Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Title of Report:	**Low Noise Fireworks**
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	17 November 2026
For Decision or For Information	For Information
For discussion In Committee	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2026-31)	
Strategic Theme	P1 Engaging and Communicating with Our Customers
Outcome	Ensure citizens have genuine opportunities to influence Council policies, strategies, and service delivery decisions.
Lead Officer	Director of Leisure and Development

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	March 2027

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	**No – would need to come from 27/28 budget**
Capital/Revenue	Details included refer to both
Code	Various
Staffing Costs	XXXX

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	**NO**
Legal Opinion Obtained	**NO**

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	**N/A**	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	**N/A**	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	**N/A**	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	**N/A**	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	**N/A**	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	**N/A**	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update in relation to an AORB raised by Cllr Jonathan McAuley at the Environmental Services Committee meeting in November 2025, requesting the introduction of Low Noise Fireworks as a response to the ill effects of fireworks and bangers on pets and livestock.

2.0 Background

Given previous discussions with Cllr McAuley and prior to the AORB being presented to ES Committee, the Tourism & Recreation team had already taken the decision to hold a Low Noise Fireworks display as part of the 2025 Hallowe'en display in Coleraine. This event proved a success and was rescheduled for Coleraine in 2026, unfortunately this display had to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.

However, after the 2025 fireworks displays across the Borough, Council received a number of FoI requests in relation to the sustainability / environmental impact of the products being used and comments were also received in relation to the noise impacts, especially on domestic pets.

Consequently, the Tourism and Recreation team have carried out research based on secondary sources of information, which is detailed in section 4.0 below.

3.0 UK Consultation into Fireworks and Pyrotechnics

Additionally, a consultation response report was taken to the September 2026 ES Committee in relation to the UK Government's Department for Business and Trade (DBT), through the Office for Product Safety and Standards 'Fireworks and Pyrotechnics in the UK Consultation'.

The consultation, which closed on 07 October 2026 explored potential changes to the regulatory framework, in support of the UK Government's Safer Streets Mission to tackle anti-social behaviour. Its aim was to identify an approach that preserves the enjoyment of fireworks for celebrations while reducing the harm, disruption and distress experienced by others.

Specifically, the consultation sought responses on proposals to:

- Restrict the availability of noisier fireworks to the general public, with louder products available only to professional users;
- Add products considered to present unacceptable risks to the existing list of banned pyrotechnic products set out in Regulation 33 of the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 (as amended); and
- Review the regulatory requirements for fireworks and pyrotechnic products currently classified as lower risk, to better reflect the differing levels of risk associated with these products.

One of the questions within the consultation, specifically related to the potential positive benefits of reducing the maximum decibel level of fireworks and our response included the following;

> *Reducing the maximum decibel level of fireworks available to the public in Northern Ireland could have significant positive impacts for residents, animals and local communities. Fireworks are already subject to tighter controls in Northern Ireland through the fireworks licensing system, but noise from lawful private use and illegal or informal use can still cause distress, particularly when fireworks are set off unexpectedly in residential areas. A lower maximum noise limit would reduce the intensity of sudden explosive bangs and should therefore reduce nuisance, fear and sleep disturbance for people living nearby.*

The entire consultation response provided by Council is provided in **Annex A**.

4.0 Overall assessment of existing secondary information

Fireworks are enjoyed by many for celebrations and cultural events. However, their use has become a growing concern, as seen from public complaints, parliamentary debates, and petitions calling for stronger controls due to the negative impacts on neighbourhood safety, vulnerable people, and animals.

This report pulls together published research and guidance on the impact of fireworks on domestic animals, wildlife and local communities. It focuses on professionally organised displays of around 10–12 minutes, such as those delivered by Council.

Fireworks can cause short-term distress and disturbance, but the level of risk depends on the location, type and intensity of sound, timing, frequency and what is nearby. Research specifically examining a single display of this duration is limited.

4.1 Domestic pets and livestock

Dogs may hide, shake, panic or attempt to escape when fireworks are heard. Research highlighted by Dogs Trust and the University of Salford suggests that sound characteristics and exposure are important; lower-noise products may help but cannot remove the risk. A review by the Scottish Government also identifies possible effects on cats, horses and other animals. Sudden flight responses can cause injury to horses or livestock, particularly near grazing areas and stables. Much of the evidence relates to fireworks generally, not just organised displays.

4.2 Wildlife

A radar study in Birmingham recorded increased bird flight activity and higher flight altitudes during fireworks. Research involving 20 free-living greylag geese in Austria found that their average heart rate increased by 96% during New Year celebrations. These findings demonstrate short-term disturbance and stress, however they do not establish long-term population effects from an individual organised display. Bird roosts, coastal areas and protected habitats are therefore important when assessing a site.

4.3 Residents and local communities

Sudden, loud noise may be difficult for some people with sensory sensitivities, including some autistic people, people living with trauma or PTSD, and young children. Fireworks can also produce temporary local increases in particulate air pollution. The extent of any exposure from a particular 10–12 minute event would depend on local conditions. UK guidance recommends advance notice and thoughtful scheduling.

4.4 Does a shorter display reduce the impact?

A short, advertised display offers practical advantages. Residents can plan ahead, animal owners can make arrangements, and the organiser can control the start time, firing period, product choice and exclusion zones. This is very different from repeated or unexpected private firework use, over which Council has no control.

A single loud noise may still frighten an animal or disturb roosting birds. Indeed, there is no established evidence-based threshold at which a 10–12 minute display becomes “safe”, nor a reliable figure for how much less harmful it is than a longer event. UK Government guidance suggests considering shorter displays and refers to five minutes as an example, not as a legal limit.

4.5 Potential practical measures to reduce adverse effects.

If Council are minded to continue with future firework displays, the following steps can be considered as part of the planning and risk assessment for each Council organised display.

Measure	Recommended action
Advance notice	Publish the exact location, start time and expected duration. Where appropriate, notify nearby residents, farmers, stables and care or support organisations directly.
Firework selection	Ask the specialist contractor about lower-noise products and options to reduce loud, low-frequency reports. Consider cost and suitability.
Site and seasonal checks	Identify neighbouring homes, livestock, stables, protected habitats and occupied bird roosts. Seek ecological advice where the location or season suggests particular sensitivities.
Timing and duration	Keep to one clearly defined firing period. Avoid unnecessary tests, delays or repeat firing, and consider a shorter programme where practical.
Environmental controls	Assess wind direction, debris and fallout areas, fire risk and post-event clearance. Maintain professional safety arrangements and the permissions required in Northern Ireland.
Review and learning	Record the actual duration, complaints, verified animal incidents, contractor specifications and any observed wildlife impacts to inform future events.

5.0 Conclusion

The Tourism and Events team could not find information confirming that every 10–12 minute display causes lasting harm, nor that a short event is free from risk.

A documented, site-specific approach would allow the Council to weigh the benefits of organised events alongside animal welfare, wildlife protection and community wellbeing including:

- Careful site selection.
- Reducing avoidable noise.
- Keeping displays short and well managed.
- Informing local communities in advance.

Consequently, it is proposed that officers bring a future report to Committee, once they have undertaken further work, including discussion with Elected Members and ratepayers on potential options to determine the most appropriate way forward. This may include consideration of:

- Delivery of only one Hallowe'en fireworks display p.a. (rotated around 4 main towns)
- Introduction of low noise firework displays in the other three main towns (not just Coleraine).
- Introduction of only low noise firework displays across the four main towns (Coleraine, Ballymoney, Limavady, Ballycastle).
- Explore the viability and costs involved with the delivery of alternative display options (such as via drone light display technology).

6.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

Sources

1 Office for Product Safety and Standards (2025). Organising non-professional fireworks displays. gov.uk/guidance/organising-non-professional-fireworks-displays.

2 Scottish Government (2019). Fireworks legislation and impacts: international evidence review. gov.scot/publications/fireworks-legislation-impacts-international-evidence-review/

3 Dogs Trust/University of Salford. Fireworks research - dogstrust.org.uk/about-us/research-expertise/fireworks-research.

4 Wayman, J.P. et al. (2023). “L-band radar quantifies major disturbance of birds by fireworks in an urban area.” Scientific Reports, 13, 12085. doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-39223-1.

5 Wascher, C. et al. (2022). “Effects of severe anthropogenic disturbance on the heart rate and body temperature in free-living greylag geese.” Conservation Physiology. See also Anglia Ruskin University: aru.ac.uk/news/fireworks-cause-stress-to-wild-birds-new-study

6 Health and Safety Executive. Organising firework displays. hse.gov.uk/explosives/fireworks/using.htm

ANNEX A

Consultation Questions

1. Are there any other particular F2 and F3 fireworks products that you think the general public should not be allowed to buy? Please state which products and give your reasons.

Products:	N/A

You can provide reasons in the space below.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council advises that, in Northern Ireland, Category F2 and F3 fireworks cannot be purchased by members of the public over the counter in the same way they can in many parts of Great Britain. Anyone wishing to purchase, possess, or use these categories of fireworks must hold a valid fireworks licence issued by the Department of Justice. Category F2 and F3 fireworks may only be sold by licensed retailers.

2. If more products are added to the regulation 33 banned list, what consequences might there be for consumers, industry, enforcement authorities, professional users, and others? Please give your reasons

You can list consequences and provide reasons in the space below.

In Northern Ireland, the consequences of adding further products to the regulation 33 banned list should be considered alongside the existing requirement under the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 that most fireworks may only be purchased, possessed and used under a valid fireworks licence issued by the Department of Justice. As the public in Northern Ireland already has more restricted access than in Great Britain, the direct impact on lawful consumers may be more limited.

For consumers, the main positive consequence would be improved protection from products most likely to cause injury, nuisance, anti-social behaviour, distress to vulnerable people and animals, or property damage.

A possible negative consequence is that some individuals may try to obtain banned items through illegal sellers, online sources, cross-border routes or informal supply. This is already a concern in Northern Ireland, and any expansion of the banned list should be accompanied by strong public information and intelligence-led enforcement.

For industry, including importers, distributors and Department of Justice registered retailers operating in Northern Ireland, there may be costs in removing affected stock, changing product ranges, updating compliance checks and ensuring staff understand which products can no longer be supplied. The consequences may be greater for seasonal retailers or smaller businesses. However, a clearer banned list could assist reputable businesses by reducing ambiguity, supporting consistent advice to licence holders, and helping prevent unsafe or non-compliant products entering the legitimate Northern Ireland market.

For enforcement authorities, the impact would be mixed. A clearer list of banned products could help local authorities, Trading Standards, the Department of Justice, PSNI and other relevant agencies take action where prohibited products are found. It may also support more consistent advice to retailers, licence applicants and the public. However, additional banned products could increase the need for inspections, test purchasing, intelligence sharing, online monitoring, seizure, safe storage and disposal of fireworks, and investigation of illegal sales. This is particularly important in Northern Ireland because unlawful possession or use can

occur outside the licensing system and may involve products obtained from unregistered or illegal sources.
3. Do you agree that regulation 33(1)(g) should be amended to make explicit that a firework comprising more than one shot tube is banned from sale to the general public? Please give your reasons.

Agree	✓
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	

You can provide reasons in the space below.
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council agrees that regulation 33(1)(g) should be amended to make it explicit that a firework comprising more than one shot tube is prohibited from sale to the public. Clear wording would reduce ambiguity for suppliers, retailers, licence applicants and enforcement authorities, and would assist in providing consistent advice for businesses and the members of the public on which products may lawfully be supplied. This is particularly relevant in Northern Ireland, where most fireworks may only be purchased, possessed and used under a valid fireworks licence issued by the Department of Justice. Retailers must be registered and may only supply fireworks in accordance with that licensing framework. Making the prohibition explicit would help ensure that the existence of a fireworks licence is not misunderstood or interpreted as permitting access to multi-shot tube products, where such products are intended to be unavailable for public supply. From an enforcement perspective, explicit wording would assist District Councils, Trading Standards, the Department of Justice, PSNI and other relevant agencies by providing greater clarity on the types of products that must not be supplied to members of the public. It would also support more consistent checks of retailers, investigations into illegal supply, and public messaging around fireworks safety. Multi-shot tube products can present greater risks where they are misused, used in inappropriate locations, or obtained outside the licensing system. A clear prohibition would therefore support public safety, reduce nuisance and anti-social behaviour, and help protect vulnerable individuals, animals and property.
4. Do you agree that the age limit for purchasing Christmas crackers should be removed? Please give your reasons.

Agree	✓
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	

You can provide reasons in the space below.

ANNEX A

Under the Windsor Framework, the EU age limit of 12 years for the purchase of Christmas crackers would continue to apply in Northern Ireland.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council agrees that the age restriction on the purchase of Christmas crackers should be removed. In practice, Christmas crackers are a low-risk seasonal product and are widely used in family, hospitality, school, community and workplace settings. Removing the specific age restriction would be a proportionate measure that reflects the relatively low risk posed, and would reduce unnecessary regulatory complexity for retailers and consumers.

The Council considers that removing the age restriction should not affect existing product safety requirements. Christmas crackers placed on the Northern Ireland market should continue to comply with the relevant product safety, labelling and conformity requirements. Retailers, importers and suppliers should still ensure that products are safe, correctly labelled and suitable for normal consumer use.

5. Are there any other specific F1 and P1 pyrotechnics that should have their regulatory requirements increased or decreased? Please state which products, what regulatory requirements you think they should have and give your reasons.

Products:	Marine/Distress flares, smoke canisters

You can provide reasons in the space below.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council considers that increased regulatory requirements should apply to certain pyrotechnics, particularly marine distress flares and smoke canisters, due to the significant risks they can pose to public safety when misused.

Marine distress flares and smoke canisters are designed to generate intense heat, bright light or dense smoke. Many of these products can burn at extremely high temperatures, are difficult to extinguish using water and generate toxic fumes.

They are of particular concern as they are frequently smuggled into sports grounds, concerts and events with large gatherings, where they can create significant safety hazards to persons and crowd management.

Any such measures should be supported by effective enforcement, appropriate penalties for unlawful possession or use, and public awareness initiatives to ensure that these products are used only for their intended emergency purposes.

6. Do you agree the decibel level of fireworks consumers use should be lowered? Choose one of the following options:

No, the maximum noise limit for fireworks should remain at 120 dB (A,imp)	
Yes, to 110 dB (A,imp) (reducing perceived loudness by approximately half)	
Yes, to 100 dB (A,imp) (reducing perceived loudness by approximately three-quarters)	
Yes, to 90 dB (A,imp) (reducing perceived loudness by approximately seven-eights)	✓

ANNEX A

Don’t know	
7. What might be the positive impacts of reducing the maximum decibel level of fireworks available to the general public? Please explain your answer, providing evidence where possible.	
You can provide your answer and explanation in the space below.	
Reducing the maximum decibel level of fireworks available to the public in Northern Ireland could have significant positive impacts for residents, animals and local communities. Fireworks are already subject to tighter controls in Northern Ireland through the fireworks licensing system, but noise from lawful private use and illegal or informal use can still cause distress, particularly when fireworks are set off unexpectedly in residential areas. A lower maximum noise limit would reduce the intensity of sudden explosive bangs and should therefore reduce nuisance, fear and sleep disturbance for people living nearby. A reduction to 110 or 100 dB is unlikely to have a material benefit which would outweigh the regulatory requirements to enforce this change. At 110 or 100 dB there is still a strong likelihood of human startle and disturbance where such fireworks are set-off in a residential environment and particularly when the ignition is unexpected and not part of a display. Given the sensitivity of animals to such sounds 110 or 100 dB is not going to prevent adverse impacts. Therefore, we recommend that the limit is set to 90 dB so that any such change can have noticeable beneficial effect. It is also noted that professional displays will remain ‘louder’. In Northern Ireland, this would complement the existing licensing regime by making permitted public-use fireworks less harmful to neighbours, vulnerable residents, livestock, pets and wildlife. The measure would be most effective if introduced alongside clear Department of Justice licensing guidance, retailer advice, public awareness campaigns and continued action against illegal supply.	
8. What might be the negative impacts of reducing the maximum decibel level of fireworks available to the general public? Please explain your answer, providing evidence where possible.	
You can provide your answer and explanation in the space below.	
The main impact for lawful consumers is likely to be reduced choice. In Northern Ireland, consumers already need a valid fireworks licence to buy, possess and use most fireworks, and only the fireworks listed on the licence may be purchased. A lower noise limit could therefore mean that some products currently available through registered retailers are no longer available for licensed private use, or that licence applications and retailer advice need to be updated. There may also be consequences for registered fireworks retailers, importers and suppliers operating in Northern Ireland. Businesses may need time to identify affected stock, amend product ranges, obtain alternative lower-noise products, update staff training and ensure that products supplied to licence holders meet the revised requirements. Seasonal businesses may be particularly affected if changes are introduced close to Halloween or New Year, when stock is often ordered well in advance. If lower-noise products are more expensive or less readily available, costs could be passed on to consumers or reduce the viability of some lawful sales.	

A further risk is displacement into illegal supply. If consumers perceive the lawful licensed market as too limited, some may seek louder fireworks through unregistered sellers, online routes or cross-border informal supply. This could undermine the intended safety benefits because illegal products may be untested, incorrectly labelled, poorly stored or unsuitable for domestic use.

Professional display operators may experience increased demand if louder products are limited to professional use, which could be positive for organised displays but may also create capacity, cost and scheduling pressures around peak periods. Community groups, sports clubs and local event organisers in Northern Ireland may face higher costs if they move from licensed private use to professional displays. This could reduce the number of lawful community celebrations or encourage smaller informal displays if professional provision is not affordable or available.

There may also be enforcement implications. Local authorities, Trading Standards, the Department of Justice, PSNI and other agencies may need clear technical guidance on how the revised decibel limit will be checked, recorded and enforced. Short-lived firework noise can be difficult to investigate after the event, and evidence from animal welfare organisations has noted that the nature of firework noise can make it difficult to locate the source. If the rule is not simple to understand and enforce, there may be inconsistent advice to businesses and the public.

Finally, the benefits for animals and vulnerable people may be reduced if the public assumes that “low noise” means “silent” or harmless. Animal welfare bodies note that there are no truly silent fireworks and that bright flashes and unpredictability can still cause distress. Therefore, any reduction in decibel limits should be accompanied by clear public messaging, retailer advice, continued promotion of organised displays and alternatives where appropriate, and strong action against illegal supply. On balance, the negative impacts appear manageable if there is a suitable lead-in period, clear guidance and coordinated enforcement across Northern Ireland.

It should be noted that it is not practically possible to measure the noise from a firework in ‘field conditions’ and that all enforcement of a maximum noise level will have to be achieved through a retail offence checked by compliance statements and, if necessary, testing. Testing will be required to be undertaken in controlled conditions and will incur costs to the enforcing authority.

9. How much lead in time would businesses need to prepare for the changes proposed in this consultation and why? Please state a lead in time in months or years, and explain your answer, providing evidence where possible.

Lead in time in months or years:	12 months aligning with buying times for Halloween

You can provide your explanation in the space below.

Businesses would need sufficient time to understand the final legal requirements, review product lines, update purchasing arrangements, train staff, amend sales procedures and ensure that only compliant products are supplied to licence holders.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council considers that a minimum lead in period of 12 months would be appropriate. Fireworks are a seasonal product and the main retail period in Northern Ireland is the run-up to Halloween. Stock is likely to be ordered well in advance, and retailers may otherwise be left with products that can no longer be lawfully sold. A full year would allow businesses to run down existing lawful stock, source alternatives such as lower-

noise fireworks, update supplier contracts and avoid introducing changes immediately before the busiest sales period.

A shorter lead-in time could increase the risk of non-compliance, wasted stock, inconsistent advice and displacement into illegal supply. A reasonable transition period would help reputable businesses adapt while allowing enforcement authorities, Trading Standards, PSNI and local councils to prepare consistent public messaging and enforcement activity.

10. What other things should we consider when setting a lead in time? You may wish to reference the impact on people who buy fireworks, enforcement bodies, police or the general public.

You can provide your answer in the space below.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council notes that the existing regulatory framework for fireworks in Northern Ireland is significantly more restrictive than that which applies in much of Great Britain. In Northern Ireland, the purchase, possession and use of most fireworks is subject to a licensing regime administered by the Department of Justice, whereas access to fireworks is generally less restricted elsewhere in Great Britain.

In considering any further restrictions on the sale or use of fireworks, OPSS may wish to examine incident, injury and enforcement data from Northern Ireland and compare it with equivalent data from Great Britain. Such analysis could provide a useful benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of stricter regulatory controls and determining whether additional restrictions are likely to deliver measurable safety benefits.

Please email this response form to: fireworksconsultation@businessandtrade.gov.uk