
Museum Mini's Refurbishment

Ballymoney Museum

A Case Study on NI Museum Council's Grant Funding



Ballymoney Museum, part of Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council, celebrates the rich cultural, social, and industrial heritage of the Ballymoney area. The museum is known for its strong community connections and its welcoming, family-friendly approach to learning. Its popular Museum Minis programme introduces young children to local heritage through play, creativity, and sensory exploration, making it a cornerstone of the museum's early-years offer.

Project Summary

The Museum Minis Refurbishment Project transformed Ballymoney Museum's early-years space into a bright, engaging, and inclusive environment where young children and families can explore local heritage through play. The project was made possible by a £10,000 grant as part of the NIMC Local Museum Small Grant Programme. The refurbishment introduced new tactile, sensory, and interactive elements, reimagined the layout, and refreshed the museum's family-focused offer.

The space was themed around the Our Museum Day children's book project, using its characters and illustrations to create a cohesive, story-driven environment. A designer worked with the museum to create a child-friendly space featuring new furniture, toys, sensory elements, and creative interactives – including a feature wall where children can “design their own museum display.”

To support accessibility, the museum introduced four themed sensory packs, ensuring that children with additional needs can participate fully. The result is an inclusive, stimulating space where young visitors can experience Ballymoney's heritage through play, creativity, and storytelling.



Context and Need

Before the refurbishment, staff identified several challenges:

- The Museum Minis area was well-used but ageing
- Resources no longer fully met early-years learning standards
- Sensory and inclusive elements needed expansion
- The space needed a refreshed layout to improve flow and engagement

The project addressed these needs by updating the space with durable, child-safe, and developmentally appropriate materials that support long-term use.

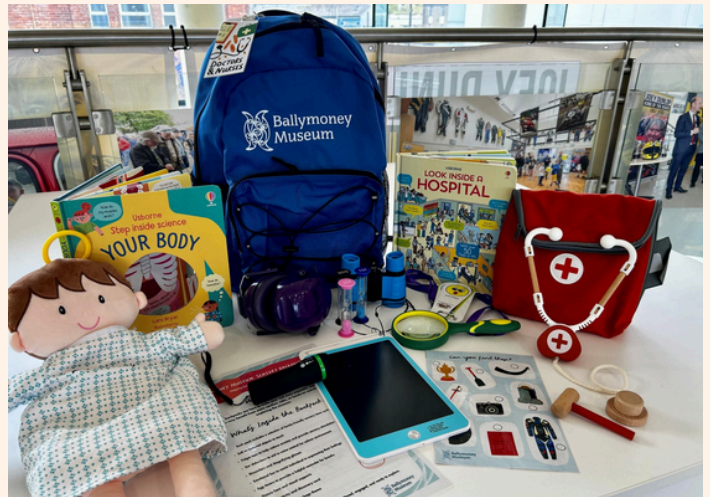


What the Funding Facilitated

The grant enabled the museum to:

- Redesign the Museum Minis area with a new layout and visual theme
- Introduce tactile, sensory, and interactive elements
- Install new child-friendly furniture and creative play resources
- Add a magnetic wall and “design your own museum display” activity
- Create four themed sensory packs for children with additional needs
- Improve accessibility and inclusivity across the space

These improvements have strengthened the museum’s ability to deliver high-quality early-years learning.





Early Learning & SEN Impact

The redesigned space has significantly improved opportunities for early-years learning through:

- Sensory play
- Creative exploration
- Storytelling
- Independent learning

The Our Museum Day theme helps children make connections between stories, objects, and local history. The magnetic wall and creative display activity encourage imagination and problem-solving, while the sensory packs support children with additional needs during both school visits and family visits.

Evaluation Highlights

- Increased use of the Museum Minis space by families
- Positive feedback from parents, carers, and teachers
- Children spending longer engaging with activities
- Schools requesting visits themed around Our Museum Day
- Sensory packs used regularly during workshops and independent visits

Climate Action & Sustainability

While the project's primary focus was engagement and accessibility, sustainability was considered throughout:

- Bespoke furniture and sensory elements were designed for long-term durability
- The project enhanced and repurposed an existing space rather than creating new infrastructure
- Wooden toys were chosen to minimise plastic use

These choices support long-term environmental responsibility within the museum.

Sustainability of Public Services – Access & Infrastructure

The refurbishment has strengthened the museum's capacity to deliver high-quality family experiences and educational programming. The improved facilities support:

- Schools workshops
- Outreach activities
- Family engagement programmes

Repeat visits from local families



Impact on Access



The project has had a strong positive impact on families, schools, and community groups. The refreshed space is more:

- Engaging
- Accessible
- Welcoming
- Inclusive

Children now spend more time exploring the space, and the sensory packs and tactile elements have improved accessibility for children with additional needs. The vibrant, story-driven design has also helped attract new family audiences.

Overall, the refurbishment has strengthened Ballymoney Museum's reputation as a welcoming, family-friendly destination.

Feedback Highlights

Children's Feedback

Parents & Carers

"I think it was really good. I liked the teddys 😊."

"Brilliant. It is lovely, clean, varied. The whole museum was a great find."

"It was the best."

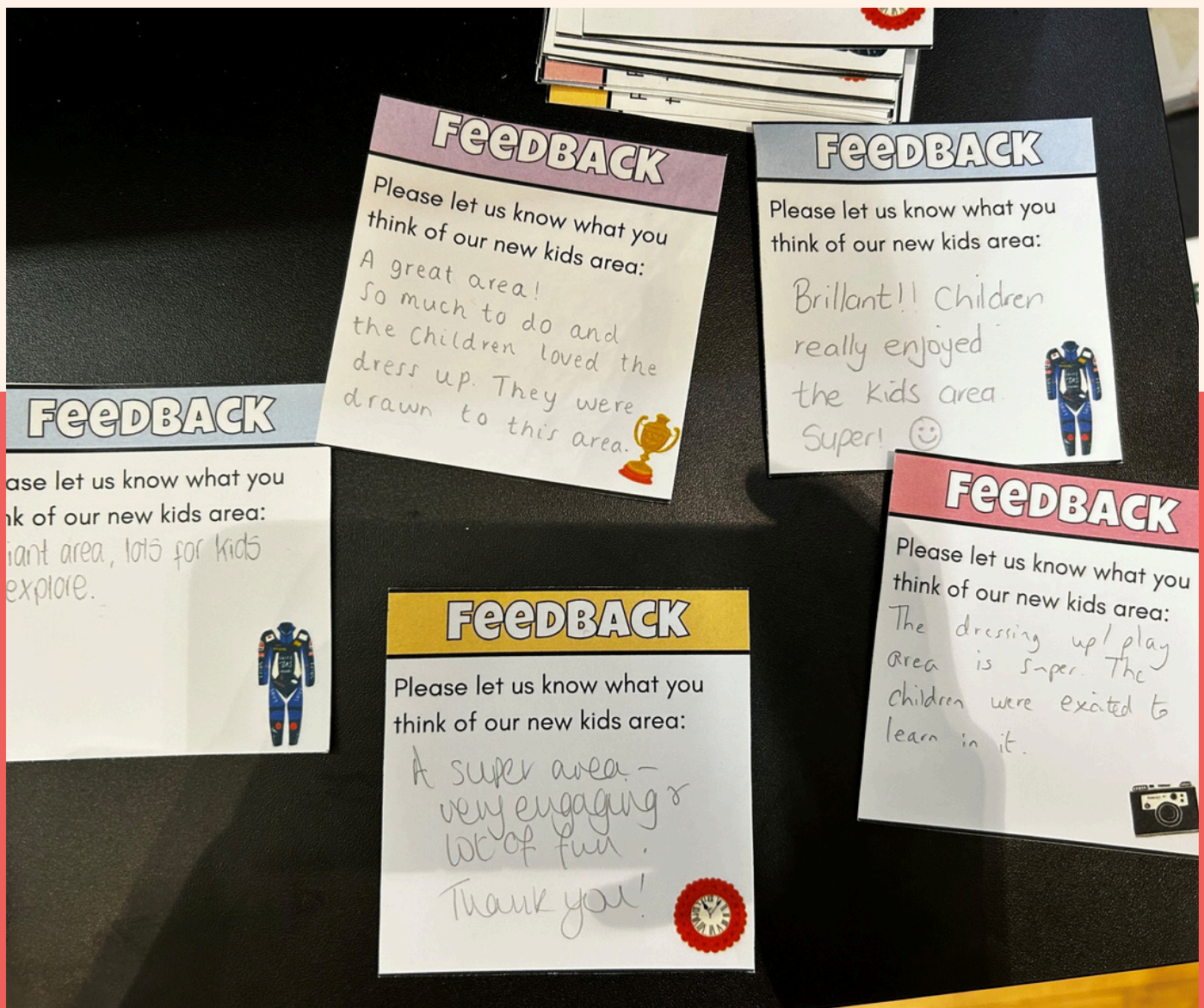
"Great area."

"I loved it, especially the dressing up bit."

"Think the kids area is brilliant this year. Well done!!"

"My two-year-old LOVED it! She wouldn't leave lol."

"Well done!!!"



Overall Assessment

The Museum Minis Refurbishment Project has had a clear and meaningful impact on Ballymoney Museum's early-years and family offer. The redesigned space is brighter, more engaging, and far more inclusive, giving young children a welcoming place to explore Ballymoney's heritage through play, creativity, and storytelling.

The new tactile, sensory, and interactive elements — especially the Our Museum Day theme — have strengthened early-years learning and helped children make simple, meaningful connections with local history.

Accessibility has improved significantly. The introduction of sensory packs and SEN-friendly resources has enabled more children to participate fully, while families and schools are spending longer in the space and returning more often.

Staff have observed higher engagement, smoother delivery of workshops, and increased demand for family-focused programming.

The project has also enhanced the museum's reputation, leading to an unexpected nomination for the Kids in Museums Family Friendly Museum Award 2026, submitted directly by visiting families — a powerful endorsement of the project's success.

Overall, the refurbishment demonstrates how targeted investment can deliver wide-ranging benefits across access, learning, and community engagement.

Thanks to the grant funding and the commitment of the Ballymoney Museum team, the Museum Minis area is now a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable space that will support families, schools, and community groups for years to come.

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