

# Ards Borough Council Development Strategy 2005-2009



Developing the Ards Economy 2005-2009



# Introduction



This work plan for the Ards economy aims to point the way ahead for how the public sector can positively influence the local, regional and wider economy, with the Borough of Ards' **growing and indigenous businesses** being our principal concern.



In our previous strategy for the Ards Economy, for the period 2001 – 5, the Council and its partners took a wide variety of actions that showed unity of purpose. We developed almost 550 sustainable jobs, brought £3 million into the economy from additional investment from the private and government / public agency sectors, enabled over 350 new companies to consolidate, and specifically influenced very real growth in our tourism and crafts sectors, worth millions of pounds annually to the wider economy. Over 150 people – including our local retailers and the elderly – took advantage of vocational training and practical skills acquisition. Nationally acclaimed events brought new and returning visitors to the world renowned Strangford Lough. Private sector developers joined Ards Business Centre and Invest Northern Ireland in developing new land for commercial growth – offering hope to the many local companies prepared and keen to expand in Ards. The Ards campus of North Down and Ards Institute capped its 2004 centenary with exceptional capital improvements geared to bring employers right to the centre of the organisation.

Conversely, we lost several key companies and hundreds of jobs also. After a period of hope – all too short – carpet manufacturing left Donaghadee in 2004. Associated textile and underlay firms left Comber and Killinchy in 2003. They will not return. The Korean computer hardware firm Humax left Newtownards, and even the parent company migrated to China.

The contents of this work plan take full note of the fragility of the global marketplace and the need for strength and diversity in the local economy itself.

There are a number of very real issues that can be influenced by a partnership of quick witted, entrepreneurial organisations capable and willing to consolidate and grow this region. We will look collectively at those issues and ascribe actions that will be time bound, output driven and involve one or more key players in the Ards economy.

Similarly, we will emphasise our growing intolerance of “for the sake of” bureaucracy, witless fund chasing, policy inconsistencies and duplication of action. Unity of purpose, responding to need and subsequent unity of action will be the thrust in the forthcoming period.

**We are grateful to the investment provided by the European Regional Development Fund under its Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme administered by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment.** This has resulted in specific economic benefits of great value to the Ards region in terms of revenue and of course jobs.

The plan – of course – is not controlled or owned by one party in this partnership. Through regular and purposeful communication we will build on the strengths of the Ards economy and anticipate some of its problems.

Derek McCallan  
Director of Development  
June 2005

# Developing the Ards Economy



## Theme 1: Invest In Ards: Strengthening our Business Community

**Paul Eakin, Eakin Brothers:** “Can you pass on my thanks to the councillors, who should know that we can now expand the business, create more jobs and maintain our world market here in Ballystockart, Comber. Your practical support is valuable and we will be seeking your advice on further development in the future”.



The work of the Economic Development Unit in the Council's Church Street headquarters will include strategic and operational support from the Craft Development Manager based in Ards Tourism Information Centre.

Communicating with our businesses, developing accountable and innovative partnerships with Ards Business Centre and North Down and Ards Institute for a programme of work for the small business community and forming strong relationships with strategic investors and developers will be the foundations of our work.

*In this plan period we will:*

- Create 575 sustainable jobs and consolidate 150 businesses in so doing
- Provide accurate **socio-economic data** on the Borough for development purposes
- Bring **£4 million** into the local economy from non rates sources
- Develop in partnership 15 acres of commercial land to provide future growth for our economy
- Enable growth in niche sectors of the private sector through targeted actions to contribute to sustainability, working with 15 key growth firms in the Borough
- Plan and run annually, 3 information seminars / networking events involving 60 Small Medium Enterprises annually
- Strengthen the relationship with Invest Northern Ireland in order to optimise the resources available from this primary government agency
- Actively work with the local commercial craft sector, government agencies and associated bodies, in particular Craft Northern Ireland, to ensure a comprehensive, cohesive and dynamic approach to craft development within Ards Borough
- As lead partner or in partnership, lobby as part of the Greater Belfast Metropolitan area to attract Foreign Direct Investment to Ards and independently attract new businesses to the region
- Pinpoint areas of economic weakness in the Borough and take action where possible to address them in partnership
- Support the growth of the social economy and community businesses
- Interact purposefully with more **local businesses** and their support agencies
- Increase the profile of Ards as a place to invest and live through practical promotion with indigenous firms here and abroad
- Work with international partners to accelerate investment in Ards for our growth sectors including added value food, crafts, speciality tourism, horticulture, retailing, medical technology, construction and the wet trades

# Developing the Ards Economy



## Theme 1: Invest In Ards: Strengthening our Business Community

Tim Acheson, Pritchitts: "We look forward to maintaining a real partnership with Ards Borough Council for the next plan period".



- Ensure that a strong relationship is established and maintained with developers in order to promote sustainable commercial infrastructure throughout the Borough. This will include the provision of technical and financial assistance to maintain local business parks in smaller settlements to ensure that the Borough's towns and villages do not regress to dormitory status
- Signpost businesses, regeneration groups and investors to other agencies capable of providing training and other practical support (INI, NITB, DARD, DSD, IFI, INTERREG IIIA) and ensure responsiveness from all quarters
- With the primary Institutes of Further and Higher Education together with other flexible training organisations, develop business specific vocational training programmes for employees, employers and entrepreneurs
- Promote the local craft and arts sector in and beyond the Borough through the provision of a quality retail outlet and through joint initiatives with other partners. The initiatives will include *the Creative Peninsula*, *the Peoria Arts Exchange programme* and *the Celtic Market interchange with Brittany*.
- Influence through knowledge the policies related to issues such as long term unemployment, dependency, social deprivation and economic isolation in the Borough's most needy wards
- Establish a major capital development programme in the fishing village of Portavogie to include business units and visitor attractions by December 2008

These initiatives will be developed under a four year Service Delivery and Improvement Plan that reflects fully the Council's Corporate Plan 2005-09. For a fuller explanation see Theme 4.

# Developing the Ards Economy



## Theme 2: Tourism and Crafts Development - The Flagship Region

**Michael Calvert, Proprietor, Barnwell Farm Cottages:**  
"2004 has seen growth in my business particularly from the Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and North American markets. By working in partnership with Ards Borough Council, through its continued plans for investment in the tourism sector, I feel confident that this growth trend will continue".



Tourism is the major growth industry in the Ards area. The Ards Peninsula is an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty treasured by the communities who live here. The Lough has also always been a source of inspiration for artists and crafts people and this is the reason why these two industries work hand in hand to develop a common approach for customers and visitors. The Council believes that our communities can tap further into sustainable tourism development and it will act accordingly during the period 2005-2008.

The Development Department has considerably contributed to the development of public-private partnerships over the last few years through its "Stay in Ards" Accommodation Programme. The first two phases assisted smaller projects to improve their infrastructure, marketing, signage and packages in association with other local private tourism service providers.

The second phase saw a radical change in the concept of the programme, with an accommodation market that had reached saturation, but with low occupancy. Improving quality and standards to ensure return visits to the area was therefore required.

The Council, therefore, chose instead to fund projects such as Dreamcatcher, the only 80 seat theatre and drama school in the region and also invested in the regeneration of the Castle Yard in Portaferry as a magnet for tourism exhibitions and festivals for the Peninsula.

*During this period we will:*

- Build on the success of the Department's three internally managed events (Lough Lively, the Creative Peninsula and the Festival of the Peninsula) by continuously evolving these programmes to ensure maximum visitor appeal and by securing resources to enable professionalism from production to delivery. The central focus of these events will remain those aspects that are unique or a key strength of Ards – Strangford Lough, our heritage and our people – and which therefore give the Borough a special appeal in events terms.
- Similarly the Tourism Development Unit will continue to act as a source of seed funding for externally managed tourism events that are hosted in the Borough, through provision of selective financial sponsorship, based on a policy that supports innovative programmes until they reach sustainability.
- As a key stakeholder, the Department will play a central role in existing and evolving Regional Tourism Partnerships. In particular, the South East Regional Tourism Partnership and its associated strategy and action plan offer numerous opportunities for targeted interventions in the sphere of product development, marketing, visitor servicing, business skills and research and monitoring.

# Developing the Ards Economy



## Theme 3: The Future of Ards – An Integrated Plan for the Borough's Communities to 2015

**Colum Sands:** "Just to say many thanks for making my visit to the Festival of the Peninsula such an enjoyable one. You've achieved that elusive combination there of professionalism and warmth - a mix which I'm sure will give the Festival enduring legs and a healthy heart for many years to come".



Regeneration and long term community planning have become cornerstone aspects of the Department's work. In essence, this involves harnessing the goodwill and commitment to improve the communities which our commercial ratepayers and residents inhabit, realising town and village plans in each of our 14 settlements by 2009.

Boroughwide, a strategic socio-economic plan for the development of services across all public sector agencies will be co-ordinated by the Department. The Borough's growing population has a diverse range of requirements and the public service should be united in providing the necessary service provision regardless of who needs what and where, in a timely and responsive manner. This is a crucial step for the Borough and the Department is committed to applying the resources required to provide the platform for all of the public sector to efficiently meet people's needs, from health to education to roads to jobs. The Council relishes, but does not underestimate, this task.

Ards 2015 – The Ards Regional Development Strategy- will be a working template prepared by May 2006 for providing integrated service delivery by those organisations keen to work together for the improved quality of life of our population.

With considerable groundwork and consultation already completed, the Borough will be mapped in terms of identifying where services are lacking, need to be re-prioritised, require problem areas to be solved, through practical partnership between participating agencies on behalf of residents.

*In this plan period we will:*

- Develop by May 2006 a ten year Integrated Development Plan for the Borough covering the work of over 25 government departments and agencies (ARDS 2015)
- Complete the establishment of 4 village regeneration partnerships
- Lead or assist the development of 9 capital schemes in the Borough's settlements
- Implement 5 town / village plans and obtain support financially and technically from government and the local communities
- Develop and sustain a 4 year work plan for Newtownards Development Partnership, realising £220,000 in direct investment and in excess of £3 million within the town itself.

# Developing the Ards Economy



## Theme 4: Measuring and Communicating Success, Creating Excellence

**Janice Harvey:** “Just a word of congratulations to you and your team for a wonderful programme of events organised over the summer. I was fortunate enough to participate in several of these, either with a friend or (in the case of the Creative Peninsula tour) on my own, and all were thoroughly enjoyable and well planned..... Thanks again and well done to everyone involved”.



As for any strategy, it is important to monitor, evaluate and measure success.

All the actions proposed in this new strategy will be assessed to ensure effective delivery and impact.

*In this plan period we will:*

- Publish regular output bulletins to highlight the progress made and the compliance of these actions with the objectives of Ards Borough Council's Corporate Plan
- Develop robust performance improvement and measurement actions based on the Balanced Scorecard and Chartermark
- Prepare and disseminate relevant socio-economic data on the Borough to key partners including central government and private sector investors
- Encourage applications to Council and partner initiatives through the Council's website
- Maintain and enhance the web-based business directory
- Hold and distribute a web-based database of commercial property and land in the Borough
- Report on the growth of the craft sector in Ards from revenue and employment perspectives with a bi-annual bulletin.

# Summary Table of Main Actions



**Eric McKillen:** "I have benefited from excellent sales, PR and marketing training programmes and opportunities and have had great support from Ards Crafts".



## Theme 1: Invest In Ards: Strengthening our Business Community

Action	Implementing Agent	Timescale
Create 575 sustainable jobs, an associated 200 new businesses and the consolidation of 70 existing companies.	Public/Private partnership between Government Agencies, Private Sector and the Council.	Service level agreement with Ards Business Centre Limited, from October 2005.
Bring £4 million into the local economy.	European Union funds from non-rates sources. Central Government Agencies. Private Investment.	Annual investment programme.
Develop in partnership 15 acres of commercial land to provide future growth for our economy.	Council. Department of Regional Development. Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry. Private Developers.	Within first phase of Ards and Down Area Plan, up to December 2008.
Develop a range of quality business events, through regular consultation, such as information seminars.	Council. Relevant advisors from the Public and Private Sector.	12 events, 3 per annum.
As lead partner or in partnership, lobby as part of the Greater Belfast Metropolitan area to attract Foreign Direct Investment to Ards and independently attract new businesses to the region.	Developers. Council. Invest Northern Ireland. Belfast Metropolitan Area Network.	Within first phase of Ards and Down Area Plan, up to December 2008.
Actively work with the local commercial craft sector, government agencies and associated bodies, in particular Craft Northern Ireland, to ensure a comprehensive, cohesive and dynamic approach to craft development within the Ards Borough.	Ards Tourism. Ards Crafts. Craft Northern Ireland. Private Craft Businesses.	Ongoing.
Develop business specific vocational training programmes for employees, employers and entrepreneurs.	North Down and Ards Institute. Council. East Down Institute. Open Learning Centre.	Service level agreement with further education institute effective October 2005.
Influence through knowledge the policies related to issues such as long-term unemployment, dependency, social deprivation and economic isolation in the Borough's most needy wards.	Council. Government Agencies. Community and Voluntary Groups.	Ongoing.

# Summary Table of Main Actions



## Theme 2. Tourism and Crafts Development - The Flagship Region

Action	Implementing Agent	Timescale
Build on the success of the Department's three internally managed events: – Lough Lively – Creative Peninsula – Festival of the Peninsula.	Council through its Development Department. Tourism and Crafts Providers. Private Sector.	3 events annually (May, August and September).
Develop Regional Tourism Partnerships, in particular the South East Regional Tourism Partnership and its associated strategy.	Council. South East Regional Tourism Partnership. Private Sector.	From September 2005.
Continue to provide advice and guidance to tourism businesses on the set up and expansion of their operations to enable them to make informed decisions on their investment proposals.	Council. Associated Tourism Agencies.	Ongoing.
Work to ensure that we continue to excel in customer service provision at our Tourist Information Centres and to maintain Chartermark status.	Tourist Information Centre. Tourism Unit.	Annually in August.

## Theme 3: The Future of Ards – An Integrated Plan for the Borough's Communities to 2015

Action	Implementing Agent	Timescale
Develop by May 2006 a ten-year Integrated Development Plan for the Borough covering the work of over 25 government departments and agencies (ARDS 2015).	The Ards Community. Council. 25 Government Departments and Agencies.	May 2006.
Complete the establishment of 4 village regeneration partnerships.	Council. Community Groups. Private/Public Sector.	One per year from 2005.
Assist or lead the development of 9 capital schemes in the Borough's settlements.	Council. Private sector.	At least 2 per year from 2006.
Implement 5 town / village plans and obtain support financially and technically from government and the local communities.	Council. Private Sector. Government Agencies.	Ongoing.
Develop and sustain a 4 year work plan for Newtownards Development Partnership, realising £220,000 in direct investment and in excess of £3 million within the town itself.	Council. Private Sector. Developers. Government Agencies.	Effective November 2005.

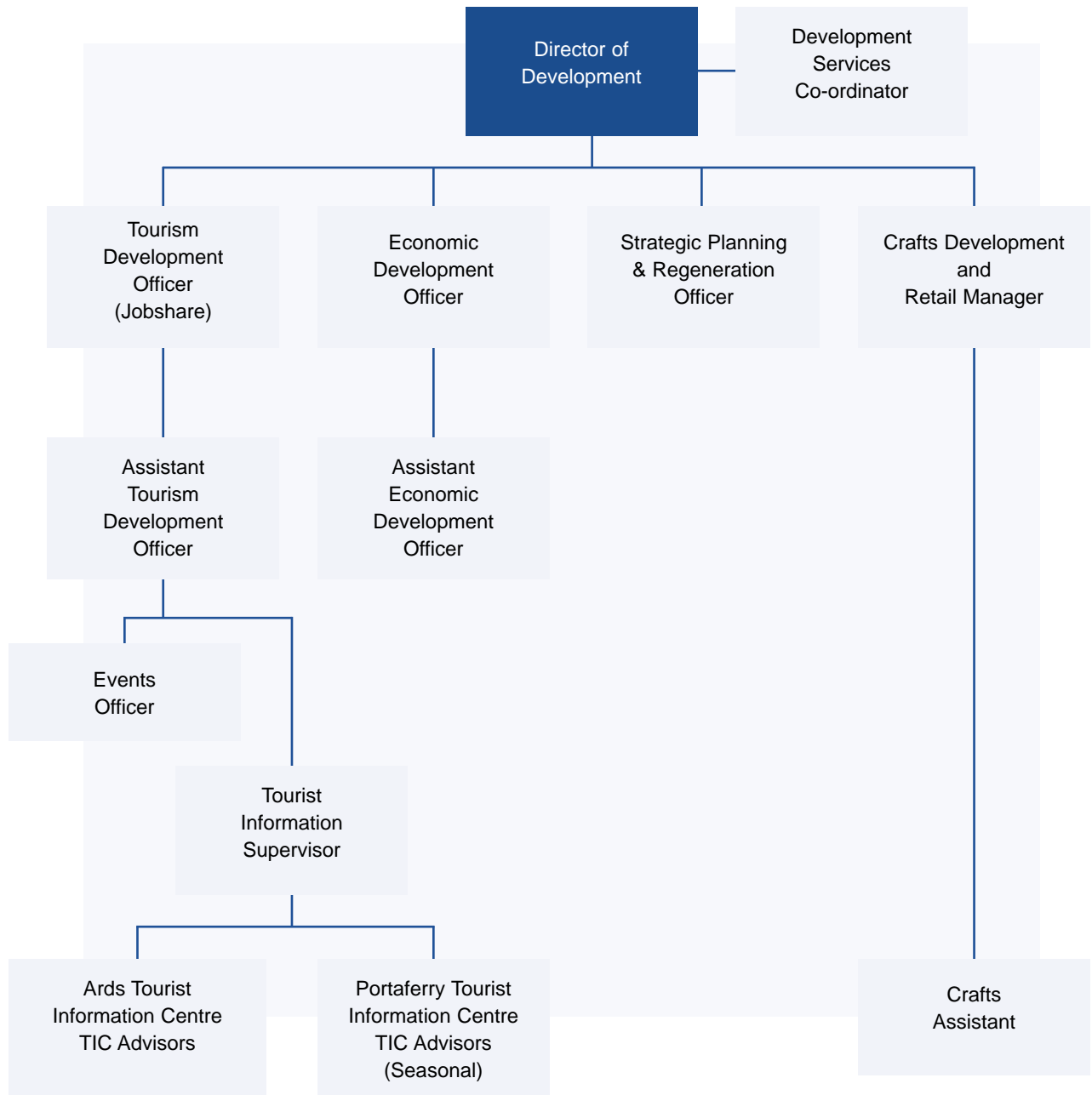
# Summary Table of Main Actions



## Theme 4: Measuring and Communicating Success, Creating Excellence

Action	Implementing Agent	Timescale
Publish regular output bulletins to highlight the progress made and the compliance of these actions with the objectives of Ards Borough Council's Corporate Plan.	Economic Development Unit. Private Sector.	Every 18 months from December 2006.
Develop robust performance improvement and measurement actions based on the Balanced Scorecard and Chartermark.	Development Department.	Ongoing from October 2005.
Prepare and disseminate relevant socio-economic data on the Borough to key partners including central government and private sector investors.	Economic Development Unit. Private Sector.	Ongoing.
Encourage applications to Council and partner initiatives through the Council's website.	Development Department. IT Unit.	Ongoing.
Maintain and enhance the web-based business directory and distribute a web-based database of commercial property and land in the Borough.	Economic Development Unit IT Unit. Private Sector.	Ongoing.
Report on the growth of the craft sector in Ards from revenue and employment perspectives with a bi-annual bulletin.	Ards Crafts. Private Sector.	September 2006 and September 2008.

# Development Department Organisational Structure



# Conclusion by Alderman George Ennis MLA, Chairman of the Development Committee



The Ards economy is continuing to change at a rapid pace, from a traditional agricultural and industrial economy towards a more fluid and versatile serviced based one. As you have seen, Ards

Borough Council is a strong, focused, strategic player and will remain the co-ordinator of many willing investors and agencies in the next half decade.

I am pleased to endorse this Strategy for the Ards Economy through to 2008. As always, the Council has taken great solace from the huge numbers of committed public servants and private entrepreneurs who work together to solve problems, make and sustain jobs and – to put it simply - pay mortgages, run cars, make ends meet.

Economic development is not about chasing money to do projects disconnected from the real needs of the economy. It is about commitment to an area, effective communication, holding each other to account, long term planning, minimising weaknesses and celebrating strengths.

Let us briefly celebrate one such strength. There has been exponential growth in the hospitality, crafts and tourism sectors of our economy. What was once a weak economic sector for Ards is now, frankly, its strongest. £16 million per annum reaches Ards from tourism. That is a “turnover” which is the envy of companies with several hundred employees. Tourism has replaced textiles – we must, therefore encourage sustainability and diversity in this plan period.

Ards Borough Council's role as facilitators, enablers, co-ordinators and doers is fully recognised by local businesses that frequently contact the Development Department for advice, assistance or signposting. However, our role does not stop there. The last few years have seen a substantial change of direction with the direct involvement of the Council in town and village regeneration projects – all of which are needed and sustained by the local community.

We will continue to source investment and advice from all quarters, gather knowledge of our area, reward exceptional talent and foster new entrepreneurs of all ages.

Ards is bigger than you think. We are now part of a number of wider partnerships, covering rural County Down (Leader +), neighbouring authorities in Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland (East Border region / Interreg IIIA) and have defined business relationships in Arizona (Peoria, Phoenix) and France (Brittany). These relationships have one common aim – to increase business performance in Ards.

This new strategy will be anything but staid and conventional. Let us make Ards an exceptional place to do business, and let us promote the region where sustainable development is welcomed, encouraged and celebrated.

We must do this in partnership and say it together – the Answer is Ards.

Alderman George Ennis MLA,  
Chairman,  
Development Committee

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# Relevant Documents and Acknowledgments



## Some relevant strategic documents and where you can find them:

Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2001-2015  
[www.doeni.gov.uk/shapingourfuture](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/shapingourfuture)

Ards and Down Area Plan to 2015  
[www.planningni.gov.uk/AreaPlans\\_Policy/Plans/ArdsDown/ArdsDown.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/AreaPlans_Policy/Plans/ArdsDown/ArdsDown.htm)

Invest Northern Ireland's Corporate Plan 2005-2009  
[www.investni.com/corporateplan.pdf](http://www.investni.com/corporateplan.pdf)

Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Draft Corporate Plan 2005 – 2008  
<http://www.nitb.com>

Ards Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2005-2009 - [www.ards-council.gov.uk](http://www.ards-council.gov.uk)

North Down and Ards Institute Corporate Strategy -  
[www.ndai.ac.uk/information/documents/strategy.pdf](http://www.ndai.ac.uk/information/documents/strategy.pdf)

East Down Institute's Development Plan -  
[www.edifhe.ac.uk/information/CollegeDevelopmentPlans/CDP\\_0405.pdf](http://www.edifhe.ac.uk/information/CollegeDevelopmentPlans/CDP_0405.pdf)

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Department for Regional Development  
Department for Social Development  
East Border Region  
East Down Institute  
European Regional Development Fund  
Building Sustainable Prosperity  
Fishing Villages Taskforce  
Greater Phoenix Economic Council  
Invest Northern Ireland  
North Down and Ards Institute  
Open Learning network  
Rural Down Partnership (Leader +)  
Peoria City Council, Phoenix, Arizona  
SEED partners – Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Down and Newry & Mourne Councils  
South East Tourism Partnership / Kingdoms of Down





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This document is available in alternative formats on request and the full Corporate Plan for Ards Borough Council may be accessed on the Council's website:

[www.ards-council.gov.uk](http://www.ards-council.gov.uk)

