

Report on	Sperrin Partnership Project
Date of Meeting	September 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Michael Browne

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on progress of the Sperrins Partnership Project and seek approval for future support funding.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Sperrins Future Search Conference entitled 'The Sperrins – Reaching New Heights, Realising Our Potential' was held in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on 27 th – 29 th September 2017.
2.2	The event brought together a group of key stakeholders to draft and agree an action plan for the future development of the Sperrins and in particular the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
2.3	<p>The Sperrins Partnership Project is a joint collaboration between four councils across the Sperrin area Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council.</p> <p>Each Council in 2018 committed to equal financial contribution towards the project delivery and have also funded the Sperrins Future Search initiative. The funding was originally intended to be for the financial year 2019/2020 but due to delays in recruiting staff this support was not apportioned until the financial year 2020/2021.</p>

3.0	Main Report
3.1	A Sperrins Partnership Project Officer and part time Administrative Support have been appointed and took up their respective roles in October 2020.
3.2	<p>Work completed or progressing since mid-October 2021 includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Approval and sign off of the Sperrins Partnership Agreement between the partners councils; ➤ A Governance Structure for the project drawn up and agreed at Board level; ➤ The formation of a Sperrins Partnership Board; ➤ The development and launch of a new website dedicated to the project www.sperrinspartnershipproject.com; ➤ An official Launch of the Sperrins Future Search Report and Actions Plans; ➤ A review and update of the Brand and Tourism Action Plan. ➤ The formation of the Brand and Tourism Thematic group; ➤ Engagement with Statutory Agencies; ➤ Support, assistance and promotion of collaborative projects including, the Sperrins Sculpture Trail and IAT (International Appalachian Trail) projects.
3.3	There are a number of projects which each of the partners councils are leading on that will support the collaborative work of the partnership and enhance the product offering in the region.
3.4	<p>The Sperrins Sculpture trail will consist of 3 iconic pieces of artwork positioned in spectacular settings within the Sperrins. The sculpture trail is designed to promote the natural and built heritage of the region and encourage rural tourism and out of state visitors whilst preserving the natural assets of the rural community.</p> <p>This project is a working partnership between Derry City and Strabane District, Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.</p> <p>The International Appalachian Trail (IAT) links the mountains in West Donegal through to Larne in Co. Antrim along the geological Appalachian trail. The route crosses 6 different council areas which include the 4 Sperrins partnership councils with varying distances in each council.</p> <p>The OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory located in Davagh Forest recently opened its doors to visitors and is the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland. The Park is an initiative by Mid Ulster District Council and sits within the Sperrins AONB.</p> <p>Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council recently secured external funding for enhancement works at Banagher Glen located in the Southwest of the council area just outside Dungiven. Once complete, the project will improve and enhance the visitor experience at this stunning location. The project will create opportunities for the local community and visitors to enjoy the site on a year-round basis and also create opportunities for visitors to explore the High Sperrins on foot.</p>

	<p>Garvagh mountain bike trail located on the Sperrins boundary within Causeway Coast and Glens has proved to be a very popular attraction. The project has created a Community Health Hub in Garvagh Forest through the development of a multi-use walk and off-road family cycling trails.</p> <p>In Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area recent improvement work was completed at Gortin Glen Forest Park. The redevelopment of Gortin Glen Forest Park has transformed it into a family friendly outdoor experience and includes a destination Play Park, trim trail, additional parking and the creation of mountain biking trails.</p> <p>The project has a number of priorities over the coming months which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Commencing work on the delivery of the short- and long-term actions contained within the Brand and Tourism Action Plan; ➤ Identifying funding opportunities and creating the respective business cases (HLF, RDP, Peace Plus etc) ➤ Completing an audit of the tourism product of Sperrins Region; ➤ Forming strong cross boundary partnerships; ➤ Researching and identifying the best practice delivery structure for Sperrin region; ➤ The formation and development of the remaining Thematic Groups.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
4.2	<p>Financial:</p> <p>The Sperrins Partnership Project is presently funded by 4 councils at total annual cost of £88,000. Going forward it is anticipated that the annual operating cost will remain the same. Officers are currently looking at options to secure additional funding from external sources for relevant projects. Each council had committed circa £22,000 for the current financial year 2020-2021.</p>
4.3	<p>This contribution includes salary and programming costs and concludes in October 2021. A further financial contribution for a further year until October 2022 and thereafter annually is requested to extend the project to maintain momentum and build on early success and allow for effective forward planning and project management</p>
	Human: Support by council officers to manage and deliver the project
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A

	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	The members agree to continue to offer financial support for the continuation of the Sperrins Partnership Project at a cost of £22,000 annually. This funding will be vital to ensure that the Sperrins Partnership Project can deliver on its vision as outlined at the Sperrins Future Search Conference.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Sperrins Partnership Board - Terms of Reference at appendix 1</p> <p>A Project Road Map is attached at appendix 2.</p>