

Minutes of Meeting of the Development Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 1 October 2020 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon and by Virtual Means

Members Present

Councillor McNamee

Councillors Black, Burton, Clarke*, Corry*, Doris, Elattar*, Kerr, Hughes, Kearney, Milne*, Monteith, Wilson*

Officers in Attendance

Mr McCreesh, Director of Business and Communities
Mr M Browne, Head of Tourism**
Ms Linney, Head of Community Development**
Mr Kennedy, ICT Support
Ms Grogan, Democratic Services Officer

Others in Attendance

Councillor S McGuigan*

Deputations

Magherafelt Volunteer Centre***
North West Mountain Rescue Team***
Lough Neagh Partnership School Land's Project***
Cookstown and Western Shores

* Denotes Members present in remote attendance

** Denotes Officers present by remote means

*** Denotes Others present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm.

The Chair, Councillor McNamee welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the meeting through the Live Broadcast. Cllr McNamee in introducing the meeting detailed the operational arrangements for transacting the business of the committee in the chamber and by virtual means, by referring to Annex A to this minute.

D139/20 Apologies

Councillors Ashton and Cuddy.

D140/20 Declarations of Interest

The Chair Councillor McNamee reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declaration of interest.

D141/20 Chair's Business

The Chair advised that questions would be taken after each completed presentation.

D142/20 Magherafelt Volunteer Centre

The Chair welcomed to the committee Ms Michele McKeown, Ms Barbara Kennedy and Ms Mairead Devine from Mid Ulster Volunteer Centre and invited them to make their presentation.

The representatives thanked members for allowing them the opportunity to address the committee and advised that Mid Ulster Volunteer Centre had celebrated 20 years in business. They advised that their vision was to fully recognise the need for an effective and efficient service; to have local presence and experience, local offices which understand and reflect local needs; Person Centred Approach – to provide a sufficiently flexible service to meet local and individual needs; A volunteer centre which is able to work in partnership with others and to support sustainability. (Appendix 1).

The Chair thanked for representatives and asked for any members comments.

Councillor Kearney commended the organisation and the work they carry out and stated that during his term as Chair of the Council he had been invited to the prize giving and witnessed first-hand the excellent job they do. He said that the group had adapted greatly during the pandemic by delivering meals and praised the work that they do with disabled learners and post primary pupils and wanted to formally acknowledge the good work they carry out. He stated that former Councillor George Shiels had been a great advocate of the organisation and had always championed their cause.

The Chair stated that Covid-19 had brought the focus of volunteering to the fore from groups like Magherafelt Volunteer Centre and other groups across the North of Ireland and wished the group all the best for the future and asked them to keep up the great work for the future as the community depended on it.

The Chair advised that there would be a change to the running order of the Agenda and that North West Mountain Rescue Team presentation would now follow Lough Neagh Partnership School Land's Project presentation.

D143/20 Lough Neagh Partnership School Land's Project Located in Derrylaughan

The Chair welcomed Mr Gerry Darby and Dr William Burke representatives of Lough Neagh Partnership School Land's Project and invited them to make their presentation.

The representatives advised that the group's aim was to co-ordinate a range of activities that can make a significant impact on the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of the Lough Neagh Area. Work involved five strategic thematic area: Tourism promotion; Environmental protection, enhancement and sustainability; Heritage conversation, management and promotion; Leisure, recreation and safety; Attracting investment and financial sustainability; £14 million+ secured since 2014. (Appendix 2).

The Chair thanked for representatives for their presentation and asked for any members comments.

Councillor Doris thanked the group for their informative presentation which was very detailed and goes to the heart of the issue. She said that she had grown up in the area her whole life and was well aware of the change in landscape and to the wildlife surroundings and especially over lockdown it was evident to see the increase in walking activities and felt that this was now an opportunity to open this up.

She raised the ongoing issue with the Education Authority for the past 15 years and advised that Linda Dillion MLA had issued a question to the Education Minister which he has to be reply to this month. She said that she was pretty positive that this will be eventually moving forward which was a positive thing.

Councillor Doris referred to local extraction in the area and said that there was no issues within the local community with those extracting the peat as it provided employment and once this was transferred over from the Education Authority then it can be moved forward.

She advised that she had raised the issue of the burning of the moss at a previous committee meeting. She said that years ago that an official burning of the moss had taken place around February time which left the ground not as prone to catch fire as quick and not as much harm to wildlife. She asked if there was any plans to bring such an action forward so as to protect the area and wildlife.

Dr Burke advised that in terms of controlled burning and overall management, currently work was being carried out on a 10 year management plan on the examination of methodology and issues which are there. He stated that within that 10 year management plan there would be series of actions taken into consideration on how fires can be controlled through controlled burns working in conjunction with Northern Ireland Fire Service, committee partners and others around Derrylaughan, Derrytresk and Washingbay. He said that it was an appropriate methodology but there needed to be an appropriate management plan approach agreed in advance to take it forward on the controlling of fires in that area.

Councillor Clarke thanked Mr Darby and Dr Burke on their impressive presentation and concurred with the previous Councillor's comments. He said that he had an interest in the burning of historical heather and that burning patches of the mountain on a yearly basis meant that there were different stages of growth of heather which was vital for the Grouse. He said that because it was burned on a rotation basis this meant that nothing got out of control if something did spark it. He said that there was an issue with DAERA as they were against controlled burning, but felt that this was not correct as this kept things under control and was better for the wildlife and cut out the risk of a massive outbreak of uncontrolled fires.

Mr Darby said that he agreed with Councillor Clarke's comment regarding DAERA's stance on the banning of controlled burning but stated that speaking to the people of that area and feedback received, it wasn't farmers or landowners which were starting the fires but more carried out maliciously. Fire starting was more the fundamental

issue, but he took Councillor Clarke's point about controlled burning as this can have a positive impact if carried out continuously within certain perimeters and limits.

Councillor Kerr said that he had spoken to members of Lough Neagh Partnership and others around the illegal extraction in the area and from previous engagement with members with the group, there had been issues around Planning. He said that Planning Department needed to take a real firm attitude towards this illegal extraction as it was a huge inconvenience whenever there is fire brigades being diverted to an area which could be required for different areas. He also raised concern regarding residents having to keep their windows closed due to smoke.

He referred to the Beekeeping Group at Lough Neagh and said that they were interested in a conservation area for the native Irish Bee and stated that he was aware of other species being mentioned but said that local residents would be keen to set an area up.

Mr Darby concurred with member's comments regarding the bees and also tree planting carried out by football clubs in an appropriate way and also agreed that beekeepers and Irish Bees was of a fundamental importance. In relation to the Planning, he felt that this was a catch 22 situation as they have indicated that the Education Department was not interested in the management of the land as it was a historical hangover from the past and back to the plantation of Ulster era. Planners have suggested that Lough Neagh Partnership seek ownership or long term lease on the project, then this would allow them to work more closely with them in trying to address this as this was having a serious impact on the habitat within that area. He felt that it may an opportunity for Councillors to lobby the Education Department and hoped by November that the lease would be transferred over to the Lough Neagh Partnership and then work can be done more closely with the Planning Department.

The Director of Business and Communities stated that in relation to land and property, officers would be happy to engage with Mr Darby and Lough Neagh Partnership. He said that officers were currently engaging with the Partnership in relation to the Derrytresk, Derrylaughan issue and the input from Lough Neagh has been very positive and very constructive to date and offered his thanks for that. He said as an officer team right across the organisation which includes planning were happy to engage with Lough Neagh Partnership as the body that is recognised as the voice of Lough Neagh. He said across 3 decades Lough Neagh as one of the largest inland waterways in Europe did not have no collective voice, no strategy, no direction, no government department taking ownership, taking responsibility or providing leadership and said that he personally welcomed where Lough Neagh is now and what they are bringing to the table.

The Director advised that Lough Neagh Partnership was supported by all the parties in a structure which allows the community right across the Lough to have a voice. He said that in the past communities in and around Lough Neagh built away and with their back to the Lough, but this was now changing and the community were now seeing what a fantastic resource it is and embracing it again. The community are now beginning to see it beyond fishing and sand extraction and more of a value from both an environmental flora and fauna but in the future as an economic resource, particularly if there was an opportunity to get to the point where it could be linked

through the Ulster Canal with the Shannon as this would be the ultimate prize. He said that the work that was ongoing at the lower Bann, from Portglenone, Bellaghy and Maghera linking into Lough Neagh, this could be implemented with Clones and Shannon that everyone should all strive for.

The Director of Business and Communities concluded by saying that the officer team would be very happy to work with Lough Neagh Partnership as the management structure had the best interests for Lough Neagh. He said that he had previously advised Mr Darby that post Covid that a meeting be convened with every Council around the Lough, elected leaders and those in authority to get Council commitment because collectively, there was an opportunity to make good things happen.

Councillor Black referred to the issue of peat extraction and declared an interest in this matter due to being a member of the Planning Committee.

Councillor Kearney also declared an interest as he also was a member of the Planning Committee.

Councillor Kearney stated that there was a course of action envisaged by the Planning Department currently taking place.

The Chair commended Lough Neagh Partnership for the work they do, and the numerous projects they do each year especially around the curlew and asked that the good work continue.

D144/20 North West Mountain Rescue Team

The Chair welcomed Mr Graeme Stanbridge and Mr Andrew Kelly representatives of North West Mountain Rescue Team and invited them to make their presentation.

The representatives advised that North West Mountain Rescue Team provides a 24/365 call out service on behalf of the PSNI, NIFRS, NIAS and/or Coastguard. They asked for consideration from the Council for a new base within Mid Ulster area. (Appendix 3).

The Chair thanked for representatives and asked for any members comments.

Councillor Kerr enquired if Council should provide a facility and try and waiver the charge of £10 per hour as this could go towards front line services.

Councillor Molloy referred to the interland of Cookstown, Magherafelt and the Sperrins and all the natural areas Mid Ulster had to promote for walking tourism and leisure he felt that a base should be identified as walking tourism was anticipated to grow within the area. He stated that it would be beneficial for this Council to identify a base and suggested that Officers put their heads together to see if anything can be sourced or even signpost the group in the right direction to somewhere it can be of benefit to them.

The Chair concurred with Councillor Molloy and said that last month the Council's walking schedule was being promoted and anticipated when post Covid, walking will

be greatly enhanced especially around Davagh. He said that he was made aware of people becoming lost in Davagh and that the experience would be terrifying if it was getting dark and cold at night and feels that the Council should do what they can to help.

Proposed by Councillor Black

That officers reach out directly with the organisation on this particular point and discuss it further to see what assistance can be provided to see what opportunities there might be.

Seconded by Councillor Molloy

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to agree that Officers liaise directly with North West Mountain Rescue Team to discuss the matter further to see what assistance can be provided and what opportunities there might be sourcing a base going forward.

Councillor Clarke advised that one of the biggest target areas was from the Sperrins down to Newtownstewart, but referred to Draperstown, Maghera area and enquired if this could be a possibility. He stated that a new site in Maghera within an industrial estate should be investigated as a possibility.

Mr Kelly stated that this would be a prime site as it was very central to the community.

Councillor Clarke stated that it would be 20 miles nearer to the centre of the action.

Mr Stanbridge concurred with Councillor Clarke's comments and said that as long as it was close to a main road as much time was wasted getting members to the rescue base and to activate the vehicle to get it onto the road, but were fortunate that there was a strong link with many members living and around the town and a strong membership in the area. He said that it was found that when a base was identified, there was greater recruitment around that area so members were able to activate the vehicle quickly.

Councillor Clarke said that it may be something that could be looked at in Maghera and Draperstown areas as well as Magherafelt to give further options.

The Chair thanked the representatives and asked them to keep up the good work in saving lives.

Councillor Burton left the meeting at 8.02 pm.

D145/20 Cookstown and Western Shores

The Chair welcomed Mr Conor Corr and Ms Clare Henry representatives of North West Mountain Rescue Team and invited them to make their presentation.

Mr Corr provided members with an update on where Cookstown and Western Shores were currently regarding community development and service to the community development support within the rural areas of Mid Ulster. He referred to SPRING Social Prescribing which was a partnership between Healthy Living Centre Members – which includes CWSAN, Bogside and Brandywell Health Forum, the Healthy Living Centre Alliance and Scottish Communities for Health and Wellbeing. This pilot is operational across 5 Trust areas, with a team of 38 Social Prescribers in Northern Ireland and Scotland and over 100 GP practices making referrals. (Appendix 4).

The Chair said that the Social Prescribing Programme sounds to be an excellent and sought clarification on where it was currently available.

Mr Corr advised that it was a pilot project was essentially in the old Magherafelt and Cookstown areas but not operational yet in the Dungannon area. He said that it operated on GP referral, so basically all of the GP's throughout Cookstown and Magherafelt could make referrals into this programme and was fortunate enough to have a good working relationship with GP's in places like Coagh, Cookstown and Maghera, Stewartstown.

The Chair referred to the online programme and issues around limited Broadband in some areas and asked if this affected the service.

Mr Corr agreed that this could be the case, not only broadband and access to IT, but there were clients/patients in the countryside and urban areas which don't have access to adequate equipment. He also advised that others were not savvy with IT and not able to operate emails or social media as some clients were quite older.

The Chair thanked for representatives and asked for any members comments.

Councillor Kerr said that he wanted to personally thank Mr Corr and his team for the presentation and for all the help with the Coalisland Food Bank in the early stages of the pandemic. He said that several issues had been identified with the governance and the signposting towards community grants etc.

Councillor Black thanked the representatives for their presentation and said that it was very positive to see such availability of a service which contributed to a holistic approach to an individual's health. He raised the issue of different referral points for example the good working relationship with GP's and enquired overall how the response has been and whether it has been a positive uptake or has there been any particular barriers in building relationships in referrals coming the group's way.

Mr Corr advised that there wasn't necessarily any barriers, but most or all GP's were extremely busy and some see the Social Prescribed Programme as a way of getting clients/patients of their books and into the community which helps their overall health and wellbeing. In stated that they have not come across any negativity in relation to the Social Prescribed project, but some GP's were more au fait with the outcomes as it is seen as a new phenomenon in the area within the past few years and may take some other GP's a little longer to see how it works, but the group would work with them to provide reassurance going forward.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their impressive presentation and stated that the group provided outstanding work and wished them well in the future. The live broadcast ended at 8.25 pm

D146/20 Duration of Meeting

The meeting commenced at 7 pm and concluded at 8.28 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____