

Ballymena

County Antrim

'Mark Three' New Town – Designated 31 July 1967

The 1962 plan for the Greater Belfast region recommended the expansion of a number of existing towns in the region in order to reduce the concentration of population and employment in Belfast. Ballymena's close links with Antrim led to their joint designation and development by a single Development Corporation. Ballymena has a stronger industrial base and a larger sphere of influence and so has most of the large shops, malls, offices and administrative functions. Today, Ballymena benefits from an excellent location on the edge of the Belfast Metropolitan Area, with easy access to the International and City Airports and the ports of Larne and Belfast. It is a significant retail centre and is complemented by nearby tourism attractions. A targeted investment strategy aims to further develop the town's role as a cultural and visitor centre.



Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland

Key facts:

- **Location:** 40 kilometres north west of Belfast, 18 kilometres north of Antrim.
- **2011 Census population:** 33,249, in 12,263 households.¹
- **Local authority:** Ballymena Borough Council (from April 2015 Mid and East Antrim District Council under Northern Ireland's new local government arrangements).
- **Local Plan status:** Ballymena Area Plan 1986-2001.

New Town designation:

- **Designated:** 31 July 1967. The entire rural area was designated, with 'distinguished' boundaries for Ballymena town and the four 'key' villages of Ahoghill, Broughshane, Culleybackey and Kells/Connor.
- **Designated area:** 63,661 hectares.
- **Intended population:** 60,000 (population at designation: 25,000).
- **Development Corporation:** Designated to expand the growth town of Ballymena and villages in the hinterland and redevelop to modern standards. The Ballymena and nearby Antrim New Towns were overseen by a single Antrim and Ballymena Development Commission, but developed as separate entities to reflect their differing characteristics. The Ministry developed the masterplan, with guidance from a steering group of county and rural councils. Development Corporation wound up 1 October 1973.

Housing, deprivation and health:

- The proportion of owner-occupied homes in Ballymena (64.6%) is 6.0% and 1.1% higher than the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively. 15.4% of households are in social rent – 6.1% and 2.8% lower than the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively. 17.4% of households are in private rent – 4.5% and 1.2% higher than the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively.
- In the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010, Ballymena local government district ranks 11 out of 26 (1 = most deprived).

- The 2011 Census reported that 44.2% of Ballymena New Town residents declared themselves to be in 'very good' health – 2.5% and 3.4% lower than UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively. 35.3% of residents declared themselves to be in 'good' health – around 1.5% higher than the UK New Towns and UK averages. 3.7% and 0.9%, respectively, declared 'bad' and 'very bad' health – less than 1% lower than the UK New Towns and UK averages.

Employment/economic profile:

- The Borough has good road and rail network connections and is close to Belfast International and City Airports.
- With a vibrant mix of national and independent businesses, Ballymena is one of the province's top retail destinations.
- Ballymena is one of three hubs within Northern Ireland recognised as having a sub-regional role and is expected to generate higher levels of future growth.
- 41.9% of those aged 16-74 (excluding students) are in employment.

Development Corporation legacy:

- Vesting powers for New Towns were left intact after most of the New Towns Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 was dismantled. Although slowed by changes in the policy and strategy environment, the development of Ballymena New Town carried on according to the masterplan even after it was revised in the adopted Area Plan of 1989.

Key issues for the future:

- Improving the quality of the town centre.
- Accommodating housing growth – the Regional Development Strategy 2035 set the housing growth indicator for 2008-2025 for Ballymena District (not just the town) at 6,400.
- Improving accessibility – public transport access and cycling provision.
- Improving connections and accessibility across the central area and waterfront to improve local accessibility and enhance the tourism offer.

¹ Totals from the following wards: Academy, Ardeevin, Ballee, Ballykeel, Ballyloughan, Broughshane, Castle Demesne, Dunlug, Fair Green, Galgorm, Harryville, Moat, Park, Summerfield

Did you know?

Ballymena is also known as the 'City of the Seven Towers', referring to the seven church towers within the town in the 1800s.