make up of its commercial sector
- Perception of the town from the perspective of the public who use the town
- Perception of the retail and commercial sectors in the town

Strategic Context for the Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy

A range of local and national strategies and policies have been examined to establish the context within which the Larne 10 Year Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy is shaped. Appendix B contains the full strategic context, and the strategies and policies reviewed are listed below:



As a summary the updated Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy will help to contribute to the direction set out in this range of strategies at both regional and Borough levels helping to translate the direction and aspirations set out in them to a tangible reality for the citizens who look to Larne Town Centre for their retail, service and social/hospitality needs whilst also providing experiences for those visiting the Borough and more specifically Larne.

The following table sets out how the updated Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy will deliver, practically, against the key aims and objectives of the vision statements and documents for the retail sector and for development/planning the economy and tourism for the Mid and East Antrim Borough:

Strategy	The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and Town Centre Contribution
Northern Ireland Programme for Government (PfG)	<p>The Investment Plan will deliver on a range of PfG outcomes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will prosper through a regionally balanced economy • We will live and work sustainably • We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest
New Decade New Approach	<p>The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create the conditions for growth and employment • Will help to bring a balance to the regional (and Borough) economy
Retail NI – Regeneration NI Creating 21st Century Towns and City Centres	<p>The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a coordinated approach to the development and regeneration of the town centre • Local authority leadership of the development and regeneration of the town centre
DfC Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025	<p>This strategy was developed establish the framework for collaborative working across government and with its Arm's Length Bodies and communities in delivering a common purpose of Supporting People, Building Communities and Shaping Places.</p> <p>The public realm investments in the Larne Town Centre Investment Plan links to the Wellbeing and Inclusion theme. The strategy states 'We help everyone within our communities to live positive, fulfilled lives surrounded by diverse opportunities to work, enjoy themselves and get involved'.</p> <p>The Investment Plan will help create the conditions in Larne Town Centre to deliver on this aspiration.</p>

	<p>The strategy places emphasis on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to improve our built environment and heritage, creating authentic, inclusive, sustainable and animated spaces • Progress a programme of public realm and revitalisation schemes in the regional regeneration areas and adequately address dereliction <p>The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and supporting Town Centre Strategy will practically deliver on these strategic objectives</p>
Mid and East Antrim Community Plan 2017-2032	<p>The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support urban regeneration of the town centre positioning it to support diversified economic activity and a strong nighttime economy • Promote and position Larne Town Centre as a place to live, work, invest in and visit
Mid and East Antrim Corporate Plan 2019-2032	<p>The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a high-quality urban environment where people want to live, work, enjoy and invest • Provide public shared green and civic space and connectivity with natural assets
Mid and East Antrim Local Development Plan (LDP)	<p>The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan will directly contribute to the LDP vision by providing a connected town for people to live in, work, enjoy, invest and visit</p>
Amplify – the Economic Development Vision for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	<p>The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support in town centre enterprises start up and growth • Will provide flexible spaces to support enterprises • Will support a more diversified Borough economy with a modern retail and service sector

Evolving Role of Town Centres

The role and function of the town centre has always evolved ... however, it must be recognised that at some points in time the pace of that evolution is much more pronounced and therefore often has more impact on our town centres.

Based on all assessment the town centres across the UK, NI and the Borough are in the midst of one of the most significant evolutions that they have experienced. The out workings will have a long-term impact on the roles our town centres play in the lives of our citizens and visitors to the Borough and its towns. As a consequence, our vision for them and the way we invest in them (the Investment Plan) to deliver on this new vision and how we lead their

development (the Town Centre Strategy) to meet the requirements of our town centre users must reflect what has brought about these changes.

To understand why this Investment Plan and the supporting Town Centre Strategy have to support the town to navigate through a significant cycle of change we need to look back to the previous approach to the planning of our town centres; planning policy in the 1990s led to the growth of out-of-town retailing and began to divide the focus of retail across the town between town centre and edge of town and out of town retail environments.

From mid-2000 and onwards has seen our town centres have had to deal with a new and sustained challenge from online retailing; estimates indicate that online retailing has gathered a sustained momentum accounting for 7.8 % of retail in 2011 to 33% by December 2020 (Source Office of National Statistics).

Combined with the two factors detailed above the third scenario which contribute to the now significant evolution of our town centres is the Covid 19 global pandemic; it is too early to predict or fully understand the impact it will have on our town centres or indeed our wider society and economy. However, we can be certain that it has accelerated the migration to online retailing. There is also an early indication that the progression to e-commerce business models (partly attributed to the pandemic and partly to the adoption of new business technologies) will also have an impact on our town centres. As an example, Bank of Ireland has announced the closure of 15 branches across NI including one (Ballymena) in the Mid and East Antrim Borough. Therefore, it is likely that some of the traditional town centre businesses will have a lesser requirement for either main street premises or indeed any form of physical presence in our town centres. This by extension will reduce the level of footfall and could lead to additional vacancy.

However, the current challenges must be seen in the context that town centres have developed and evolved over time and this Investment Plan will help create the conditions for Larne Town Centre to continue to adapt and evolve. To inform the Investment Plan and the Town Strategy as review of the emerging thinking and approaches to the repurposing of the town centre. At a headline level this provides confidence about the future role and functioning of town centres across the UK, NI and the Borough.

The Westminster government has recognised that town centres are facing a range of challenges. It has established the Town Centre Task Force to act as a catalyst to develop meaningful interventions leading to the regeneration of our town centres as sustainable urban living, commercial and leisure/social environments. The Task Force has been supported by the introduction of the Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund.

A review of the high street footfall data for 2019-2020 published by the Town Centre Task Force in August 2020 confirms that retail is declining as the dominant driver of visitors to our

town centres; 44% of towns across the UK are now classed as multi-functional which represents a rise of 8% over the previous year.

The patterns of not only how but also when people access our town centres is beginning to change at a level which is significant. For a number of decades (and especially in NI due to the impact of the Troubles on how our town centres functioned) typically town centres were 9am to 5pm retail and commercial environments. The Task Force data identifies that this is changing and that 16% of daily footfall is in the evening and an increasing evidence of nighttime footfall associated with 24-hour services and a developing hospitality offer and changes in work patterns, behaviours and cultures.

The Northern Ireland Executive has also recognised that its town centres face challenges but equally a range of opportunities to regenerate, redevelop and repurpose. It established the NI High Street Task Force which held its first meeting on 24th February 2021. Its stated vision ("Sustainable city, town and village centres which are thriving places for people to do business, socialize, shop, be creative and use public services as well as being great places to live").....this gives a sense of where and how the Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy for Larne should develop.

A review of the range of thinking and discussion papers about the future of town centres across the UK sets out the argument that over the past few decades' town centres have developed as clone centres offering similar rather than differentiated offers.

The range of sources identifies that our town centres will increasingly be a place for people to live; with an acknowledgement that new approaches must be taken to diversify the range of housing types and options available in our town centres. Typically, town centres currently provide either high-density low-cost housing units or individual houses which are some of the most expensive in the local authority area. Clearly town centres in NI have had more specific challenges associated with the Troubles which reduced their attractiveness as living spaces. Evolving towns will provide a much more diversified range of housing types in and around the town centre.

Whilst our town centres are likely to become more multi-functional retail will still be a core function of the evolving town Centre; retail is likely to be experiential and more focused on providing high quality retail experiences for the local community which provides an alternative to a more sterile online experience ... or linked to the Borough or regional tourism offers. The focus on very town specific destination retail experiences will be part of the characteristics of our new town centres. Progressively sustainable retailers will examine mixing online business models with a more conventional offer.

Provision of a strong hospitality offer, and nighttime economy is likely to be a main element of our town centres as they develop. This will include developing pockets of green and civic space which facilitate people to spend more time in town centres meeting people and engaging in social activities and connectivity.

Mixed use may continue to be a part of the approach to the development and regeneration of our town centres; however, it will have less, if any, focus on retail and will provide developments which combine a mix of living accommodation, community facilities, health and wellbeing facilities and creative/maker spaces.

The Covid 19 pandemic has provided a range of challenges and experiences. Accepting that the key challenge is public health it has reinforced how we miss and by extension value social connection

Appendix C contains web links to the data and articles reviewed to inform this section of the updated Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and the supporting Town Centre Strategy.

Larne Town in Figures

Based on the published data for the town the following summarises Larne Town Centre in numbers from both demographic and trading perspective.

Larne Town Centre has a total population of 18,705 based on the 2011 census. A review of its demography confirms:

- 21% of the population is under 17
- 61% of the population is between 18-64 years
- 18% of the population is over 65 years

Performance and Character of the Larne Town Centre Economy

Council completed town centre health checks for each of the key towns in 2019(The Mid and East Antrim Retail and Commercial Leisure Need and Capacity Study by Nexus Planning). This provides an objective assessment of the performance of Larne Town Centre as the third largest town in the Borough.

The retail turnover of Larne Town Centre is approximately £74.6 m per annum ... though it is recognised that the Nexus Town Centre Health Check Assessment was completed before the 2020/21 Covid 19 global pandemic which in all likelihood will have a short to medium (up to three years) impact on the retail turnover of the town.

The make up of commercial units in Larne town Centre is set out below:

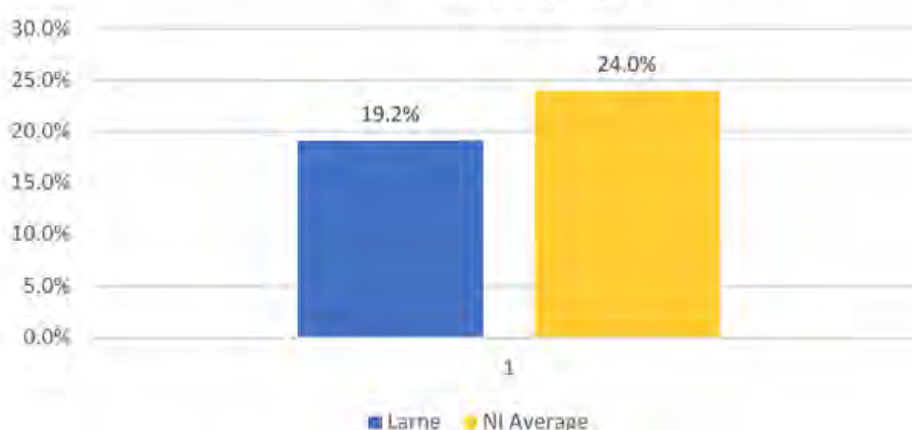
Entering the 2021 to 2031 timeframe Larne Town Centre has 282 commercial units across a range of eight categories as follows:

Larne: Commercial Units



The DfC Northern Ireland Town Centre Database for February 2021 confirms that Larne has a lower level of commercial vacancy than the norm for Northern Ireland. The comparison is:

Commercial Vacancy: Larne v. NI Average February 2021



Source: DfC - The Northern Ireland Town Centre Database (2021)

The independent town health check report offered the following recommendations which can, in part, inform the direction of the updated Investment Plan:

- Promote the provision of more convenience floorspace in the town centre to reduce the reliance on out-of-town centre supermarkets, particularly Asda at Redlands, and help to promote more linked trips with the town centre. Promotion of convenience goods stores might be achieved by allowing the amalgamation of vacant units for provision of a larger foodstore within the town centre. This should be given priority over the provision of additional new convenience floorspace

- Promote the development of more leisure services such as restaurants and bars, in the town centre to continue to strengthen the leisure services offer of Larne Town Centre and continue to reduce the reliance on comparison goods shopping as the main draw for visitors. This could be achieved by avoiding the introduction of planning policy that is prescriptive to only allowing A1 units in the town centre core units within it
- Promote policies for mixed use developments in appropriate locations throughout the town centre including residential led mixed-use developments, to increase footfall in the town centre
- Working with landlords and property owners to provide incentives, such as rent-free periods for major and independent retailers to take up vacant units in the town centre which might improve the perception of Larne Town Centre
- Promote tourism within the town centre by encouraging tourism-based development including hotel development in the town centre, improving the overall offer of leisure services, such as restaurants, cafes and drinking establishments and working with tourism operators in the area to increase the value of tourists visiting Larne

Listening to Our Stakeholders

Central to getting the vision and focus of the Larne Town Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy right is developing it based on the direction and needs of the town centre stakeholders; the citizens who use Larne Town Centre and the retailers and traders who provide the range of retail, hospitality and services in it.

The public engagement processes were designed and promoted to secure a high level of stakeholder input and direction. Appendices D and E set out a full analysis of public and retailers/traders' perceptions of Larne Town Centre and their vision for how it can evolve and develop to meet their needs and aspirations over the next decade to 2031.

The perception of the users of Larne Town Centre (the public engagement process asked people to respond based on their experiences and user patterns pre the Covid 19 pandemic) is summarised in the following diagram:

The respondents were asked to rate Larne town centre against a range of 10 factors with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good. The graph below sets out the response and weighted averages against each factor:



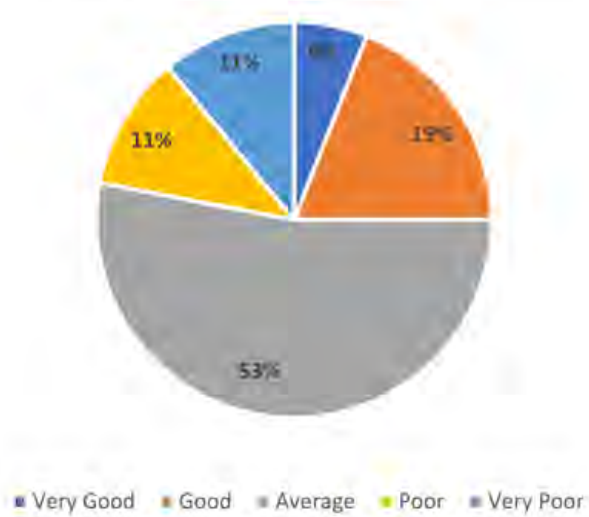
As would be expected Larne town centre users expressed a range of views across the factors, the highlights were:

- The majority of respondents 46% (52) consider facilities to be average with 43% (48) considering them to be below average.
- The retail mix is in the main considered to be below average with 61 respondents (55%) rating them poor or very poor. The response on promotional activity reflects a similar view.
- Destination stores were also rated below average by 69 (63%) of respondents.
- There were particular negative responses in relation to the tourist offering and the evening economy 83 (74%) and 101 (90%) respectively considering these to be poor or very poor.
- 89% (85) consider parking to be average or better with 48 (50%) rating it good.
- The customer experience is considered positively with 87 (62%) rating average or better and 49 (35%) good or very good.
- Ease of use is also rated positively with 98 (88%) rating average or better and 55 (50%) good or very good.
- The quality of the environment is perhaps the most balanced with 52 rating average, 23 good or very good and 37 poor or very poor.

Retailers and people owning and operating businesses in Larne Town Centre were also asked to rate their perception of the Larne Town Centre against a range of factors and their responses are summarised below:

The following table sets out the retailers and traders’ perceptions of Larne Town Centre in 2020:

Perceptions of Larne Town Centre
(Retailers & Traders)

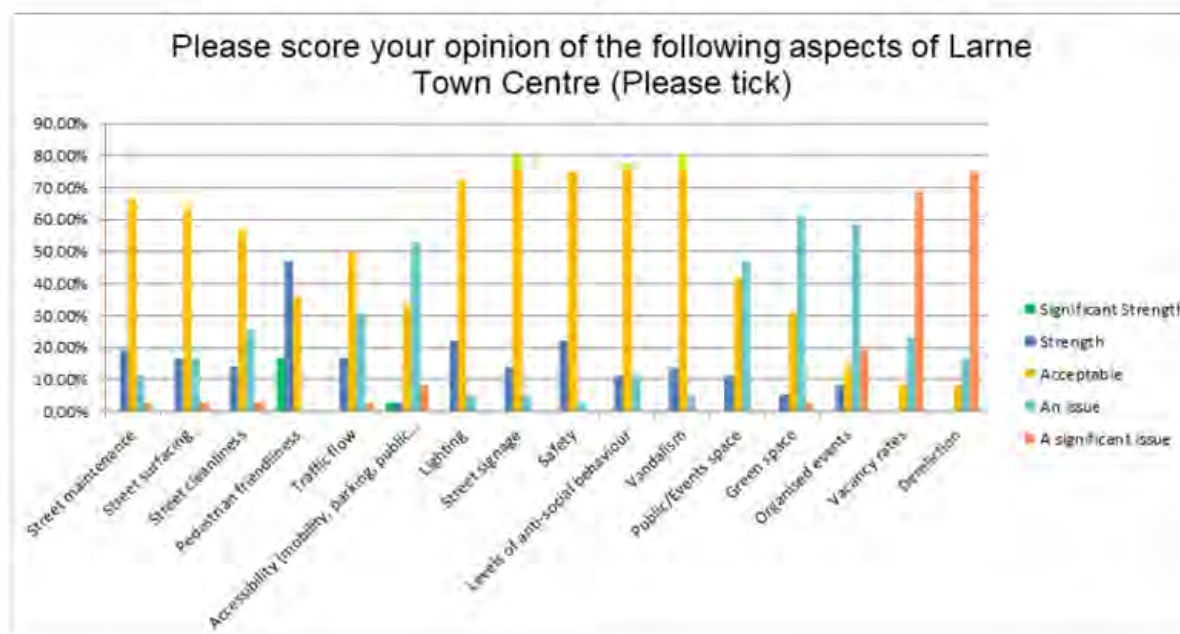


Whilst the majority of respondents are committed to retaining their business in Larne Town Centre it is clear that they view the overall presentation and functionality of Larne as a limitation; 52% rate the Town Centre as Average at best with 22% as either Poor or Very Poor. The Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy must identify actions which can reverse their perceptions over the medium to long term.

The retailers and traders were asked to rate their opinion of Larne Town Centre against a range of 16 factors. The following rating scale was used:

Significant Strength
Strength
Acceptable
An Issue
A Significant Issue

The following table sets out their responses:



A review of the response confirms the following:

- The performance of the Town Centre against all of these factors is acceptable at best
- From the perspective of retailers and traders in the Town Centre they can see the dereliction and vacancy rates are the two main concerns; almost 74% of people feel that dereliction is a significant issue and 69% are of the opinion that vacancy is a significant issue
- The following are perceived as a significant issue or an issue by respondents:
- For almost 20% organised events (or lack of) is perceived a significant issue and for just under 60% an issue
- The lack of green space is perceived as a significant issue for 4% and an issue for 62% of the respondents
- Accessibility including mobility, parking and public access are perceived as significant issues for 8% of respondents and an issue for 53% of them

Only 2 issues were seen as a significant strength; 17% of respondents indicated that pedestrian friendliness was a strength and 2% identified accessibility as a significant strength. It is clear that the Town Centre isn't performing particularly well against any of the factors from the perspective of retailers and traders. This feedback provides direction for the Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy and begins to identify priority areas which will be required to address including; vacancy, dereliction, presentation of green space, lack of organised events and general accessibility.

Providing Direction for the Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy

The outputs of the public and retailers and traders' surveys provides direction for the Larne Investment Plan and Larne Town Centre Strategy (2021-2031). The combined responses

provide a series of common priorities which need to be addressed in both the Investment Plan (investment of public funds in capital projects to regenerate and develop Larne Town Centre in line with the agreed vision and priorities established via the review and public engagement processes) and the Town Centre Strategy. The direction can be summarised as follows:

There needs to be an inclusive vision for Larne Town Centre ... one which meets the needs of the citizens of Larne, those investing in businesses in Larne and those who might visit the Borough and the town. The vision should be inclusive; by that it should focus on Larne Town Centre as a business (retail and trade) environment, as a place where people live and want to live, as a social and meeting place and as a town where people go to because it has quality experiences (retail, hospitality, night life and experiences relating to culture, the environment and its coastal location) and not bypass on their way to somewhere else.

The feedback provides focus on what the Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy might need/want to focus on:

- Better presentation and image ... primarily by addressing vacancy and dereliction
- Town Centre focused retail; diversified, niche and 'worth travelling for'
- A strong hospitality sector and nighttime economy
- A town centre which increases footfall by providing mixed use development combining living, community/health and wellbeing and maker/craft/creative spaces and developments
- Develop smaller scale social and civic spaces to facilitate casual connections and to provide space for town centre dwellers to access
- A programme of events and animation of spaces and civic space

The following table and associated images bring together the challenges and issue raised by the analysis, consultation and engagement process for the Larne Investment Plan: (See attached Masterplan Analysis)

6 Larne Town Centre by 2031

The review of the existing Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan and the range of public engagement activities have helped provide a sense of direction and purpose for the 2021-2031 Investment Plan (and Town Centre Strategy). The vision for Larne Town Centre set out in the 2010 Regeneration Masterplan was:

'To be a vibrant and prosperous Town Centre through a co-ordinated and sustainable approach to redevelopment'

The feedback from the public engagement processes confirms that it is opportune to revisit and redraft the vision for Larne Town Centre. A vision and supporting outcomes have been developed which create a sense of what any investments (capital projects) and programmes should be focused on and seek to achieve. The updated vision for Larne Town Centre across the 2021 to 2031 timeframe is:

'Larne Town Centre 2031: A town centre which provides high quality environments and spaces to live, shop, meet and work creating experiences which encourage people to come back more often, to stay longer and contribute more to its economic sustainability'

The 2021-2031 vision is supported by the following outcomes; outcomes are a statement of how we want Larne Town Centre to be, how it will function for its range of stakeholders and how it will be perceived by visitors to it and users of it. The capital investment proposals will seek to deliver the following outcomes for Larne Town Centre over the 2021 to 2031 timeframe:

- Larne town centre will have attractive housing options connected with quality retail and services natural environments and civic space which encourage people to live in the town centre
- Larne will be recognised as a great town centre to meet people and spend time
- Larne will develop as a destination town based on the retail and hospitality experiences it provides
- Larne town centre will have a diversified economy and provides flexible in town working spaces and environments
- Larne town centre will contribute to the experience of visitors to the Borough through its linkage with the Coast and its heritage and natural assets
- Larne will be an excellent town centre environment to invest in or develop a commercial enterprise which benefits from quality spaces and support initiatives
- Larne will be a safe and inclusive town centre for citizens of the Borough or visitors to it
- Larne town centre will promote active travel by providing the infrastructure which supports pedestrian and cycling to work and leisure facilities and to park and ride and public transport access points
- Larne is an age and dementia friendly, welcoming town centre and a great experience for all, including our most vulnerable

7 Updated Larne Town Centre Investment Plan

This section of the updated Larne Town Centre Investment Plan for the 2021 to 2031 timeframe translates the vision and outcomes into a range of practical development proposals which have:

- The potential to deliver on the vision
- Been tested and refined via the public engagement processes

The Larne Town Centre Investment Plan 2021-2031

The following schematics and visuals set out the overall direction of Larne Town Centre Investment Plan and a range of seven development proposals which work in an inter-related manner to deliver the vision for a repurposed Larne Town Centre. The Investment Plan is focused round five themes which have been informed via the review and public engagement processes. They provide both co-ordination and consistency for the Investment Plan ensuring that public investment against the agreed vision and outcomes for Larne Town Centre. The following diagram sets out the five interrelated Investment Plan Themes:



The following visual presents the seven investment proposals in the context of Larne Town Centre establishing their spatial relationship with both the town centre and between each of the proposals:



The Investment Plan seeks to focus on themes and areas in the town centre which have been identified via the review and public engagement processes.

Each of the seven development proposals have the potential to contribute to a number of the Investment Plan themes.

Collectively they ensure that the investment of public funds via the development proposals means that the five themes emerging through the review and public engagement processes are addressed. The Investment Plan, its five themes and seven development proposals also provide an evidence base and direction for private sector investment in Larne Town Centre.

A. Riverdale


LARNE

- Pop up park including green space, (seating, planting, events and play space) flexible work units, parking and programming for events to diversify and create activity in the town centre on the soon to be vacant site.
- Pre cursor to residential led mixed use masterplan.



B. Refurbishment of Targeted Vacancy and Dereliction

LARNE



- Targeted building refurbishment to remove blight and reoccupy vacant buildings e.g. apartments. Take advantage of regeneration opportunities which create a more attractive town centre environment, encourage town centre living, and protect and enhance the built heritage of the town centre.
- Retrofitting - sustainable development
- Increased town centre population
- Increased town centre investment
- Improved building appearances
- Adding to mix of town centre uses
- Adding to mix of housing offer
- More vibrant town centre
- Reduced vacancy level
- Increased footfall

Commercial & Business	✓
Town Centre Living	✓
Green & Public Spaces	●
Connections & Access	●
Key Sites / Opportunity Sites	✓

C. Streetscape Improvements

LARNE

- High quality streetscape to Town Centre streets, including Dunluce Street, Point Street and Lower Cross Street, encouraging footfall and creating a more attractive town centre environment.




- Improved resident & visitor perceptions
- Increased footfall & dwell time
- Increased confidence and business growth
- Modal shift from cars to walking & cycling.

- Commercial & Business ✓
- Town Centre Living ✓
- Green & Public Spaces ✓
- Connections & Access ✓
- Key Sites / Opportunity Sites ✓

D. Town Centre Animation

LARNE

- Development of a varied programme of high quality events to take place in and around the town centre, focusing on promoting inclusivity and creating new opportunities for life and activity. A series of events will ensure public realm areas are brought to life and make sure the town centre becomes a destination.



Lyon, France

Increased Events	✓
Improved Perceptions	✓
Increased Footfall & Spend	✓
Increased Social Interaction	✓
Activity and Life to Town Centre	✓
Commercial & Business	✓
Town Centre Living	✓
Green & Public Spaces	✓
Connections & Access	✓
Key Sites / Opportunity Sites	✓

E. Underpass Environmental Improvements

LARNE

- Environmental improvements and the introduction of uses to create a functional and safe space beneath the Harbour Highway will generate life, activity and encourage people into the town centre. A pedestrian crossing, on Bridge Street, linking the spaces underneath the Harbour Highway will encourage permeability and along with animation, such as art, lighting and events, will help to transform the space.



Increased Events

Space For Meeting & Interacting

Increased Footfall & Dwell Time

Increased Perception of Safety

Improved & Functional Space

Intra-Space, Boston



Commercial & Business

Town Centre Living

Green & Public Spaces

Connections & Access


Key Sites / Opportunity Sites



F. Improved River Path Connections

LARNE

- An improved connection along the river to encourage movement and provide stronger connections between the town centre and surrounding areas, including the football stadium.
- Clearing the overgrown vegetation and improvement of wildlife habitat will turn the river into a focus along the connecting route, contributing to its value as a public asset.



Improved Connectivity

Increased Perception of Safety

Increased Footfall

Improved Health & Well-being

More Journeys on Foot & Cycle

Increased Biodiversity

Connswater Community Greenway

Commercial & Business	<input type="radio"/>
Town Centre Living	<input type="radio"/>
Green & Public Spaces	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Connections & Access	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Key Sites / Opportunity Sites	<input type="radio"/>

G. Lagoon

LARNE

- Pop up waterfront including public space, (seating, decking, planting) and activation through water based activities. Opportunity for a programme of events to encourage use and make people aware of the lagoon and its biodiversity.
- Pre cursor to residential led mixed use masterplan.

Increased Footfall

Enhanced Gateway Site

Enhanced Civic Pride

Improved Health & Well-being

Increased Biodiversity

Commercial & Business

Town Centre Living

Green & Public Spaces

Connections & Access

Key Sites / Opportunity Sites

Ullswater

Leadership Resourcing and Decision Making

The updated Investment Plan for Larne complete with its themes and investment proposals establish a vision for the town centre and a framework to deliver on that vision. Once agreed by all the stakeholders and adopted by the Council focus must then be placed on implementation.

The following table sets out an implementation plan for the 2021-2031 Larne Town Centre Investment Strategy. It has been developed based on the learning captured from the implementation of the 2010-2020 Larne Town Centre Masterplan and the collective experience of the Council and DfC regeneration teams.

The implementation plan underpinning the delivery of the updated 2021-2031 Investment Plan is:

Focus	Implementation Activities
Leadership	<p>Ultimately the success and impact of the Investment Plan against the agreed vision for Larne Town Centre and the associated outcomes depends on the quality and experience of the leadership available to implementation processes and activities.</p> <p>The Leadership group will bring together the combined competencies, capabilities and Larne Town Centre knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid and East Antrim Borough Council • DfC's Regeneration team • Traders <p>They will come together as a Town Centre Forum (???) which will lead and co-ordinate the delivery of the updated 2020-2030 Investment Plan. The Town Centre Forum will be responsible for the following elements of the implementation of the Investment Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritisation of development proposals • Development of design options • Technical assessment of proposals and associated • Completion of all technical and legal assessment and compliance issues • Costing agreed design options and bidding for the required capital delivery funding • Procurement and contract management • Communication and public engagement for both the Investment Plan and for specific development proposals • Annual review and refinement of the Investment Plan
Prioritisation	<p>There are many factors to be considered when deciding which of the development proposals should be delivered and when. Good practice dictates that the team leading the implementation of the Investment Plan should be revisited each year based and revised based on the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership and availability of the target site

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness of the site owner to progress the development proposal • Technical deliverability • Capital cost and capital funding availability <p>It is proposed that an annual review of the Investment Plan is undertaken and that this is used to revisit and agree the priorities for the incoming year</p>
Review	<p>Regular review must be a central part of the implementation of the Investment Plan.</p> <p>The Larne Town Centre Forum will undertake an annual review of the progress against the Investment Plan.</p> <p>The review process will entail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of progress against the Annual Delivery Plan • Engagement with the public and town centre retailers and traders via online and face to face processes to confirm perceptions and any emerging issues • Commissioning external evaluation for any significant capital project delivery (PPE)
Communication	<p>Communication is key to effective implementation of any town centre investment and especially around the delivery of specific proposals .The Council has a Communications Unit which was centrally involved in the public participation processes which informed this Larne Town Centre Investment Plan .The Town Centre Forum will work alongside the Council Communications Unit to develop an appropriate annual communication and engagement plan which will seek to maintain a high level of public awareness of the Investment Plan and its delivery.</p>

Larne – Project Implementation

The Investment Plan Projects represent priority actions for the physical regeneration of Larne Town Centre between the period 2021 – 2031. Together they target key issues identified through analysis and are each positioned to catalyse a wider process of regeneration and investment.

Responsibility for delivery will fall to local and central government, as well as the private sector, drawing upon the capacity, skills and responsibilities of each. It is therefore essential that each party works closely with one another through a centralized oversight and project management body, helping to maximise coordination, continuity and synergies between investments.

Design quality must remain an utmost consideration for each project, ensuring that any intervention is of a high quality, constituting a long-term investment in Larne that build investor confidence.

Each project must also be designed in partnership with local stakeholders, ensuring that they have a genuine opportunity to help shape proposals and play their part in the process of transformation.

PROJECT	LEAD	KEY STAKEHOLDERS	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME	FINANCIAL SCALE
A RIVERDALE	NIHE	M&EABC	2021 – 2031	£££
B REFURBISHMENT OF TARGETED VACANCY AND DERELICTION	DFC and Private Sector	DFC NIHE M&EABC	2021 – 2031	££
C STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS	DFC	M&EABC DFI	2021 – 2031	££
D TOWN CENTRE ANIMATION	M&EABC	Private Sector	2021 – 2031	£
E UNDERPASS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS	M&EABC	DFC DFI	2021 – 2023	£
F IMPROVED RIVER PATH CONNECTIONS	M&EABC	DFI Rivers Agency	2021 - 2023	££
G LAGOON	DFC	M&EABC Private Sector	2022 – 2026	££

£ <1M ££ 1-10M £££ >10M

8 Larne Town Centre Strategy

This section of the updated Investment Plan for Larne Town Centre sets out the Town Centre Strategy for the 2021-2031 timeframe. The Town Centre Strategy focuses, largely, on revenue investment to help to develop the Larne Town Centre offer and the experiences it provides for local citizens who use it to access their retail requirements and services, the businesses who choose Larne town centre as a base for their commercial activity (retail and service) for people who work in and around the town centre and for those who visit Mid and East Antrim Borough and more specifically the attractions in an around Larne.

The Town Centre Strategy has been developed based on:

- Feedback from town centre users and businesses gained through the public engagement processes underpinning both the Updated Investment Plan and this Town Centre Strategy
- The experience of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's Town Centre Support Team
- The experience of DfC's Regeneration Team

It is recognised that the Town Centre Strategy has been developed at a point where Covid 19 restrictions are still in place with mid 2021 likely to be the starting point for any non-essential town centre trading activity with the possibility that hospitality services may being to operate sometime soon after. On that basis it is reasonable to assume that the initial focus of the Town Centre Strategy will be on supporting the town centre and its businesses to recover from the impacts of the global pandemic. However, given that this is a 10-year Town Centre Strategy it is important that the impact of Covid does not dominate the overall Strategy.

The Larne Town Centre Strategy has been developed around five Areas for Intervention which align to the feedback from the combined public engagement processes and a review of a range of town centre performance data. The five Areas for Intervention are:



Action plans have been developed for each of the themes:

Intervention Area One: Covid Recovery					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses are supported to sustain and grow and adapt to the post Covid 19 retail and commercial environment Larne builds as a stop off location on the North Coast route As part of the Town recovery Larne Town Centre develops as a hospitality and nighttime offer 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council with local partners in Larne will implement the Council led Covid 19 Recovery and Revitalisation Plan	<p>This Plan will focus on a range of investments, activities and supports to bring about a confidence in people to use the town centre, enhance the town centre to provide activities, spaces and features which can be delivered in line with any restrictions associated with the global pandemic. Key activities will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitation of 'spill out' space and promotion of evening/night-time economy through provision of outdoor furniture, awnings, canopies, dividers and heaters Development of a parklets scheme; using on street parking bays to create space for café/pub alfresco provision where existing pavements are too narrow Putting people first: making Larne town centre more welcoming and functional through the provision of additional street furniture, additional mobile charging points, hand sanitisers and electronic bollards to create part time pedestrianised zones 	MEABC	DfC; Larne Traders Forum; Larne Renovation Generation	DfC	Up to March 2022 (and subject to review past this timescale)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entertainment zones: using appropriate space in Larne to create outdoor performance and cinema areas combined with the provision of outdoor games zones (including table tennis, large scale draughts/dominos/chess. This will include examining mobile skateboard and scooter parks• Animation activities: including provision of town centre audio systems and events and stage equipment for music festivals and ad hoc events• Shop front scheme: improve the presentation of existing shop frontage• Develop pop up exhibition space in vacant units and gap sites• Development of urban parks: at sites (infill/gap) which are available, strategically located and where schemes are affordable• Ambient lighting: including the provision of permanent character lighting schemes in key pedestrian areas• Programme of marketing support for traders including 'shop local' vouchers, town centre maps and the development of a website for each town				
--	--	--	--	--	--

Intervention Area Two: Branding, Promotion and Animation					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed brand in place and developed which is consistent with the new vision and outcomes Annual programme of events and activities developed and promoted creating reasons for people to visit Larne Town Centre and experiences which encourage them to return Build on Larne's position on the coast and the North Coast route The town centre develops its offer through its heritage and strong community arts and creativity sector Improving public perception of Larne Town and Town Centre 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Agree a brand and annual communications plan for Larne Town Centre, aligned to the Council Tourism Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm a brand proposition linked to the Investment Plan vision and outcomes 	MEABC and its Comms Unit	DfC	DfC	Short
Larne Town Centre has a range of spaces and places which can support the development of a range of events and festivals aligned to the Investment Plan vision and building on the capacity and capability of its people and community organisations. It is also recognised that the implementation of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree and resource an annual animation programme for Larne (events and festivals) Continue to develop events round the coastal locations and water based activities Build on Larne's drama and arts Develop town centre promotions related to Larne Town FC matches Develop a literature offer based round the Town Hall and Carnegie Library Buildings 	MEABC	Community Arts Organisations		Ongoing

investment plan will create additional opportunities.					
Develop a social media campaign providing positive messaging about Larne and its events, promotions and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate topical feed and content for the Larne page of the Council website and for all Council social media channels • Develop a programme of positive messaging and social media streaming linked to events, promotions, private sector investments (e.g., Hotel development) and implementation of individual elements of the Investment Plan 	MEABC (and its Comms Team)	Events promoters and private sector investors	DfC	Short and ongoing
Develop a pop-up programme to bring vacant units into use (linked to events and festivals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link the use (pop up) of vacant buildings and under used sites in Larne Town Centre to the proposed programme of events including cultural and sports • Liaise with local events promoters and the community sector (makers, arts, drama and music) to animate spaces in the run up to and during events 	MEABC	Events Promoters and Community Arts Groups	DfC and ACNI	Short and ongoing
Develop a creative sector partnership to help animate and bring life to the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop existing links with Arts and Creativity organisations in Larne Town and facilitate them to take a lead in an annual Town Centre Creativity, Animation and Engagement Programme 	MEABC	Community Arts Organisations	DfC, Arts and Business	Medium and ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on a programme of arts and creativity offers and packages around Larne Towns theatres and venues (the Mc Neill Theatre ;the Carnegie Library and the Town Hall) 				
Intervention Area Three: Attracting, Supporting and Growing Businesses					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing rate of business startup and survival in Larne Town Centre Larne Town Centre has an increasingly more diversified business and commercial sector Increased range of spaces places and facilities for people to work from or develop businesses in 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Examine the potential for flexible/co-working space projects in Larne Town Centre; possibly as an extension of the LEA (LED COM) provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish potential models for investment in Larne Town Centre derelict or vacant sites to provide solutions to workspace requirements building on the Ledcom success at Willowbank business Park Examine mixed use models with community, arts, living accommodation and community health and wellbeing space Support social enterprises and community organisations to examine the development of Town Centre properties and sites for community use and the development of their social 	MEABC	Ledcom	TBC (perhaps Shared Prosperity or Peace Plus Shared Space)	Medium to Long

	economy/sustainability models (perhaps using Community Asset Transfer for public owned spaces)				
Provision of town centre support programmes for retail and service businesses including support to adopt ecommerce and digital transformation strategies	<p>MEABC has undertaken a number of consultation events with retailers and traders in all of its town centres including Larne . This should inform the focus and delivery formats for business support. Based on the most recent feedback from retailers and traders this should include support focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of social media • Digital marketing and online commerce business processes • Visual merchandising • Effective grant and funding applications <p>This support should be available via a range of delivery formats with an emphasis on online content which owner managers can access when they need it</p>	MEABC	DfC and the NI College Network	TBC	Short and ongoing
Examine town centre incentives for new businesses and expanding businesses if policy changes relating to Covid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post the Council led Covid revitalisation Programme develop a Larne retail/hospitality voucher scheme 	MEABC	DfC	Time investment	Ongoing

19 recovery allow for such financial instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align promotion offers to events and festivals (e.g., Friends Goodwill, Larne Half Marathon) 				
Intervention Area Four: Thriving Hospitality Sector and Night-Time Economy					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larne is recognised as a destination town based on its hospitality and nighttime offer Larne provides experiences through events and animation of its town centre which encourages people to visit and return Larne Town Centre is recognised as attractive and safe and a place people want to spend leisure time and to engage in social activities 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Pilot promotions linking visitors to the area with the town centre events and promotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an annual night time plan focused round the Towns arts and drama offer Develop thematic promotions (seasonal and linked to organised events) Develop pilot pavement dining schemes Develop a promotional package linking visitors to adjacent attractions with Larne Town Centre (Carnfunnock Country Park, the Gobbins and the North Coast route) Create maps and promotional materials linking visitors to hotels and attractions such as the Gobbins to Larne Town Centre Resource a night-time economy development role 	MEABC	Traders	DfC	Short and ongoing

Examine approaches to creating a safe evening and nighttime environment free from anti-social behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an education programme/campaign for teenagers beginning to engage with the Towns night time economy • Create reasons for the family traffic coming or exiting on the Larne to Cairnryan route to stop in Larne Town centre and avail of its retail and hospitality offer • Develop hospitality packages with existing accommodation providers (e.g., the Ballygally Hotel, the proposed town centre hotel and glamping operators as examples 	MEABC	PCSP and youth organisations including the Education authority Youth Service (EAYS) and Youth Voice	PCSP	Short and ongoing
Examine lighting approaches in design of public and civic space which contributes to a safer evening and nighttime environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine design approaches within the implementation of the Investment Plan which designs out challenges to safety • Carry out lighting audit to examine linkages to approaches routes to town centre and public transport 	MEABC	DfC	DfC	Medium to Long
Provide an annual hospitality and experience making training programme for businesses and staff in the hospitality sector and for those in retail and events who provide experiences for visitors (in partnership	<p>Liaise with Larne Town Centre tourism focused and hospitality businesses to identify their support requirements (linking with similar initiatives in Ballymena and Carrickfergus) to identify specific skills support initiatives for the sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signpost to current provision from regional sectoral bodies and NI College Network 	MEABC (Tourism and Town Centre Teams)	TNI	TBC (DfC)	Short and ongoing

with peer businesses across Ballymena and Carrickfergus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission bespoke training and mentoring support to address gaps and Larne specific requirements 				
Intervention Area Five: Repurposing Larne Town Centre					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vacancy and dereliction are reducing features of Larne's Town Centre Larne Town Centre presents a range of options for people who want to live in the town centre Larne Town Centre is a supportive environment for creative and artisan makers and enterprises Innovative and creative approaches are used to repurpose green and civic space and create attractions to leisure and natural assets around and adjacent to Larne Town Centre 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Invest in small scale capital projects to open up infill sites/space or address dereliction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create pocket parks Examine the routes to the shore and to the football stadium and develop as attractive space incorporating access, walkways, informal leisure, bio-diversity and interpretation 	MEABC	DfC	DfC	Short - Medium
Promote mixed use development models, residential accommodation and creative, community or health and wellbeing space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a study on new approaches to mixed use Town Centre developments (drawing on repurposing best practice in other towns and regions) Examine the feasibility of such models in Larne Town Centre (based on leadership, need, potential mix, building availability and capital funding availability) 	MEABC	Public and private property owners	TBC	Medium to Long

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and facilitate a Project Board if a feasible mixed use project can be identified 				
Examine projects which repurpose underused and vacant commercial properties as flexible studio, creative and co-working spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish the ownership and status of vacant properties in Larne Contact owners to confirm intentions or willingness to release properties Link potentially available properties with a range of community and social economy promoters/developers 	MEABC	DfC	TBC and dependant on the specific properties which are available ;possibilities via UCIT and Shared Prosperity	Medium to Long
Examine the potential for a LOTS Scheme to increase the availability and quality of town centre living accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a LOTS Scheme for Larne and promote the concept with property owners Liaise with Social Housing providers to examine opportunities in Larne in former commercial/retail premises (possibly as part of a mixed use scheme) 	MEABC	DfC, NIHE and Social Housing providers	TBC and dependant on the specific properties which are available/ possibilities via UCIT and Shared Prosperity	Medium to Long
Introduce quality urban design to develop pockets of green and urban spaces to support meeting, casual leisure, family spaces and to support events and town centre animation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify small spaces in and around Larne Town Centre (or connecting to it from the Lagoon, Coast and Football Stadium) to develop quality and inclusive spaces Assess sites and develop a number of pilot schemes 	MEABC	DfC	DfC	Medium to Long

Examine how the market can be developed as a major attractor of footfall relating to retail, makers/artisan output and events/activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review the current performance of the Larne Market YardReview the approach and strategies behind other models of Market Yards across the UK (trading, business development, artisan initiatives and events)Link the Market Yard annual programme to the Town Centre via promotions, complementary activities to support other initiatives and access ways and signage	MEABC	Community Sector	DfC	Short to Medium
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Carrickfergus Investment Plan and Town Centre Strategy 2020 – 2030

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1. Why Do We Need A Strategy?

Mid & East Antrim Borough Council (MEABC) through Amplify, the integrated Economic Strategy for the Borough, has committed to regenerating and developing the town centre offering across the Borough. In January 2020, the Council commissioned Venture International Ltd (Venture) to develop a town centre strategy for Carrickfergus. The Town Centre Strategy (a non-statutory plan) sets out a clear direction for the town and provides a framework for the implementation and timing of physical, social, economic and community development initiatives within Carrickfergus Town over the next 10 years. It also sets out a pathway to recovery helping to lead Carrickfergus Town out of the challenges presented by Covid 19.

Mid & East Antrim Borough Council cannot deliver this strategy on its own or from within its own resources. To ensure that the strategy is led and resourced the Council will work with key partners, including Carrickfergus property owners, retailers and businesses to deliver a town centre that is fit for the future and evolves to meet the aspirations and expectations of its citizens and visitors to Carrickfergus.

The Council and a range of statutory partners recognise the potential for Carrickfergus to develop as a quality living, retail and hospitality environment for its citizens and as a destination town for visitors. Collectively they have sought to develop a vision for Carrickfergus and have identified a range of capital projects to create the conditions to deliver on that vision; this is the draft Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Programme (CRIP) – a capital investment programme which will focus on investing in the Town's assets and infrastructure to develop the Carrickfergus Town centre offer for all.

Town centres and the retail businesses based in them have met and continue to meet challenges including the migration to online shopping, the recession of the late noughties, the increasing prevalence of out of town retail parks and the outworking of the Covid-19 pandemic. Equally, there are opportunities to develop as environments and places where people want to live and spend their leisure time. Towns can provide a base for the creative industries and new ways of working such as hot desking, co-working space, and studio space. Potential also exists for niche retailing and for our retailers to embrace the opportunities offered by e-commerce. Recognising the challenges faced by town centres such as Carrickfergus but also being aware of the opportunities means that this is the ideal time to develop a Town Centre Strategy for Carrickfergus for the next 10 years.

Venture was commissioned by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (the Council) to facilitate the development of a Ten Year Town Centre Strategy for the 2020-2030 timeframe. Venture has significant experience (over 25 years) facilitating town centre strategies on behalf of local authorities. It was requested to facilitate the 2020-2030 Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy through:

- Reviewing the performance of the town up to 2020 through examining the available data relating to the town

- Engaging the wider public through a series of consultation processes to ensure that their views and experiences inform the Town Centre Strategy
- Engaging traders and businesses based in the Town Centre to ensure that their views and experience is reflected in the Strategy

The following document represents the outworking of these activities and is the 2020-2030 Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy.

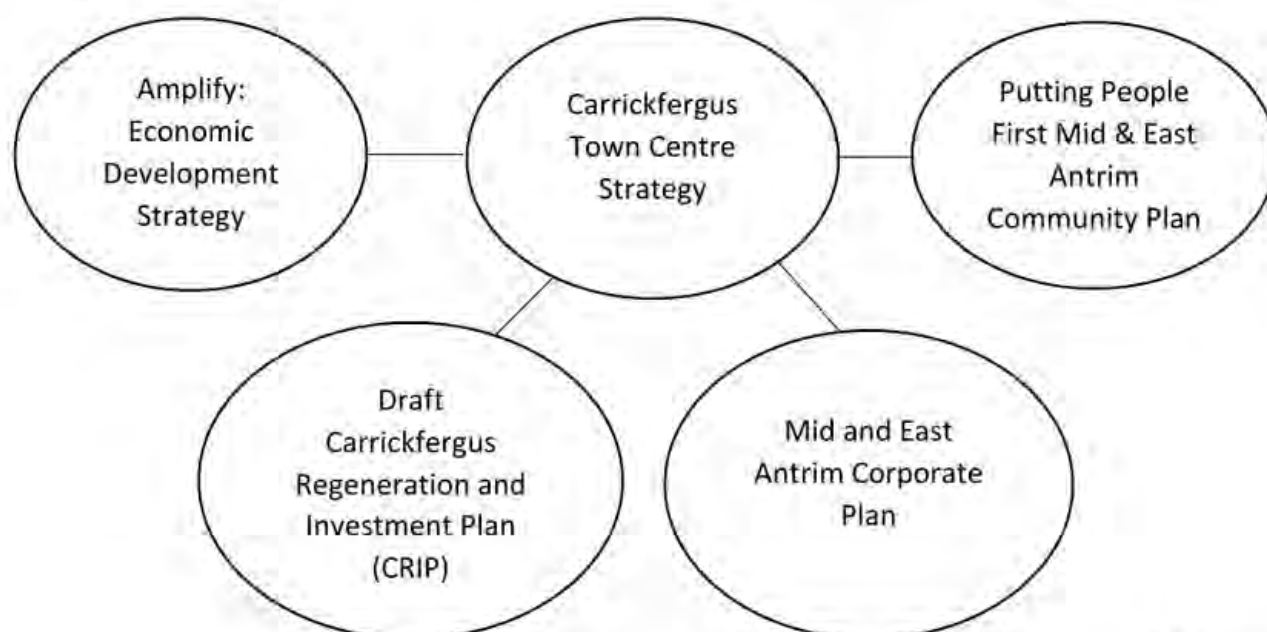
2. Strategic Context

Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy will not operate in isolation but within a range of Northern Ireland, Council/Borough and Carrickfergus focused strategies and plans.

A range of local, regional, and national strategies and policies have been examined to establish the context within which the Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy 2020-2030 is shaped, as set out below:

- Draft Programme for Government 2016 – 2021
- Regional Development Strategy 2035
- Local Development Plan 2030 Draft Plan Strategy 2019
- Putting People First Mid & East Antrim Community Plan 2017
- Amplify: Growing the Economy of Mid and East Antrim Integrated Economic Development Strategy 2018 – 2030
- Mid & East Antrim Retail & Commercial Leisure Need & Capacity Study on behalf of Mid & East Antrim Borough Council January 2019 Final Report
- Draft Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan(CRIP) 2019
- Carrickfergus Townscape Heritage initiative Annual Action Plan 2019-2020
- Carrickfergus Castle and Walls A Cultural & Heritage Led Tourism Strategy 2018
- Carrickfergus Town Centre Masterplan 2010
- Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area & Transport Plans 2015
- Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001

The strategic context is appended. For the purposes of the main body of the Town Centre Strategy the Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy for the 2020-2030 timeframe has been set in context of the hierarchy of strategies for Council and Carrickfergus; this is both practical and appropriate as the leadership of the delivery of the strategy will be provided by the Council. The diagram below shows where the Town Centre Strategy relates to local strategies, plans and priorities:



3. About Carrickfergus Town Centre

Carrickfergus is located in the south east part of Mid and East Antrim Borough and is a coastal town. At the time of 2011 Census, the town had a population of 27,998 people, making it the second largest settlement in the Borough. The town is serviced by bus and train and is within 20-minute driving time of Belfast.

Carrickfergus Town in numbers

A review of the data set out in the Mid & East Antrim Retail & Commercial Leisure Need & Capacity Study on behalf of Mid & East Antrim Borough Council January 2019 Final Report confirms the following:

- Census Day 2011 ... population of Carrickfergus was 27,998 living in 11,562 households
- Carrickfergus represents 20% of the Borough population
- In 2016, there were 84 business births (new businesses) in Carrickfergus ... 5.5% business start-up rate in the Borough against 7.5% of NI's population
- There are 138 registered accommodation providers across the Borough ... 22 of these or 16% are in the Carrick region

The table below sets out the town centre composition:

Carrickfergus	2017		2018		2019		2020	
	Units	Units (%) of Total	Units	Units (%) of Total	Units	Units (%) of Total	Units	Units (%) of Total
Service	70	39	74	41	114	39	116	39
Retail Comparative	13	7	14	8	29	10	29	10
Retail Convenience	14	8	13	7	25	9	24	8
Hospitality	24	13	29	16	40	14	41	14
Charity	11	6	8	4	9	3	7	2
Vacant	40	22	35	19	46	16	48	16
GAP	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Residential	5	3	4	2	20	7	20	7
Derelict	4	2	4	2	10	3	10	3
TOTAL	181		181		294		296	

(The figures in the table above are taken from the Mid and East Antrim Retail and Commercial Leisure Need and Capacity Study January 2019 carried out independently by Experian)

- Currently 1 in 10 UK High Street properties re vacant; this is the highest level of vacancy since 2014
- It is recognised that the level of vacant High Street properties in Carrickfergus has reduced from the very high percentages recorded in 2017 and 2018. However, Carrickfergus has higher levels of vacancy than the UK as a whole; 16% of properties vacant in the Town Centre compared to a UK average of 10%

- High Streets in the UK and NI are experiencing rapidly increasing levels of vacancy in late 2020 due to the impact of Covid 19 on the sustainability of High Street retail and hospitality businesses. Therefore, in all likelihood the current (2020) level of 16% will continue to increase as the impact of the high level of High Street business failure works its way through to the figures.

Footfall figures are collected for Carrickfergus Town Centre on a weekly, monthly and an annual basis. This provides an assessment of the performance of the Town Centre and allows comparison with the position across Northern Ireland. The table below summarises the trends in Carrickfergus Town Centre's footfall across the last two years:

Month	Percentage Change Across One Year			
	2017 to 2018		2018 to 2019	
	Carrickfergus	NI	Carrickfergus	NI
June	-0.9%	+5.0%	-21.4%	-7.1%
July	-5.9%	+1.7%	-11.5%	-5.4%
August	-17.6%	+1.1%	+4.5%	-1.8%
November	-12.6%	+4.7%	+3.8%	-7.3%
December	+1.9%	+3.9%	+4.8%	-6.5%

The table confirms that footfall in Carrickfergus Town Centre has largely decreased at a faster rate than has been the case across Northern Ireland ... especially in the summer months of June and July. Given its potential as a destination (the Castle, waterfront and its location on the main North Coast route) it is clear that the offer is still not sufficiently strong at this stage to generate additional footfall (and thus primary and secondary spend) from visitors in the summer months.

It is noted that it has outperformed the position in Northern Ireland across the later part of 2019. This may indicate a revival in the performance of the Town Centre.

The rationale for using the 2017-18 and 2018-19 footfall statistics is that the Covid 19 global pandemic and the associated restrictions on trading for many retail and hospitality businesses mean that the 2019-2020 statistics are not reflective of footfall in Carrickfergus in normal trading conditions.

Current Town Centre Leadership, Development and Investment

This Town Centre Strategy builds on existing leadership and previous investment in developing the town Centre. There are a number of partnerships and bodies with a focus on the development and regeneration of the Town and the development of the Town Centre. The Council leads, is represented on, or supports all of them. They include:

- The Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Programme Board
- Carrickfergus Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)
- Carrickfergus Traders' Association

Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Programme (CRIP)

MEABC has established the Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Programme (CRIP) to develop and design a multi-dimensional approach to the physical and economic regeneration of Carrickfergus Town Centre, its Conservation Area, heritage assets and its waterfront.

The Carrickfergus Regeneration Partnership Board was established in 2017 to enable MEABC and a range of central Government Departments and Agencies to work together in partnership over the next ten to fifteen years to achieve real progress in the physical and economic regeneration of Carrickfergus town centre. The current CRIP partners are:

CRIP – Current Partners



Preparatory Phase: Jan – Dec 2018

The Strategic Investment Board

(Non public facing)

The CRIP Board has been working to develop the Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan, with the aim of regenerating the town centre, based on an agreed ten to fifteen year plan. The CRIP Board has invested in specialist studies on urban design and placemaking, and on utilising culture, tourism and heritage as a catalyst for urban regeneration, and public engagement. The urban design and placemaking strategy process considered a long list of potential projects that would help regenerate the town. The shortlisting exercise focused on whether projects would bring positive social, economic and environmental impacts to Carrickfergus (see Draft Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan 2019, available on request).

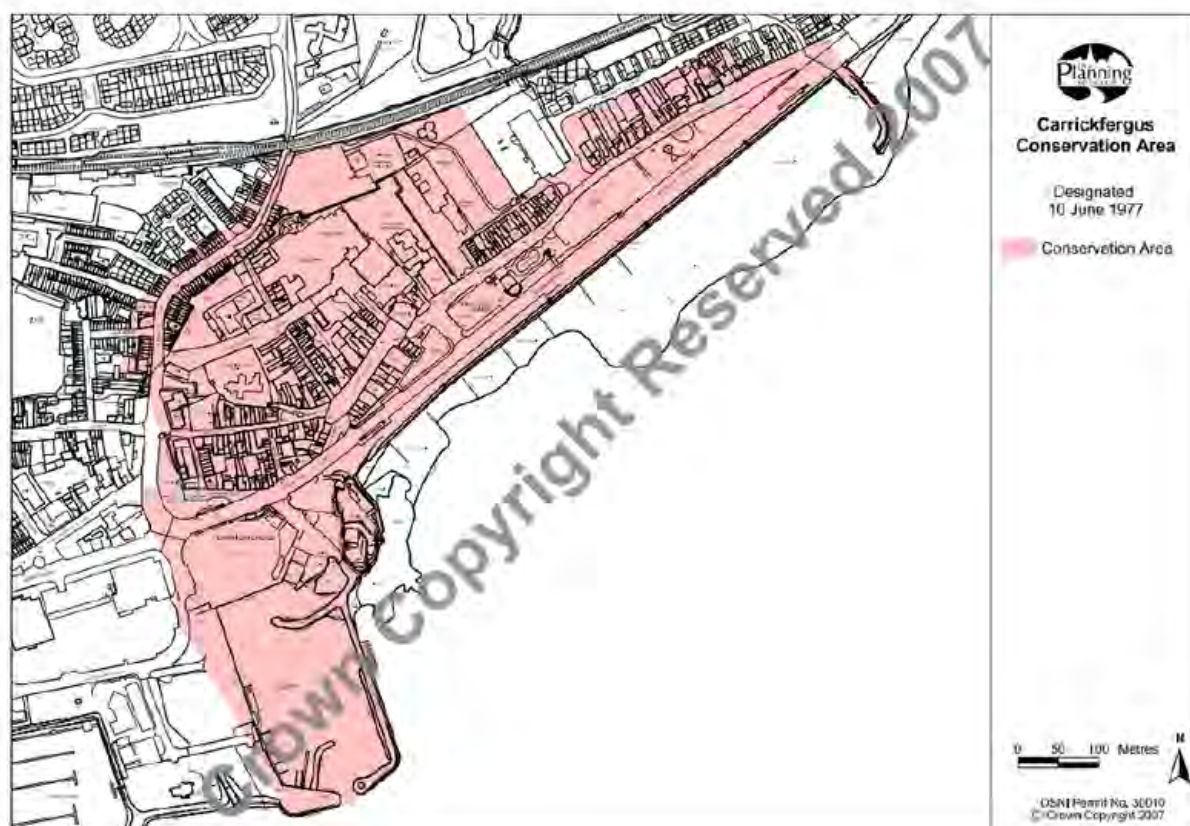
The CRIP Board role will end with the adoption of the draft Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan. Council will co-ordinate the implementation of this Investment Plan along with the appropriate statutory partners through the Community Planning partnership on which they are represented.

Belfast Region City Deal

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is a partner Council in the Belfast Region City Deal. The UK and NI Governments in conjunction with local councils and the two universities will commit up to £850m over a 15 year period from 2019/20 to support the Belfast Region deliver transformative projects that will position Belfast Region as a globally competitive destination for digital and innovation investment and MEABC will bid for the delivery of strategically important projects in the Borough including those identified as having potential to contribute to the regeneration of Carrickfergus. The process of developing projects is ongoing, and projects will be identified and delivered across the lifetime of this Town Centre Strategy (2020-2030). This will, in part, set the context for the 10 Year Town Centre Strategy.

Carrickfergus Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)

The Townscape Heritage programme, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and Council, is a grant programme which seeks to tackle the decline of historic townscapes in Conservation Areas, by promoting the repair, restoration, and sustainable re-use of vacant or derelict buildings that positively contribute to the townscape character and generate physical and economic regeneration. In addition to bringing life back to unused properties, the scheme aims to educate the public about local heritage and the importance of sympathetic restoration of buildings within conservation areas.



https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/planning_statements_and_supplementary_planning_guidance/conservation/conservation_map/conservation_carrickfergus.htm

Carrickfergus THI is delivered by the Council with the oversight of a Carrickfergus THI Project Board. The scheme was commenced in 2016 and has been extended to 2022. It aims to:

- Preserve and enhance buildings located within the town's Conservation Area, through targeted THI grant assistance
- Stimulate and support the wider economic regeneration of Carrickfergus by enhancing its distinctive historic quarter
- Raise awareness of the rich built and cultural heritage of Carrickfergus through a programme of training, education and events

It is projected that the THI scheme will support the regeneration of 10 heritage properties across its timeframe.

Informing the Town Centre Strategy – Consultations

This Town Centre Strategy has been developed alongside and complementary to the development of the Final Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan. In light of this, the consultation was a broad and meaningful engagement process with the Carrickfergus community which sought feedback on both this Strategy and the Regeneration Investment Plan. The Town Centre Strategy consultation was augmented by a focused trader, retailer and business (including tourism providers) survey that reflected the Regeneration Investment Plan and captured respondents' views on how to create the context for the town centre to perform and function better as a modern town meeting residents' and visitors' needs over the next 30 years.

A consultation framework was developed which ensured the public consultation and engagement process took a variety of forms that would result in a process that was open, participative, accessible, transparent and inclusive. Promotional methods employed for the various consultation events included posters in shops and public buildings, press releases and interviews circulated on Facebook and Twitter, a dedicated webpage on the Council's website and word of mouth. 548* members of the Carrickfergus community and public engaged in a variety of ways:

- Interactive workshops with community youth groups and schools
- Hard copy surveys were available in community organisations for members to complete
- Community organisations representing various sectors (e.g. young people, older people, creatives, heritage and museums, sports and recreation) were invited to attend consultation events. The invitations to the community groups were issued directly by Council staff through the Council's community and voluntary sector database mailing list. This approach was taken to avoid any GDPR infringement
- Visual displays were available for viewing and participation in a number of public locations: the library (one week), the Civic Centre (one week plus two drop in sessions) the leisure centre (one day), and churches (one week). This ensured the consultation materials were available to be viewed and feedback could be obtained during the day, in the evenings and at weekends

- Face to face with Elected Members and key stakeholders including business owners, traders and tourism providers within the town centre
- An online survey option was available through the online tool Survey Monkey. The link was circulated through social media and by email to those members of the public who preferred to participate in this way
- A workshop with Town Centre traders and businesses facilitated by an independent facilitator

*548 does not include any views, likes, shares, comments, impressions or interactions on Facebook or Twitter, or visits to the dedicated webpage

145 businesses and tourism providers were contacted either face to face, by phone or by email (and in some instances using all three methods), and invited to complete the survey. A total of 88 responses were received out of 145 businesses and tourism providers invited to engage. This represents a 60.1% response rate. A minimum response of 30% is required for statistical relevance, but ideally 50%. Appendix B contains a summary of the outputs of the consultation processes.

4. Carrickfergus Town Centre ... The 2020 Baseline

This section of the Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy establishes “where Carrickfergus town is starting from.” It brings together the analysis of available information and consultation with traders, citizens and stakeholders to establish the 2020 baseline position. In simple terms it establishes:

- What works well in Carrickfergus Town Centre
- What could work better in Carrickfergus Town Centre
- The opportunities to develop Carrickfergus Town Centre and its offer for citizens and visitors
- Threats which could pose risks for Carrickfergus Town Centre

The Carrickfergus Town 2020 Baseline position is set out in the following table:

<p>What works well in Carrickfergus Town Centre...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The heritage assets of the town; though these could be better used to promote the town as a destination • The pedestrian area works well and has benefited from investment in public realm • The Castle and the heritage of the Town helps to define it from many towns of a similar size • The people are a core strength of the Town • Reasonable volume of carparking distributed around the Town • Good public transport linkages • High quality play provision in or adjacent to the Town Centre • The Town has good outdoor spaces which could be developed further as part of the Town offer • A high level of commitment to improving both the Town Centre and the overall town ... this included leadership, energy and potential investment form a range of bodies/organisations including the Council, the Community Partnership and Carrickfergus THI
<p>What could work better in Carrickfergus Town Centre...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher level of vacancy than the average for Northern Ireland or across the UK ... with the likelihood of a post Covid 19 increase in the vacancy levels in the Town Centre • There is a perception of a lack of connection between the housing developments (social and private) on the edges of Carrickfergus and the Town Centre itself; it is recognised that a proportion of citizens work outside of Carrickfergus and therefore largely travel out in the morning and back in the evening. This might mean that they access retail and services in and around where they work rather than in Carrickfergus Town Centre • There are 1,078 car parking spaces throughout the Town (551 Council owned and operated and 527 private spaces). Whilst community engagement and consultation might identify car parking as an issue it is almost certain that it is not the volume of spaces but perhaps visitors/ shoppers awareness of where they are, ineffective signage or information to support people to access the most appropriate parking to support their visit to the Town Centre and the need to change behaviours of car park users

- Community consultation (through the CRIP process) indicates that there is a perception that Carrickfergus Town Centre could be a safer environment for users; the Northern Ireland Town Centre database identified that in 2018 that there were 484 incidents of crime in Carrickfergus Town Centre; this is up from 412 in 2017, 451 in 2016 and 378 in 2015. Of the 2018 figures, 54% were classified as anti-social behaviour and 16% as violence
- There is a need (based on feedback from the CRIP Community Engagement and Participant Process and the engagement with traders) to redefine or repurpose Carrickfergus. It does not have a strong brand or defined offer
- The Town, given its location along the North Coast route combined with its range of historical and heritage assets, is required to meet the expectations and needs of both the local population and visitors to it
- Over the last 10 years there has been investment in delivery of a strong retail offer on the edge of the Town Centre but sufficiently disconnected from it; this has brought the focus of retail (particularly local retail) away from the Town Centre

Opportunities ... to develop Carrickfergus Town Centre...

- There is an opportunity (within the wider Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan) to create better linkages between the housing developments on the edge or periphery of Carrickfergus and the Town Centre itself; this might include approaches to signage, enhancing existing access routes or creating new routes which might double up as areas for recreation and leisure
- Key buildings such as the Town Hall and the adjoining civic centre space are underutilised; they could/should be developed as part of the aspiration to reposition Carrickfergus as a Town with a unique offer and attractiveness to creative (new and traditional) businesses (private and social economy)
- The town's heritage assets help to define the external image/perception of Carrickfergus; they have not been sufficiently developed to present a sufficiently strong offer to encourage a higher volume of visitors to Carrickfergus (either on a day trip or stop over basis)
- The draft Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan (CRIP) is developing a strong vision for the development of the town's assets (built and natural) and to repurpose/reposition Carrickfergus Town; it is important that as this draft Plan is evolved, adopted and delivered that links to important attractors immediately adjacent to but outside the immediate Town Centre are connected to the Town Centre
- Pedestrian areas of the Town Centre combined with its walls and civic spaces provide an opportunity for animation and events in and around the Town on a seasonal themed basis which helps to connect local community and visitors to the Town bringing additional footfall and commercial benefits
- Online retailing is the present and not the future and there will be a progression to more online transactions over the duration of this Town Centre Strategy; to ignore or fail to recognise this reality would be a major failing. That said, the retail community in the Town Centre can differentiate themselves from the 'online town centre' by focusing on providing excellent interpersonal contact and 'experience and convenience'
- Many people (particularly those working outside Carrickfergus) are not well served by 9.00am to 5.00pm opening hours; there may be potential to examine opening hours in

line with the more varied working patterns of people as we enter the third decade of this century

- The town has significant heritage assets and history and association (e.g. the link with the Royal family); the development of the town needs to reflect, be empathetic and complement these assets and history
- Potential to build on the Town's location on the main route to the North Coast and position itself as the Gateway to the Causeway Coastal Route

Threats ... to be minimised

- A key challenge for Carrickfergus Town Centre is the location in relation to Belfast; with good rail and road networks the town is situated less than 10 miles from Greater Belfast and thus will have difficulty competing with much of its retail offer. This is a challenge which the Town Centre Strategy is required to acknowledge and address through the positioning of the town and the development of an offer unique to it
- Carrickfergus has two perceptions for people external to it: some focus on its heritage assets and history as a settlement whilst others associate it with paramilitary activity/ markings, antisocial behaviour, and intercommunity tensions. This presents significant challenges to the positioning of the town as a safe, attractive and shared environment
- The main arterial routes into the town are dominated by cultural expression and territorial marking; whilst some of these are empathetic others present a challenge to people not associated with that culture visiting, staying, and returning to Carrickfergus. Therefore, this is a challenge to repositioning/repurposing of Carrickfergus and progression towards vision and outcomes set out in both the draft Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan and this Town Centre Strategy
- Falling into the mindset of some Town Centres by ignoring the reality of online retailing and hoping that the retail landscape will return to that some 10-20 years previous....to do nothing is not an option
- Covid-19 is first and foremost a health crisis but once the pandemic phase has passed it will be an economic challenge for which there is no precedent. The Town Centre Strategy will be required to address the impact on the Town Centre economy

5. Our Vision – What Type of Town Do We Want Carrickfergus Town Centre To Be?

This section of the Town Centre Strategy starts to look forward to how we want to see Carrickfergus Town Centre developed over the long-term; this Town Centre Strategy will focus on the first ten years of that journey i.e. the 2020-2030 timeframe. It seeks to confirm:

- The Vision this Town Centre Strategy will work towards
- The Mission of this Town Centre Strategy
- Our Outcomes... the difference we want to make in Carrickfergus town over the 2020-2030 timeframe

Vision

Carrickfergus Town Centre does not exist in isolation from the overall town; the town centre serves as the commercial and retail focal point for the overall settlement of Carrickfergus and its hinterland.

The 2020-2030 Town Centre Strategy should/must help to deliver against an agreed overall vision for Carrickfergus.

The Council has worked in partnership with a range of public and community sector stakeholders and the citizens of Carrickfergus to develop a vision for the overall settlement of Carrickfergus and including its Town Centre. The vision was initiated via the Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Programme (CRIP) public engagement processes and has resulted in a draft Regeneration Investment Plan. Therefore, the vision developed through the CRIP process is an overarching vision for Carrickfergus for the next 20-30 years. On that basis the vision to which the Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy will contribute to is:

"Carrickfergus will be an attractive, healthy, relaxed and safe place to work, live and visit, welcoming to all, including families and young people. Its reputation for excellence and high quality will focus on history and heritage, culture and the arts, leisure, niche retailing and marine activities. Carrickfergus will be a distinctive town with a unique blend of both ancient and modern, including state-of-the-art infrastructure, public realm and lively streets."

Mission Statement

There is a clear rationale for the 2020-2030 Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy to contribute to the wider vision for Carrickfergus developed through the CRIP process. Equally, it is recognised that the Town Centre Strategy must/should have its own distinct focus, its role in contributing to the overall vision for Carrickfergus ... this is articulated through the following mission statement for the Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy 2020-2030:

"To repurpose and reposition Carrickfergus Town Centre as high quality urban living, retail, hospitality and business environment by co-ordinating the public, private and community

sectors to drive towards an agreed vision by securing resources and implementing projects and programmes which contribute to this vision"

Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy Outcomes

Outcomes define the impact (or difference) we want to achieve through the implementation of the 2020-2030 Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy.

The outcomes have been developed to address both the areas where consultation and analysis identify improvements could be made, or opportunities delivered on, to improve the functionality and performance of the town centre.

The outcomes for the ten-year timeframe of the Town Centre Strategy are:

- Carrickfergus will have a strong leadership vehicle in place which brings the energy, experience, resources and knowledge of the public, private and community sectors to the delivery of the 2020-2030 Town Centre Strategy and the Mission and Outcomes set out in it
- A modern and functioning town centre supported by appropriate accessible, environmental and digital infrastructure
- Carrickfergus will have a well-defined brand recognised by its citizens and visitors to the Town and Borough
- Carrickfergus will be perceived as a welcoming well-presented town which provides experiences combined with the highest levels of service
- Carrickfergus will present a strong retail offer for both citizens of Carrickfergus and visitors to the Town
- Carrickfergus Town Centre will provide a range of retail, hospitality and events which complements investment in strategic assets which attract visitors to the Town, Borough and Northern Ireland
- Carrickfergus Town Centre will be a safe and welcoming town centre for citizens and visitors; the town is perceived as safe and welcoming and its performance against anti-social and crime indicators is in line with the best performing town centres in Northern Ireland
- Carrickfergus Town Centre will be developed as a desirable urban living environment
- Carrickfergus will have a more diversified commercial and business base where its strong retail offer is complemented and augmented by high business birth rates in growth sectors such as new creativity
- Carrickfergus Town Centre will have vacancy levels which are in line with the norm across the UK and NI at 10%
- The Town Centre will be a focal point and gathering place for the whole community and visitors to the town
- The communities external to Carrickfergus Town Centre will be connected to it physically and through its range of offers

6. Updated Carrickfergus Investment Plan

This section of the document provides an updated version of the Carrickfergus Investment Plan 2030. The preparation of the Investment Plan was undertaken as part of the work delivered by the Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Programme (CRIP) Partnership Board. The Board represented a formal collaborative planning exercise between Council and a variety of public sector partners and was chaired by the Chief Executive of Mid & East Antrim Borough Council. The draft Carrickfergus Investment plan emerged in May 2019 following a series of workshops facilitated by Council for the Partnership Board. This then underwent an extensive public engagement process.

Based on the Community Engagement and Public Participation process, which engaged 548 citizens of Carrickfergus, there was a strong consensus that the Vision and direction set out in the draft CRIP Investment Plan met with the approval of the majority of the people engaged. There was a clear sense that Council and its partners should progress the implementation of the Vision and the majority of the draft projects contained therein.

Prioritisation of projects by the public was considered difficult given the fact that the draft Investment Plan included thirteen major capital projects and four aspirational projects and the public engagement process was the first time these had been introduced to the wider public. It was also recognised that any prioritisation direction provided by the public must also be set against technical and financial constraints associated with the projects.

Following the public engagement process, the draft version of the Carrickfergus Investment Plan was then presented to MEA Elected Members. Members highlighted the fact that eight of the projects identified within the Investment Plan were now being progressed via the Carrickfergus City Deal Project and the Plan should therefore be revised to reflect a renewed focus on the nine remaining elements which will complement those being taken forward by the City Deal project.

Consequently it was determined that given the feedback from both the public and Elected Members the following projects should be set aside from the final Carrickfergus Investment Plan as they shall be delivered via the Belfast Region City Deal, which is seeking to secure £42.2m.

- Develop Carrickfergus Castle and Town Walls as a must-see visitor attraction
- Castle Square – a high quality civic space at the heart of Carrickfergus
- Town Walls West
- Re-positioning Carrickfergus as a Cultural Heritage Tourism destination
- Harbour Square and Visitor Centre/Visitor Attraction
- Create a memorable arrival experience into Carrickfergus
- Transport Hub and Heritage Railway Station
- North Street Walk

The high level ranking of the remaining projects was as follows:

1. Town Greenway Network and Wider Greenway Connection
2. Town Centre Living and Working Initiatives.
3. Creative Place-Making Programmes – Animating the spaces
4. Developing Tourism to underpin the regeneration of Carrickfergus
5. Develop a Town Hall Masterplan
6. Development of Carrickfergus Harbour and Marina
7. Clipperstown – Potential to attract Housing Development
8. The Result Schooner – Return Iconic Marine Asset to Carrickfergus
9. Harbour Quarter – Mix Use Development

Prioritisation and progression of individual projects and development sites will depend on a number of factors, including the engagement of property owners and funding availability. As a result, it has been agreed that the Investment Plan will be subject to an annual review, which will include engagement with key stakeholders and will be amended as required, to ensure that all elements remain viable and achievable.

7. From Vision to Action

This section of Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy sets out the range of interrelated actions (projects and programmes) which will be implemented by the Council and its stakeholders with a role, remit or responsibility for the development of Carrickfergus Town and its Town Centre. It establishes the actions required to progress towards the shared vision in the draft Regeneration Investment Plan and adopted in this Town Centre Strategy.

The Town Centre Strategy covers the 2020-2030 timeframe. With a view to bringing both order and focus to the strategy the actions within it have been developed against a series of five Town Centre Strategic Themes which are aligned to the outcomes set out in the strategy. These Town Centre Strategic themes are interrelated as are the implementation of the actions set out across the five themes will help to contribute to the vision and delivery of the outcomes. The themes are:

- Theme One: Vision and Leadership
- Theme Two: Physical Presentation and Performance
- Theme Three: Repurposing Carrickfergus Town Centre
- Theme Four: Programming the Town Centre: Animation and Events
- Theme Five: Branding, Promotion and Communication

Whilst the five themes provide a framework for the 10 year strategy, in the short to medium term (up to 2025) they also provide a focus for actions to lead the recovery of the town out of the immediate impacts of Covid 19 in 2020-2021. It is recognised that towns will be required to evolve to meet the combined challenges of Covid 19, the continued shift from conventional retailing to online retailing and the increasing challenges (restrictions in trading hours and the requirement to meet social distancing guidelines which impacts on capacity and therefore turnover) for the hospitality sector. The Council led Covid 19 Recovery Plan is embedded in the 10 year Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy.

It is recognised that an element of the short term focus of the 10 Year Town Centre Strategy will be on supporting actions to help the town centre to recover from Covid 19 it is recognised that like the majority of town centres across NI and the UK, recovery must lead to the repurposing and repositioning of the town centre. The themes have been crafted to combine both recovery and repurposing Carrickfergus Town Centre.

Theme One: Vision and Leadership					
Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrickfergus has a strong leadership vehicle in place which brings the energy, experience, resources and knowledge of the public, private and community sectors to the delivery of the 2020-2030 Town Centre Strategy and the Mission and Outcomes set out in it 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Confirm Vision for Carrickfergus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm Vision for Carrickfergus (as an overall settlement) via the CRIP community engagement and public participation process Adopt the Vision to which the Town Centre Strategy works 	MEABC	CRIP Board	MEABC in partnership with the CRIP public engagement processes	Short
Agree appropriate leadership vehicle and resourcing to deliver the 2020-2030 Town Centre Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish how the leadership of the Town Centre Strategy sits with other strategic processes focusing on Carrickfergus including CRIP and THI Examine how to bring about meaningful involvement from public, private (trader and landlords) and community sectors (including section 75 groups) Confirm Leadership structure and appoint and induct representatives from key stakeholder groups including traders and community groups Agree terms of reference for the Leadership Model (group/forum) and reporting and resourcing processes 	MEABC	Traders	Time investment	Short

Adopt Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Present the Town Centre Strategy to the Leadership Group• Confirm and adopt the Mission• Ensure that there is clarity relating to the terms of reference for the group• Clarify relationship to other processes including CRIP and THI	MEABC			Short
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Theme Two: Physical Presentation and Performance

Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrickfergus presents a strong retail offer, for both citizens of Carrickfergus and visitors to the Town • Carrickfergus has a more diversified commercial and business base where its strong retail offer is complemented and augmented by high business birth rates in growth sectors such as new creativity • Carrickfergus Town Centre is a safe and welcoming town centre for citizens and visitors; the town is perceived as safe and welcoming and its performance against anti-social and crime indicators is in line with the best performing town centres in Northern Ireland • The Town Centre is a focal point and gathering place for the whole community and visitors to the town • The communities external to Carrickfergus Town Centre are connected to it physically and through its range of offers 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Support the delivery of strategic investment in the physical assets of Carrickfergus and especially those which improve the presentation or performance of the Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage retailers and town centre businesses to input to the CRIP project consultation and project development processes to support potential investment in key assets including the Castle, Town Walls, Town Hall, Harbour/Marina • Support the strategic capital investment by providing retail and hospitality experiences 	MEABC	City Deal*	TBC	Medium-Long
Deliver smaller scale capital projects including environmental improvements and enhancements to the town centre presentation and features. These will complement the strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the consultation processes with the traders and supporting the CRIP and THI initiatives to identify town centre capital projects which can improve the experience of town centre users/visitors • Develop a long list of potential projects and consult with the retailers/hospitality and service businesses in the town 	MEABC	DfC and Traders or any emerging Town Centre Leadership Group	MEABC /DfC	Medium-Long

investments made as outputs of the CRIP and THI initiatives.	<p>centre to prioritise them. Based on consultation to date the long list could/should include the rose walk, solar powered charging bench, install PA/sound system, shop front enhancement project, floral enhancement project, directional signage and overall approach to commercial and public signage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop concepts and costings for the concepts • Address any technical requirements (such as planning, land ownership, utilities) • Identify sources of capital funding to deliver the range of projects 				
Examine the potential to repurpose underused space as modern enterprise space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify up to five underused properties which could be a base for town centre enterprise space ... this could include the Civic Centre • Carry out a technical and business feasibility process to confirm demand and deliverability including the potential to secure lease/ownership, planning consent and the required capital funding • The model will want to consider co-working, hot desking and second site options 	MEABC	LEA	MEABC	Medium

Hospitality Sector Training and Skills Development Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with tourism and hospitality focused businesses in Carrickfergus to assess their support requirements Review existing models for promoting and developing experience and hospitality businesses Design a training and skills development programme and procure/appoint a provider (possibly across the Borough's three towns) 	MEABC	Traders Group	DfC	Short-Medium
Develop a workable approach to cultural expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include questions on perception and cultural expression on any surveys with shoppers and visitors Review current approaches and identify good practice from other towns/Council areas Develop an agreed protocol 	MEABC	TEO/PCSP/local cultural organisations	PCSP/Good Relations	Short-ongoing
Introduce a sustained and interagency approach to the reduction of anti-social behaviour (ASB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine the range of interventions which can impact positively on anti-social behaviour Examine a timebound interagency partnership to bring a range of approaches and resources for a concentrated period Examine a street ranger or town ambassador approach 	MEABC	PCSP/Traders	PCSP	Short-ongoing

Examine design options (e.g. lighting) which lead to a reduction in anti-social behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review design led models which have worked elsewhere Capture learning and apply to Carrickfergus Feed learning into the CRIP and THI processes 	MEABC	MEABC, Community Planning partners and THI Project Board	MEABC/DfC	Short-ongoing
Animate spaces and provide diversionary activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine when spikes in ASB occur and develop interventions which help to manage the relationships between users of the town centre space Provide activities which engage specific target groups which might engage in ASB to use the town centre/urban landscape in positive, active and creative ways 	PCSP	Traders/Youth Organisations	PCSP	Short-ongoing
Provide an annual training programme to support the needs of retailers/businesses in the Town Centre and to support workforce skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out a training needs analysis with the traders/retailers and business community in the Town Centre Develop a bespoke annual programme based on the outputs of the training needs analysis process (but based on the consultation likely to include topics such as Embracing and Embedding E-Commerce, Business Succession, Providing and Managing Co-working Space, Service and Customer Excellence and Developing a Destination Retail Experience and Business) Signpost to existing providers to avoid duplication and displacement e.g. the 	MEABC	DfC/Ni Regional Colleges	DfC/Ni Regional Colleges	Short-ongoing

	Regional College Network (where appropriate)				
Generate data on the performance of the town across the year which can help monitor the impact of the actions in the Town Centre Strategy and provide up to date information to inform decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain regular footfall counts across the key seasons for the Town • Survey analysis to determine customer feedback • Survey analysis to determine visitor perception and feedback (especially relating to events, festivals and offers based in the town centre) • Survey analysis to determine the experience of traders and businesses so that support programmes can be developed against current and emerging needs • Retain the current assessment of vacancy levels 	MEABC	DfC/Traders	DfC/MEABC	Short-ongoing

Theme Three: Repurposing Carrickfergus Town Centre

Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrickfergus Town Centre has vacancy levels which are in line with those towns presenting at the lowest 10% Carrickfergus Town Centre has developed as a desirable urban living environment 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Support the Council and THI delivery teams to invest in public realm and key sites buildings to position Carrickfergus as an attractive and high-quality urban environment for citizens and visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the Town Centre Strategy leadership team is fully aware of the progress on the draft Regeneration Investment Plan and the THI projects ... especially those with a specific relationship to the Town Centre Bring town centre input or support as required 	MEABC	Carrickfergus THI	City Deal* and MEABC	Medium and ongoing
Promote town centre living schemes: Living Over the Shop (LOTS); reusing vacant and derelict buildings and sites for private and social housing/accommodation projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review previous schemes and capture learning from peer towns which have successfully promoted a shift to increasing levels of town centre living Identify target buildings and promote concept via visual reworking of buildings and site and completion of outline development proposals Examine capital funding incentives for the implementation of projects in target areas or buildings (especially vacant buildings or brownfield sites) 	MEABC	Housing Associations and the Private Sector	Mix of DfC (via Housing Associations) and borrowing	Short and ongoing

Examine opportunities to design urban landscapes in the Town Centre which helps both presentation and to redefine it as a living environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify urban green space and recreational zones in and around the town centre which would provide outside space for potential dwellers in new town centre-based housing developments(e.g. pocket parks) Identify the potential to develop civic and community (including church) sites and properties Examine a weather proofed outdoor area as part of the urban living streetscapewhich can also provide space to support small events or elements of larger town centre festivals and events 	MEABC	NIHE, Housing Associations, Private Landowners, DfC and TNI	DfC	Medium to long
Improve how parking functions within Carrickfergus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the CRIP to take a strategic approach to parking in the Town Examine how coach parking can be introduced to make attractions such as the Castle or the Town Walls more accessible Develop a better approach to signing where parking spaces are available, especially for out of town visitors to Carrickfergus Examine the potential for the carpark adjacent to the Town Hall/Civic Centre to be developed as an Arrival Hub (possibly including coach parking) 	MEABC and DFI	Appropriate Community Planning partners	City Deal*, MEABC and DFI	Medium to long

Create learning and exchange networks with Towns of a similar scale and with a focus on meeting the needs of the local community and visitors to the Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a specification of the key challenges and opportunities (set out in the Baseline section) Identify towns where they are further down the 'transition journey' and seek to establish a learning and exchange network 	MEABC	DfC, Traders/BID	DfC and BID	Medium to long
Develop the Castle as the key feature to attract visitors and to provide a place for events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with the CRIP Board and support the development of the Castle, the lighting of the Castle, its promotion/marketing and the development of an annual animation and events programme based in and around the Castle 	MEABC	Appropriate Community Planning partners	City Deal*	Medium to long
Reinvigorate and develop the night time economy in the town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Night Time Economy Working Group Link to seasonal, events and animation eventscreating supporting night time hospitality offers Develop outdoor dining and social spaces working towards a café culture experience Link with artisan producers and maritime food supply to develop a local dining offer and menus Connect with hospitality training action 	MEABC	DfC and Traders	DfC and MEABC	Medium to long
Feasibility Study on a regular Market in Town Centre (food, artisan makers, seasonal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop terms of reference and procure external support to develop an independent feasibility study Look at precedent models in and external to Northern Ireland to capture learning which can be applied to the position in Carrickfergus 	MEABC	DfC	DfC	Short term

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subject to a positive feasibility study seek the capital funding to implement the recommendations				
Run pop-up shops to include test trading spaces and creative units, community hub and drop in spaces bringing life to our vacant premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify vacant properties where the owner would consider working with the Council to open pop up shops (typically three month timeframes) to test the market for a range of uses or experiences	MEABC	DfC and property owners	DfC and community trust funds	Short and ongoing

*Belfast Region City Deal is challenge funding and any award is subject to application and project appraisal processes.



Theme Four: Programming the Town Centre: Animation and Events

Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrickfergus Town Centre provides a range of retail, hospitality and events which complements investment in strategic assets which attract visitors to the Town, Borough and Northern Ireland 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
Agree annual events programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm a number of strategic brand building events (could be heritage or maritime as examples) Identify opportunities to develop events which link communities to the town centre Examine event opportunities which relate to the Carrickfergus story and strategic assets which will be developed by City Deal and THI processes Develop a series of events which build the Carrickfergus brand 	MEABC	Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI), CRIP and Council's Tourism team	MEABC, TNI	Short and ongoing
Develop capacity in the community and arts sectors to animate space, tell the stories of Carrickfergus and contribute to experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test the willingness of the community and arts sector(s) to contribute to the delivery of events and the animation of space(s) Assess capacity and competency and provide support to deliver events (food, arts, creativity and heritage) 	MEABC	Local Arts and Craft organisations, professional Theatre Companies and Council's Arts team	MEABC	Short and ongoing
Provide arts led animation of the town centre and key assets (the Town Walls and Castle)	The annual programme will be co-ordinated with seasonal events and specific planned festivals and cultural celebrations.	MEABC	Local Arts and Craft organisations, professional Theatre Companies and Council's Arts team	MEABC	Short and ongoing

Theme Five: Branding, Promotion and Communication

Desired Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrickfergus will have a well-defined brand recognised by its citizens and visitors to the Town and Borough Carrickfergus will be perceived as a welcoming well-presented town which provides experiences combined with the highest levels of service 				
Action	Delivery Activities	Led by	Supported by	Resources	Timescale
To develop a Town Brand which is based on experience, convenience, and serviceand aligned to the overall vision and heritage, history and cultural offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with the CRIP Board, THI and Council's Tourism team to agree a brand and brand language for Carrickfergus Consult on brand and agree a brand strategy Agree and implement a Positive Perceptions social media campaign providing a continual stream of good news/success stories from the town targeting the local audience (building pride and ownership) and the external (and potential visitors market) audience 	MEABC	DfC	MEABC/DfC	Short and ongoing
Develop a Marketing, Branding and Communication Strategy for Carrickfergus which helps to provide a positive image and targets groups and visitors with specific offer and events. It will seek to communicate with both the local citizens and visitors	<p>This was the DfC funded scheme that was out on hold due to Covid-19 crisis. The Marketing, Branding and Communication Strategy will produce a range of outputs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's on Guide Printed leaflet promoting events and projects from all departments Monthly Advert/Column in local press E-Zine on Mailchimp 	MEABC	Traders, Tourism NI, the Council's Tourism team and DfC	DfC	Short and ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tab on Amplify & Section on MEABC Website• Marketing campaign and brand				
Provide a range of incentives for local citizens and visitors to visits Carrickfergus town centre	Develop a range of incentives creating connections with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other towns in the Borough• Events and festivals• Seasonal events• Packages including accommodation, hospitality and parking	MEABC	Traders and DfC	DfC/BID	Short and ongoing

8. How Will We Deliver the Strategy?

Council will share the Strategy with stakeholders with an interest, role or remit in the development of Carrickfergus Town Strategy. These will include:

- Council's Community Planning partners
- Carrickfergus Townscape Heritage Initiative (until the programme ends in March 2022)
- Carrickfergus Traders
- Community and voluntary organisations operating in Carrickfergus

Where appropriate, Council will lead on actions and be responsible for the implementation of the Strategy. Equally, where relevant, other stakeholders will take a lead on actions set out in the Ten Year Strategy and their responsibility will be identified and resourcing sought, identified or provided. Ultimately if the Ten Year Town Centre Strategy is to be effective it will require a combination of:

- Leadership
- Partnership working (co-design and co-delivery)
- Resourcing from within Council budgets or identifying resourcing externally

Effective implementation of the Strategy might also require new partnerships to deliver elements of the Strategy. Initially leadership will be provided by the Council and via engaging appropriate statutory and community partners via the Community Planning Partnership.

The Theme One Action Plan sets out the actions which will be put in place to provide the leadership and structures in place to deliver the ten year Town Centre Strategy.

9. Monitoring and Delivery Framework

In implementing the 2020 – 2030 Carrickfergus Town Centre Strategy MEABC will monitor and review:

- The Strategy's effectiveness at tackling issues in the town
- Alterations to other relevant local strategies, for example the emerging Carrickfergus Regeneration Investment Plan
- Changes in national and local circumstances during the life of the Strategy, for example the Local Development Plan and the Belfast Metropolitan Area & Transport Plans

The following implementation and monitoring framework has been developed to ensure the outcomes of this Town Centre Strategy can be delivered.

Theme	Principal Outcomes	Indicators of achievement	Principal means of delivery
Vision and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrickfergus has a strong leadership vehicle in place which brings the energy, experience, resources and knowledge of the public, private and community sectors to the delivery of the 2020-2030 Town Centre Strategy and the Mission and Outcomes set out in it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership structure and group established • Quality buy-in from traders • Number of traders involved • BID established (if sufficient support exists) 	Town Centre Strategy Actions Community Plan Corporate Plan
Physical Presentation and Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrickfergus presents a strong retail offer, for both citizens of Carrickfergus and visitors to the Town • Carrickfergus has a more diversified commercial and business base where its strong retail offer is complemented and augmented by high business birth rates in growth sectors such as new creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of vacant commercial properties • Town centre health check • Number of business start-ups (town centre business birth rate) • Number of jobs created through new town centre based business start ups • Diversified business base • Levels of reported ASB incidences 	Town Centre Strategy Actions Community Plan Corporate Plan THI Action Plans PCSP Action Plan

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrickfergus Town Centre is a safe and welcoming town centre for citizens and visitors; the town is perceived as safe and welcoming and its performance against anti-social and crime indicators is in line with the best performing town centres in Northern Ireland • The Town Centre is a focal point and gathering place for the whole community and visitors to the town • The communities external to Carrickfergus Town Centre are connected to it physically and through its range of offers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User and visitors' feedback on perception and experience 	
Reimagining Carrickfergus Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrickfergus Town Centre has vacancy levels which are in line with those towns presenting the lowest 10% • Carrickfergus Town Centre has developed as a desirable urban living environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of vacant commercial properties • Vacancy percentage compared to norm for NI 	Town Centre Strategy Actions Community Plan Corporate Plan THI Action Plans
Programming the Town Centre: Animation and Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrickfergus Town Centre provides a range of retail, hospitality and events which complements investment in strategic assets which attract visitors to the Town, Borough and Northern Ireland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of new events • Participation in events • Profile of people attending events (number of visitors) • Perception of events via participant surveys 	Town Centre Strategy Actions Tourism Strategy Arts and Culture Strategies

Branding, Promotion and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrickfergus will have a well-defined brand recognised by its citizens and visitors to the Town and Borough • Carrickfergus will be perceived as a welcoming well-presented town which provides experiences combined with the highest levels of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual footfall count • Tourism: number of visitors • Tourism: visitor spend • Tourism: visitor length of stay 	Website
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Council/Committee: Environment & Economy Committee
Date: 23 June 2025

Report Title: Economic Development Activity Report
Publication Status: Open

Author: Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development
Approver: Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on current Economic Development activity.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Economic Development Function includes five key strategic areas including:
- Skills and Entrepreneurship
 - Business Growth
 - Investment and Funding
 - Investment and Place
 - Town Centre Development

3. Key Issues for Consideration

The following update is to provide Members with an overview across the five key operational areas within the Economic Development Team

NAME OF ACTIVITY:	UPDATE:
Investment and Funding	
PEACEPLUS Programme	As previously reported PEACEPLUS Measure 1:1 Co-Designed Local Action Plan has been approved. The Programme Officer that has been assigned to Mid & East Antrim was confirmed by SEUPB on 7 May 2025. Council Officers met with the SEUPB Programme Officer on Friday 23 May 2025. Project Officers are progressing the completion of the pre commencement and project implementation conditions. Once SEUPB are satisfied that the conditions have been met they will issue the Letter of Offer. The next PEACEPLUS Partnership Board Meeting will take place on 25 June 2025 in LEDCOM, Larne.
Skills and Entrepreneurship	
Start Out 19-24 and Insight Youth	Labour Market Partnership Officers have secured £50,000 additional funding from Michelin Development to support

	<p>the delivery of Start Out 19-24 and Insight Youth. Both programmes are designed to include bespoke employer training and placement opportunities tailored to school leavers (Insight Youth) and young people with disabilities (Start Out 19-24) to bridge skills gaps, enhance personal development and provide employability opportunities. Employer engagement is a core element to help build inclusive work environments where young people can develop. Companies interested in supporting both programmes are asked to contact imp@midandeantrim.gov.uk</p>
<p>LMP Programmes – Currently recruiting. Info at the link here: MEA LMP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing 4 Work 50+ • Sparkworx • Youthwork Academy • Medical Administration • Do It Herself/Yourself • Cleantech Electrical
<p>Go Succeed – Activate Enterprise</p>	<p>As part of Council's Go Succeed service a bespoke programme has been developed to support those who are economically inactive to start a business. The support will include 'ask me anything' and ideation sessions, mentoring support and a get started fund.</p>
<p>World of Work Update</p>	<p>Officers are continuing to work with Businesses in the Community, Hospitality Ulster, Tourism NI and local hotels/restaurants to deliver immersive activities for the Primary Schools "World of Work" hospitality programme. 300 pupils have been engaged. All schools have had their 3 employer visits to school and partner venues.</p>
<p>Investment and Place</p>	
<p>Manufacturing Task Force (MTF)</p>	<p>The PR announcement about the new MTF Chair, ex-Ryobi MD David Watson, was released in April. The Chair conducted his first official engagement representing MTF at the Manufacturing NI Anchor High Summit where MTF member Joanne Liddle, MD of IPC Mouldings, was inducted into the Manufacturing NI Hall of Fame. To coincide with the new Chair appointment and reflect the future focus of the MTF the network has been re-branded to the 'MTF - Making the Future Network'.</p>
<p>MEANZ Business Project</p>	<p>The final Net Zero Insights webinar on Sustainable Investment Planning took place in June. Almost 200 attendees participated in the 8 webinars delivered. The MEANZ Business project is on target to be completed by 30 June 2025 with a full project update to be presented to Members in August.</p>

i4C Innovation and CleanTech Project	The i4C Contract for Funding has been signed and the appointment of an Operator is imminent; publicity for these two key events is planned for September. Progress on the design and planning phase for i4C has faced delay due to a 'value engineering' review.
HyTech NI Project	The final Outline Business Case for the £20m Hytech NI project collaboration with industry and universities in the hydrogen economy is with Invest NI who are in the process of appointing an independent appraiser to assess. Officers continue to liaise with key industry partners on the three hydrogen demonstration projects including Wrightbus representatives on current thinking around the Hydrogen Refueling Station demonstrator and if it still fits with their wider operational plans.
Investment Opportunities	Officers recently visited an e-commerce manufacturing company based in Antrim & Newtownabbey to discuss expansion plans in the MEA Borough, which include a new manufacturing facility, storage and office space. Further to the May 2025 report in relation to AI Growth Zones, one application was submitted to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology in June from a company within the borough.
International Relations	Officers hosted The Executive Office (TEO) International Relations Working Group meeting on 19 May 2025; the group aims to establish a more coordinated and structured approach to international engagement and overseas visits. Attendees provided updates on their respective international activities and Officers presented the CleanTech proposition for the borough followed by a tour of the H ² Gas Safe Lab.
Ecos Hub	Room income for Q4 24/25 increased by 13.5% compared to the same period last year, however performance in the last two months has remained flat year-on-year. Creevx has relocated to Space NI facility in Antrim due to expansion plans with no suitable alternative available within Ecos Hub or the area. Discussions are underway on how best to utilise the now vacant unit.
Business Growth	
NI Housing Executive Private Sector Grants Awareness Event	NI Housing Executive recently presented to 11 Councils advising on domestic construction opportunities, with an estimated value of £14m, available in the private housing sector across Northern Ireland. Over 1,000 grant awards have been made to homeowners to make adaptations or install energy efficiency measures, which are ready for contractor(s) to commence working on.

	<p>Business Growth and Skills & Entrepreneurship teams collaborated to host an introductory event for industry funded under the Labour Market Partnership in conjunction with The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) on Friday, 20 June 2025 at ECOS Hub, Ballymena. The event provided an outline from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on work type, the grant aid process and how contractors and architects can secure this work.</p> <p>A poll to identify further support needs via existing provision of business growth mentoring or skills support was run on the day, Officers will review feedback and work to progress attendees on to further supports.</p>
Go Succeed Grow & Scale	<p>The blended delivery model will support 97 businesses via Client Managers. Delivery agent Mallusk Enterprise & Deirdre Fitzpatrick Associates will deliver sector specific support to 24 businesses across Retail and Social Enterprise, the MEA Food & Drink Network and Masterclasses.</p> <p>Update will be brought as part of the next Go Succeed Quarterly report update.</p>
Go Succeed Grants	<p>Go Succeed Grants closed at 12 noon on 30 May and are currently in assessment phase. Update will be brought as part of the next Go Succeed Quarterly report update.</p>
Augmenting business' growth potential via stakeholder supports	<p>Council's Client Managers continue to work with local and regional Economic Development Partners and Stakeholders to make referrals to relevant supports on behalf of our local businesses. An update on the first quarter of 2025/2026 will be reported at August Committee.</p>
Invest NI Partnership Working <i>Update on Council's local level partnership work to increase the pipeline of businesses capable of access Invest NI financial assistance.</i>	<p>Supply Chain Series: Officers are working with Invest NI to secure dates to host two Supply Chain events in late Summer/early Autumn. These will be interactive workshops with the aim to provide up to 30 businesses with a supply chain tool kit personal to their operations. Next partner meeting on the series marketing/PR is scheduled for 1 July. Further information on series dates/content will be provided once partner schedules have been agreed.</p> <p>6 Breakfast events at ECOS Hub are taking place over the year, aimed at providing businesses with information to drive productivity and success through People & Skills, Sustainability/Energy, Trade & Innovation. The first event is Access to Finance, Wed 25 June, registration link: Event Details · Invest NI Customer Portal</p>

	Business Innovation Grant (BIG): Current call closed on 3 June 2025. Invest NI will inform in due course of the applicants/outcomes from MEA.
Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - (11 NI Council partner fund, led by Newry, Mourne & Down District Council's FFNI consortium)	<p>Supports small businesses overcome financial barriers to digital transformation. Grants from £5,000 to £20,000, covering up to 70% of project costs/30% applicant match.</p> <p>9 businesses applied to Call 4, of which 3 were not compliant but invited to apply under call 5. Scoring is underway for the remaining applicants, outcomes expected mid-June 2025.</p> <p>Call 5 EOI closes 11 July 2025 at 12 noon. An in-person business briefing session took place in ECOS Ballymena on 18 June.</p>
Town Centre Development	
Footfall	Footfall for the month of May 2025 seen a mix of increase/decrease across all three towns in comparison to May 2024. Ballymena footfall seen an increase of (+1.2%) in comparison to the same month the previous year. Carrickfergus seen a small decrease of (-0.7%) whereas Larne seen an increase of (+5.7%) compared to the previous year. The Northern Ireland average was (+3.6%) against the same reporting period.
Carrickfergus Artisan Market	The fourth market took place on Saturday 7 June, in Market Place with 12 traders in attendance. The Footfall was steady and traders reported a good day trading. The next market is due to take place on Saturday 5 July alongside the Cirque du Carrickfergus family event around the town.
Business Support	<p>Ongoing business engagement continues with the Town Centre businesses. The Town Centre Newsletter is sent out at the beginning of each Month; four issues have been sent out to date. Each newsletter is tailored to each Town Centre and includes upcoming events, updates and opportunities from stakeholders and Council departments.</p> <p>Bespoke training support options are currently being explored for September for the Town Centre businesses, and these will be offered to businesses once confirmed.</p>
Town Centre Activity	<p>Activity in each Town Centre is currently being finalised to encourage footfall in the Town Centres throughout the summer months on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cirque du Carrickfergus event is taking place on Saturday 5 July alongside the monthly artisan market. • Broadway Summer Carnival is taking place on Friday 25 July.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballymena event taking place on Saturday 16 August in a joint venture with Ballymena BID.
Town Centre Marketing Campaign	The Town Centre Marketing campaign funded under DfC Revitalise fund is ongoing. The campaign includes Billboards, Ad Shells, Digital, Radio, Bin Lorries and Roundabouts located at each entrance to the Town Centres. The Hospitality campaign was rolled out in March, the Retail campaign has commenced mid-April and ran throughout May, the Outdoor campaign commenced in June.
Shop Front Improvement Grants	All Letters of Offer have been issued. To date 62 of the 77 Businesses who took part in the scheme have received payment with a total grant value of £185,156.24. There are 6 claims being processed for payment with a total of £20,307.99. 7 claims are currently being verified with 1 withdrawal and 1 outstanding.
Town Centre CCTV	Officers are currently reviewing Town Centre CCTV provision and hope to make a funding application to DfC for an upgraded system to include all three towns.
Revitalise Steering Group	Officers are working collaboratively with the Regeneration team, DfC and the revitalise steering group are scoping new regeneration projects and initiatives for each of the Town Centres.
Post Project Evaluation	A requirement of the DfC funded projects is to carry out surveys with businesses and shoppers in each town, the business surveys have been disseminated to the Town Centre Database and the public surveys are due to commence throughout June once all projects are completed.
Sound System for Carrickfergus & Ballymena	Officers are working to install the new sound system in Ballymena and Carrickfergus, this will be a similar set up to the Larne system.

4. General Considerations / Implications

No implications relating to this update report.

5. Proposed Way Forward

The report is presented for noting.

6. Recommendation or Decision

Elected Members are asked to note the updated Economic Development Activity report.

7. Appendices / Links

N/A



Council/Committee:	Environment & Economy Committee
Date:	23 June 2025
Report Title:	Ballymena Business Improvement District Update
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development
Approver:	Jonathan McGrandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Ballymena Business Improvement District (BID) activity from March 2025 to June 2025.

2. Background

- 2.1. Members have previously been updated on the formation of the Ballymena Business Improvement District, the governance arrangements and the priorities that have been agreed by the BID to support Ballymena Town Centre businesses.
- 2.2. Council has seven listed properties (including four car parks) within the Ballymena Business Improvement District boundary that equate to a levy of approx. £15,083 per annum.
 - Ballymena Town Hall, Museum & Arts Centre
 - Springwell Street Carpark
 - Meeting House Lane Carpark
 - Greenmount Plaza Carpark
 - Granville Drive Carpark
 - 12 - 16 Bridge Street
 - Wellington Court Building
- 2.3. With Council being a BID levy payer and working in close partnership with BID it was agreed that updates on the Ballymena BID's activity would be presented on a regular basis, the latest update was presented to Elected Members on the 3 March 2025.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

3.1 Advertising/Marketing/Events

- BID hosted an Easter Trail and Activity Day on Good Friday. Despite extreme weather, the event was well received with around 150 children participating. A supporting digital advertising campaign was rolled out during Easter week to drive trade. Additionally, BID worked with local primary schools on an Easter colouring competition. Over 1,500 entries were displayed throughout Easter week, with prizes presented by the BID team in each school after the holiday.
- Funded by MEA/DFC Revitalisation, BID rolled out a Mother's Day Gift Card campaign. Gift Card sales increased 96.9% compared to the Mother's Day period in 2024. Sales also rose by 58% in April and 48% in May (year-on-year comparison: 2024 vs. 2025).
- A digital May Day offers campaign supported 30 Town Centre businesses. Each participating retailer had a dedicated Ad on the BID website, with the digital campaign linking to the offers landing page. The 3-day campaign achieved a reach of 20,586.
- A multi-channel hospitality campaign promoting eateries, bars, bakeries, and takeaways across digital, radio, podcast, and influencer channels. The campaign will run for 5–6 weeks.
- Running through May and June, this campaign encourages parents to purchase the Ballymena Gift Card as an end-of-term gift for teachers. As part of the campaign, school children are invited to write in and explain why their teacher deserves a special gift from the Town Centre — a heartwarming initiative that is always well received.
- The Ballymena Gift Card continues to grow, now surpassing £230,000 in total sales.

3.2 Business Support

BID's social media and website channels continue to offer free advertising to businesses, with requests received daily.

BID's content creator continues to offer free promotional videos for Town Centre businesses. Over 100 pieces of content have been created so far this year, all at no cost to the businesses. These assets are available for businesses to use on their websites and socials and are also promoted via BID's social media channels. BID'S social media platforms reach an average of 70,000 weekly.

3.3 BID Partnerships

- Housing for All: Continued collaboration with social housing partners to address Town Centre challenges.
- MEABC: Ongoing cooperation with the Town Centre Team.
- PSNI: Regular engagement to address security concerns.
- Tractor Association: Successful partnership, with plans for more events like Santa Dash.
- Revitalisation Group: BID representatives actively contribute.
- Local Economic Partnership (LEP): BID represents Ballymena in MEA's Local Economic Partnership.

3.4 Upcoming Events

- Two summer events: one aligned with The Open (July 17–19), and the End of Summer Carnival in partnership with MEABC on 16 August.
- Launch of Autumn/Winter Fashion Campaign and Annual Fashion Show in partnership with MEABC.
- Halloween Trail, competition, and family fun day planned for Friday, 31 October

3.5 Challenges & Updates

Cleanliness: Street cleanliness, litter, and fly-tipping remain ongoing concerns.

Theft and Crime: A new Town Centre warden took up the role in May and has already proven to be a valuable asset to the area.

Land Property Services Data & Billing: BID bills were sent W/C 7 April. 30-day reminders issued on schedule.

Debt Collection: 70% of levy income has been received within 8 weeks of invoice being issued, ahead of the 60-day reminder deadline.

Re-ballot Planning: Re-ballot preparation is underway by the BID Board. A report will be tabled at a future Committee to update Members on the re-ballot process.

3.6 Ballymena BID AGM

The AGM took place at the Adair Arms Hotel on the 3 June. Roy Smith & Thomas McKillen who were Interim Chair and Vice Chairs were formally voted into the roles. 2 new board members were elected to include Melissa Shearer (Manager Danske Bank) Melissa was also elected as Treasurer; Carleen Smyth, Centre Manager of Tower Centre was also appointed.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Financial - Council properties are within the Ballymena BID boundary and Council will be required to continue to pay the BID levy which is approx £15,083 per annum
- 4.2. Human Resources – Council continues to support partnership projects both through the support of the Town Centre Development Team & Council's Communications Team

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. Council to continue to support the Ballymena BID through regular engagement and project development support.
- 5.2. Elected Members to generate awareness in relation to upcoming BID events and activities.
- 5.3. A report detailing the BID re-ballot arrangements will be tabled at a future Council meeting.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. It is recommended that Elected Members note the successful outcomes of Ballymena BID.

7. Appendices / Links

N/A

Council/Committee:	Environment & Economy Committee
Date:	23 June 2025
Report Title:	Local Economic Partnership
Publication Status:	Open
Author:	Ursula O'Loughlin, Head of Economic Development
Approver:	Jonathan Mc Grandle, Acting Director of Development

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the ongoing work of Mid & East Antrim Local Economic Partnership (LEP).

2. Background

- 2.1. Members were previously advised in October 2022 that following a review of Invest NI, DfE and Invest NI commenced development of a Sub-Regional Economic Plan for NI in late 2023 in partnership with key economic stakeholders.
- 2.2. The Sub-Regional Economic Plan was launched by the then Minister for Economy, Conor Murphy on 1 October 2024. The Plan outlined how the Department will work with Invest NI, Councils and other key stakeholder to establish LEP's with an allocation of £45 million available over 3 years across Northern Ireland with £1.503 million per annum available to Mid & East Antrim.
- 2.3. Six meetings of the Mid & East Antrim LEP have taken place to date, 29 January 2025 at Ecos Hub, Ballymena, 19 February in Larne Town Hall, 20 March in Carrickfergus Town Hall, 2 April in Ecos Hub, Ballymena and 7 May 2025 in LEDCOM, Larne and 3 June 2025 remotely via Teams.

3. Key Issues for Consideration

- 3.1. Since the last Committee report one meeting of the LEP has taken place on the 3 June 2025.
- 3.2. The meeting on the 3 June 2025 was a single agenda item where DfE provided detail on the updated Regional Balance Fund Project Guidance as detailed in Appendix 1.
- 3.3. Council have also received a Draft Memorandum of Understanding and Letter of Offer for comment and Officers have engaged our Legal Team in providing a response to DfE.

- 3.4. Further clarity is required on governance processes in particular the procurement requirements attached to the funding. DfE have committed to organising a workshop with Council Officers and Central Procurement Directorate to understand the procurement requirements of the programme.

Draft Project Ideas

- 3.5. As advised at last month's Environment and Economy Committee LEP Members are developing a long list of project ideas which will be tabled for Members consideration when all LEP Members have had the opportunity to put forward their ideas and when the procurement requirements of the funding are clearly understood.

Local Economic Action Plan Template and Monitoring Return

- 3.6. DfE have issued Council with a draft Action Plan Template and Monitoring Return as attached in Appendix 2.

4. General Considerations / Implications

- 4.1. Financial – The budget has been confirmed as £1.503m per annum over a 3-year period. A Letter of Offer is awaited from DfE for this funding allocation.
- 4.2. Human Resources – continued and significant officer involvement will be required to service the LEP and providing support in shaping project ideas.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1. Officers will continue to consult with DfE, Invest NI representatives and Mid & East Antrim LEP Members to develop project ideas for consideration by Councils Environment & Economy Committee.

6. Recommendation or Decision

- 6.1. Elected Members are asked to:
 - Note the progress with the establishment of Mid & East Antrim LEP and the meeting that has taken place since the last Environment and Economy Committee Meeting
 - Note that the Regional Balance Fund Project Updated Guidance together with Draft Action Plan template, Monitoring Return and Letter of Offer has been received from DfE.

7. Appendices / Links

- Appendix 1 – Regional Balance – Updated Project Guidance
- Appendix 2 - Action Plan Template and Monitoring Return

Appendix 1

Regional Balance Fund – project guidance

1. This short note is designed to assist in providing an overview of the £45m 3-year Regional Balance Fund ("the Fund") spending objectives, targets, metrics and suggestions of project scale as captured in the DfE project business case.
2. The genesis of this fund is a reflection that addressing regional imbalance requires a broader conception of economic development and the barriers to economic growth at a local level. Identifying and addressing these will require genuine partnership and collaboration. This note reflects further feedback and questions from stakeholders received since the first draft was shared.
3. The Fund is to last for three years (2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/28). As we have not yet had our business case approval this will be for a period less than three years.
4. Our business case has moved through the initial internal approval and is now with Department of Finance for their approval. This is the final stage of the approval process. Delivering this project at pace has meant that a number of workstreams have to happen simultaneously. If there are any approval conditions or any other issues which need to be reflected in guidance we will update this again.

Fund Business Case

5. In seeking approval from Department of Finance we have sought:
 - Approval for £45m fund for a three-year fund
 - Delegation of responsibility to Councils for project approvals
 - Flexibility for spending between years and flexibility between capital and resource
 - Approval to use the Local Government Finance Act to disburse funding to Councils.
6. Two areas where we wanted flexibility were around spending across the three years, as it is very difficult to profile this at the outset and mix of spending between capital and resource as without partnerships having identified projects this is difficult to assess.
7. We will need to balance this with the needs of the management of the DfE budget. This has meant that we have already profiled funding for this year as this was required for our own finance team.

8. As is the case for Labour Market Partnerships, once our business case is approved we will agree an Action Plan with each Partnership and issue a letter of offer to provide the basis for funding. Any spending in advance of approval would be irregular spend.
9. We will also agree a Memorandum of Understanding with Councils around financial and governance arrangements for spending.

Spending Objectives

10. As we do not know the projects that will be taken forward and we wish to delegate approval of projects to Councils rather than DfE or Invest NI approving these, we needed clear targets that link to economic performance in order to secure internal approvals.
11. The overall objective of the fund is around regional balance, and there are particular issues around imbalance in productivity and median wages across council areas. It will be difficult to have an impact on measures for productivity and median wages within a three-year period and as such we needed to look at lower level metrics that we know will positively impact both of these. Because of the impact of sectoral composition on median wages and productivity, we identified statistics on tradable businesses in terms of number and scale as the measures we would use for the business case.
12. There are a wide range of measures and none will be perfect, however we needed areas where data was readily available and relatively 'live' and we could only use a small number of measures to indicate the logic of how the Fund will address regional imbalance particularly in areas with poorest economic performance. In addition it was important to differentiate this business case from the Labour Market Partnership business case that was also seeking Department of Finance approval.
13. Tradable businesses are those which can goods/services outside the area where they are produced. They do not always sell outside their home area but have the potential to do so. Tradable businesses have a significant wage difference with other businesses – in 2024 this amounted to a 27% annual wage difference for all employees (full time and part-time).
14. Due to their higher productivity and higher wages, we believe that in areas where there are relatively fewer numbers of these types of businesses increasing this number will benefit both the future productivity of the area and the median wages paid to those working there. In other areas there may be a greater number of tradable businesses, and facilitating growth of these may take priority for example through addressing barriers to growth arising from attractiveness of an area or innovation activity.

15. The spending objectives we have set are focused around this and particularly around what will drive improvement in the areas most in need, where economic performance is lowest:
 - **Potential:** increase in tradable businesses – defined using a list of tradable sectors from Interdepartmental Business Register which is updated annually. This gives a broad sense of the business base in every area. Together with the scale of these in terms of turnover and employment, this indicates the base for productivity improvement;
 - **Actual Behaviour:** increase in Invest NI client companies – we are using this as a proxy measure for actual behaviour of firms. Whereas the IDBR figure gives us insight into the potential of the business base this, together with the scale of these, will give us insight into the actual behaviour. This should capture all those firms which have real potential for growth and whose behaviour is geared toward export. (Note that Invest NI are changing the methodology of how this is measured, and so figures are likely to be revised upward.)
 - **Impact:** Growth in median wages and employment rate – However, growth in the other targets should drive median wage growth.
16. Further data on each of these is outlined at Annex A and we will work with LEPs as part of the Action Plan process on what they will target to achieve.
17. We have set overall targets rather than Council specific ones as we want to enable Partnerships to consider where the priorities for their area lie.

Spending Areas

18. Within the business case, in order to provide assurance around the projects that would be funded, we have provided a list to DoF that outlines the broad areas where you would expect productivity/median wage enhancing investment. We have also noted that Partnerships may develop projects outside of this when they recognise a local need in some area.
19. The broad areas are:
 - Commercial property/land
 - Entrepreneurship support
 - Sectoral entrepreneurship support
 - Scaling support
 - Sectoral scaling support
 - R&D investment
 - Energy efficiency
 - Upskilling/reskilling in digital/engineering skills
 - Sectoral cluster development
20. There are many areas which influence the dynamism of the private sector in a local area, and its productivity; only some of these are within DfE's responsibilities and we recognise that Partnerships will have an interest in the

broader canvas of work that will impact the placemaking of the area. Areas such as planning and transport, as well as public realm and regeneration have all been raised with us and we are also aware that Partnerships may want to engage with the Shaping Sustainable Places work that DfC are leading on or work on rural policy that DAERA are beginning.

21. Where a Partnership identifies a joint project that is within the vires of another Department, such as Department for Communities or Department for Infrastructure, this can be taken forward. However, this must be done in partnership with that Department. Evidence of support and engagement should be available, for example through a letter of support. Our expectation is that this would be proportionate with the size of the project and generally involve those officials who are already engaged with the local area. This is to ensure that projects are not taken forward outside the legal vires of either Councils or DfE.
22. Given the focus of Labour Market Partnerships on inactivity and improving the employment rate, if a partnership identifies a skills project that could fall under the scope of that Partnership we would anticipate that the LEP would engage with the LMP whose membership has been selected with expertise in this area.
23. Staff can be recruited on contract covering the period of the Fund. Decisions on appropriate resources to dedicate to council staff resources will be for the LEP. Councils will be responsible for all elements of recruitment and employment of staff. We will engage with governance colleagues on whether staff costs can be accrued prior to an action plan/full letter of offer being agreed and provide a further update on this point.
24. Several Councils questioned whether consultancy could be used, for example to facilitate meetings, write action plans or complete provide specific support on a complex area. It is not out of scope. However, there are stricter rules about engagement of external consultants than other professional services. In engaging with stakeholders, it is clear that while consultancy is used as a general term not all activities will meet the definition of consultancy in Department of Finance guidance.¹ Department of Finance guidance breaks professional services into two main categories:
 - Consultancy Services: ad hoc consulting requirements to provide advice and identify options; and
 - Other Professional Services: related to the routine business of a department, steady state operations and the implementation of advice or options identified by consultants.
25. External consultancy is defined as:

“The provision to management of objective advice relating to strategy, structure, management or operations of an organisation, in pursuit of its purposes and objectives. Such advice will be provided outside the ‘business-as-usual’ environment when in-house skills are not available and will be time-

¹ Department of Finance, Guidance on Professional Services including Consultants (https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/iddfp0712attv3_sept17.pdf)

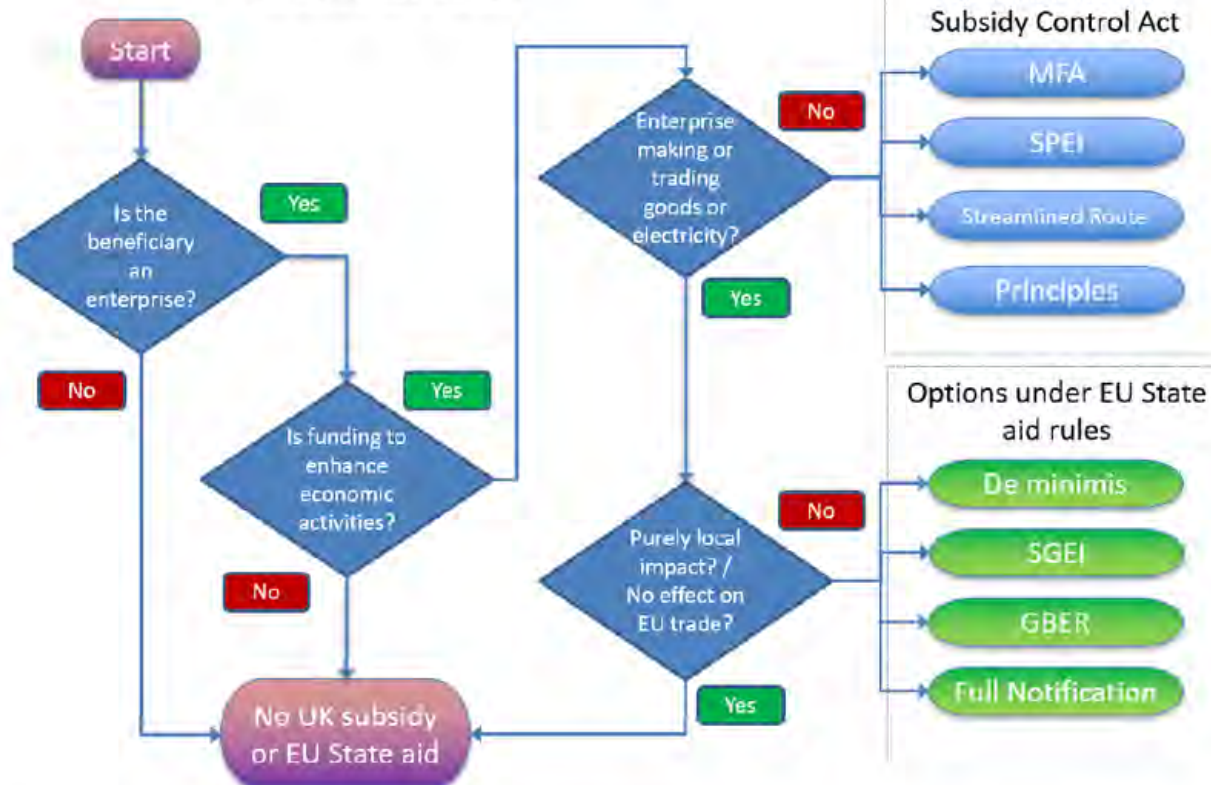
limited. Consultancy may include the identification of options with recommendations, or assistance with (but not the delivery of) the implementation of solutions."

26. Research is classified as other professional services.
27. Given the scrutiny that external consultancy attracts, there are specific returns to gather information about spending on external consultancy and all external consultancy over £10k must be approved by the Minister. In general consultancy assignments over £75k must have DoF approval.
28. Given that there is likely to be some confusion between what is external consultancy and other professional services we are happy to engage with Partnerships and Councils whether there is any confusion.
29. As a general principle, on both consultancy and any other professional services (including research or any other support) we want to maximise the resources that are available to partnerships, and as such if there are areas where Councils lack resources or capacity and where DfE or Invest NI has staff who can assist we want to use Departmental and Invest NI resources rather than using the resources of the Partnership. For this reason, we are seeking engagement from Partnerships including through the Action Plan process where the Partnership identifies a need for this type of a spending.
30. Consultancy spending has specific rules, and any spending over £10k on this will require advance Ministerial approval. As such, and in order to ensure there are not delays to projects, we would ask for early engagement on these to ensure we can seek the necessary approval.
31. All projects must be completed by the end of March 2028.

State Aid and Subsidy Control

32. Councils will be responsible for ensuring that projects meet state aid or subsidy control requirements. Depending on the project, they may fall into either the EU state aid rules or the UK subsidy control rules. Where there is any doubt about the correct course of action, the DfE Subsidy Control Team are happy to provide advice. They can be contacted directly at: subsidycontrol@economy-ni.gov.uk and are happy to provide advice or training.
33. There is some complexity attached to this and the diagram below is intended as an aid to initial understanding of which regime may be appropriate.

Decision Tree



34. Intervention rates will depend on whether the project is in scope of EU or UK rules. The EU State Aid rules have specific intervention rates depending on the project whereas the UK rules are set out in terms of principles that must be followed rather than specific rules.
35. Both state aid and subsidy control rules set limits of the assistance that can be provided to an enterprise under Minimal Financial Assistance or De Minimis provisions.

Areas outside scope

36. There are specific state aid rules in the following areas that increase complexity in primary agriculture, fisheries and road transport. For this reason projects in these areas are out of scope. However, this does not rule out projects in related areas such as farm enterprises.
37. Where there is doubt about whether a project falls into one of these categories, it will be the responsibility of the Council to ensure that any state aid or subsidy requirements are met. DfE Subsidy Control Unit are happy to provide support and guidance to enable projects to be developed in the best possible way including testing ideas for example for skills training where there may be some ambiguity.

DRAFT Action Plan Template – Regional Balance Fund

Anticipated Staff Resource: £ (Detail number of staff, Grade, Total Cost)

Description and planned consultancy spend [if any]: [we will engage further on this]

Project title	Short Description including targets for delivery including delivery agent, and/or partners	Financial forecast across four quarters and any financial impact on future years [including capital/resource split]	How the project will impact Strategic Objectives and area of focus	Timescale [start/end date for project]

Appendix 2

Monitoring Return							
Theme (Baseline measure)	Standard Metric	Projected full year cost and spend to date	Spend to date	Resource/ Capita [funding type – if mix of funding, amount of resource vs capital]l	Timescale [projected start and project completion dates]	Target/actual delivery	Comments
Areas of focus (eg)							
1. Commercial Property	m ² of new/renovated office or industrial space and units / businesses						
2. Business start	Individuals engaged New business in tradable or certain sectors started (follow-up)						
3. Sectoral support (start)	Individuals engaged New businesses in tradable or certain sectors started (follow-up)						

Appendix 2

4. Sectoral support (scaling)	Businesses engaged Increase in turnover (follow-up metric)						
5. R&D and Innovation	Businesses engaged New innovation projects New R&D projects						
6. Energy efficiency	Businesses engaged Energy savings						
7. Upskilling – digital/engineering	Individuals who have completed training (split digital/engineering)						
8. Cluster development	Number of businesses involved in each cluster Increase in turnover (follow-up metric)						
9. Other agreed areas	Metrics to be agreed						
Total cost/delivery impact							

Draft Forward Plan – Environment & Economy Committee (23 June 2025 v18)

1. Planned Agenda Items Next meeting

Items		Purpose
4 August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable Development Goals 2025 DfC Town Centre Revitalisation Programme Update Capital Plan Q1 Update Labour Market Partnership Update Economic Development Activity Report PEACEPLUS Update Local Economic Partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting Report for Noting

2. Future Meetings

Meeting Date	Item	Purpose
15 Sept 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate and Sustainability Action Plan and MEA Adaption Plan Update 2025/26 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report for Noting

3. Items to be programmed

Item	Purpose
Business Cases (DC)	Report for Approval
Business Cases for Fleet for year ahead	Report for Approval
Tenders	Report for Approval
Potential Award of Funding for THI Phase 2	Report for Approval
Greenisland Regeneration Work	Report for Update