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Man charged over drug factory

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Rong Chen is driven away from Ballymena Magistrates Court

This is the man who is accused of operating one of Ulster's biggest ever cannabis factories.

Rong Chen, from Spring Meadows, Coleraine, appeared at Ballymena Magistrate's Court on Saturday after police seized 269 cannabis plants and cultivation equipment worth an estimated £130,000.

The cannabis factory was discovered last Thursday after police officers swooped on the property in the Waterside area of the town.

The 39-year-old faces five charges of cannabis cultivation, possession of class B drugs and possession of class B drugs with intent to supply.

Chen, who was **also accused of abstracting electricity**, was remanded in custody and is due to appear in court at a later date.

Police said that a number of first-floor bedrooms in the semi-detached house had been converted into cultivation rooms, with the windows taped over to block out light.

Heat lamps and a watering system had also been installed in the room.

A blanket was used to conceal the stairs leading to the makeshift factory.

PSNI Inspector Andrew Lemon said the haul would deal a significant blow to the local drugs trade.

"This is a significant seizure and will have a considerable impact in the trade in illegal drugs," he said.