Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

13 May 2021

Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Development Committee to be held in The Chamber, Magherafelt and by virtual means Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt, BT45 6EN on Thursday, 13 May 2021 at 19:00 to transact the business noted below.

In accordance with the spirt of the recent COVID restriction, Members are strongly encouraged to join virtually as the preferred option. Should you need to attend in person then provision will be made at the Council Offices, Magherafelt. Please notify Democratic Services in advance if this is the case.

A link to join the meeting through the Council's remote meeting platform will follow.

Yours faithfully

Adrian McCreesh
Chief Executive

AGENDA

OPEN BUSINESS

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
   Members should declare any financial and non-financial interests they have in the items of business for consideration, identifying the relevant agenda item and the nature of their interest.
3. Chair's Business
4. Deputation - Killeeshil and Galbally First Responders

Matters for Decision

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Items restricted in accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. The public will be asked to withdraw from the meeting at this point.

Matters for Decision

20. Tender for Direct Debit Bureau Services to Include an Online Joining/Membership Platform
21. Tender to supply willow to Cookstown Leisure Centre
22. Gortgonis Project

Matters for Information

23. Confidential Minutes of Development Committee held on 15 April 2021

Report on	Regional and Minority Languages Bursary Programme 2021/22 and Irish Language Activity Funding Programme 2021/22
Date of Meeting	Thurs 13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Tony McCance, Head of Culture & Arts
Contact Officer	Déaglán Ó Doibhlin, Irish Language Development Officer

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	To update Council on the proposed Regional and Minority Language Bursary programme 2021/22
1.2	To update Council on the proposed Irish Language Activity Funding Programme 2021/22
1.3	To seek decision from Council regarding approval to publicly advertise both programmes.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The Action Plan for the Development of the Irish Language, as approved by Council identified the following key themes: Theme 1: *Promoting Opportunities to Learn Irish,* funding support would be made available for local people to attend recognised residential language learning courses and Theme 2: *Irish Language in the Community,* funding would be made available for external language, cultural and sporting organisations for the promotion of Irish language events.
2.2	The purpose of the Regional and Minority Language programme that is delivered across Mid Ulster District Council is to assist residents of the district in attending approved residential summer courses in order to achieve fluency in a regional or minority language.
2.3	The purpose of the Irish language activity funding programme is to identify, to assist and to support groups and organisations seeking to provide events and activities through the Irish language across Mid Ulster from June 2021 to March 2022.
2.4	In 2019, 145 local people availed of a Regional and Minority language bursary from Mid Ulster District Council. Due to Covid19 restrictions no bursaries were

	made available during 2020 as all residential courses were cancelled. There is still considerable doubt as to whether courses will be permitted to go ahead in Summer 2022 but on the basis that they do, it is expected that there will be a high level of interest and uptake.
2.5	In 2020/21, 8 voluntary and community groups, schools, sports, arts and cultural organisations organised events and activities in their local area through the medium of Irish Language with assistance from Council's Irish language activity funding.
2.6	Subject to Council approval, a public call will be issued in relation to the 2021 Regional and Minority language bursary scheme. Individuals will be invited to submit funding applications. Officers within Culture & Arts Services will assess and process applications prior to submission to Council for consideration.
2.7	Subject to Council approval a public call will also be issued with regard to June 2021 to March 2022 Activity Funding Programme. Groups/organisations will be invited to submit expressions of interest applications. The Irish Language Officer team will follow up on Expressions of Interest with all interested groups to discuss their project ideas and to support and develop their projects prior to submission to council for consideration.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Mid Ulster District Council has adopted an Irish Language Policy which commits Council to the implementation of an Action Plan to develop the language in the district, and the above actions are specified within the plan.
3.2	The activities delivered in 2020/21 will be reviewed on completion to measure success and to shape future planning.
3.3	Community events and activities supported will complement existing Council services including Arts and Culture, Tourism and Community Development activity.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**<u>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</u>** Financial: The required funding to support the delivery of the Regional and Minority Language bursary scheme and the Irish language Activity Funding Programme has been budgeted from the 2021/22 Regional and Minority Language budget.
	Human: Irish Language officers and other relevant staff within Arts and Cultural Services will offer assistance and support in terms of knowledge and experience for all applicant groups and individuals where required.

	Risk Management: Cognisance of the impact of COVID restrictions and how these may impact on residential language tuition in Summer 2021. On this basis, bursaries will be awarded on the basis that the Language schools actually take place.
4.2	**<u>Screening and Impact Assessments</u>**
	Equality and Good Relations Implications: The implementation of the Activity Funding and the Regional and Minority Language Bursary programmes will strengthen partnerships between Council and community, empowering communities at grass roots level and encourage greater collaboration among groups.
	Rural Needs Implications: None
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1 5.2	Permission is sought to publicly advertise the Regional and Minority Language Bursary Programme 2021/22 Permission is sought from Council to issue a public call for Expressions of Interest for support under the Irish Language Activity Programme 2021/22
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	n/a

Report on	Virtual Tours – Hotel Cluster
Date of Meeting	13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Charmain Bell

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

1.0	**Purpose of Report**
1.1	Propose supporting the Mid Ulster Hotel Cluster with the development of virtual tours for weddings and conferences.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The Hotel Cluster is one of the four Mid Ulster cluster groups, established as part of the Tourism Development Group under the Mid Ulster District Tourism Strategy.
2.2	It is a platform for all nine designated hotels within the district to meet and work collaboratively together, facilitated by council officers.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Hotels have been affected significantly by COVID closures. Within the past year, April 2020-March 2021 hotels have been closed for 245 days (67%), 82 days (22%) operated under tight restrictions, and 38 days (10%) operating under restrictions with a curfew.
3.2	The hotel sector for Mid Ulster have a strong wedding and conference business which contributes substantially to the economic development of the area with bed-nights and visitor spend. Weddings and conferences are key revenue generators for the hotel industry.
3.3	Hotels have found it extremely challenging to showcase their wedding/conference proposition, especially during the peak seasons for engagements i.e. Christmas, New Year and Valentine's Day. Hotels are not permitted to show perspective couples or business representatives around their premises, which is directly affected by the uncertainty of the re-opening date.
3.4	To help attract and secure wedding and conference bookings, it is proposed to support the hotels within the district who are registered with Tourism Northern Ireland, to produce virtual tours. This will allow a 'virtual' walk through of the hotel to help sell to customers.

3.5	The videography and imagery will also provide the necessary collateral for content on the new Mid Ulster Tourism Website, which will be essential to help promote the wedding and conference business in Mid Ulster post COVID.
3.6	It is proposed that each hotel will receive financial support to produce a 2 minute virtual video. The estimated cost is £500 per hotel which will include 4 hours video and still photography, 6 hours editing, and production of the video with copyright free music.
3.7	An expression of interest will be issued to each hotel for completion. A quotation specification will be developed and issued by council officers to ensure best value for money.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: £4,500 if all nine hotels participate. Existing tourism budget.
	Human: Support by council officers to manage and deliver the project
	Risk Management:
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	To support the production of virtual tours for Mid Ulster Hotels.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**

Report on	Community Development
Date of Meeting	13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Claire Linney, Head of Community Development
Contact Officers	Philip Clarke - Community Services Manager, Oliver Morgan – Good Relations Manager, Michael McCrory - PCSP Manager, Martina Totten Community Planning Coordinator

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	Peace Plus Response – to agree the response to Peace Plus.
1.2	Community Development – to note the community development update.
2.0	Background
2.1	Peace Plus Response – SEUPB has issued a consultation document on the future Peace Plus Programme and is seeking comments on this.
2.2	Community Development – to note the community development update. Community Development includes the following areas: Community Support, Good Relations, PCSP, Connecting Pomeroy and facilitation of Community Planning.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Peace Plus Response – Please see attached the Peace Plus consultation and proposed Council response at Appendix 1.
3.2	Community Development Community Support Community grants close now on the 12th May 2021 with recommendations still to June Committee. The grants were extended to allow groups to plan ahead for a range of projects taking account of direct delivery and social distancing. Emergency Support Funding Council is engaging with DFC regarding future emergency funding for Mid Ulster.

	Good Relations Good Relations is commencing the delivery of the new plan, pending final agreement by the NI Executive Office. Peace IV Local Action Plan – The request for the extension to the programme and the Towns Shared Space project (awnings and equipment to support outdoor events) is still with SEUPB for decision. An update on the STEP programme, with agreement from SEUPB is to deliver a communications project led by the partner, and a research project to support future peace delivery led by Council. The PCSP team has commenced delivery of their new plan under DOJ and NIPB.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**<u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u>** None **<u>Professional Support</u>** None
4.2	**<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u>** None
4.3	**<u>Risk Management Implications</u>** None
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1 5.2	To agree the response to Peace Plus. To note the community development update.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
6.1	Appendix 1 Peace Plus delivery and Peace Plus response.

COUNCIL RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE NEW PEACE PLUS CROSS BORDER EU FUNDING PROGRAMME FOR THE PERIOD 2021-27

Comhairle Ceantair Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster District Council

April 2021

INTRODUCTION
Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) welcomes this opportunity to respond to SEUPB's consultation exercise with respect to the plans for the new Peace Plus Programme.

The design and development of the new PEACE PLUS Programme provides what may be the last opportunity to learn from previous programmes and develop an improved programme that will produce real and sustained economic growth to underpin a peaceful society post Brexit.

Theme 1 – Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities

1.1 Co-designed local community Peace Action Plans

Welcome the local community Peace Action Plans looking at skills development, youth development, educational linkages, shared space, regeneration and health and wellbeing. However, it is important that poverty is also included within this as there would be a correlation between poverty and being able to fully participate in the opportunities of a peaceful society. Projects should co align with the Mid Ulster Community Plan.

The regional programmes need to support our Programme for Government priorities to grow and develop the region to allow for people to have opportunities from peace. These should be departmental priorities at a regional level that impact across all areas of Northern Ireland. At a sub regional level these need to be in line with major priorities such as the growth deal for the sub regions and key priorities within community planning. Similar to other programmes, regional delivery needs to link to local and ensure no duplication of target audiences to maximize the peace funding.

1.2 Empowering Communities

It is unclear as to how these elements are different from the opportunities which are intended/can be delivered via the Local Peace Action Plans (1.1) and Building Positive Relations (1.3) and how the funded activities will ensure complementarity and not duplication.

Community–based, localised solutions and bespoke interventions are required to respond to the current and emerging needs of vulnerable cohorts and communities. However, the provision of a small grants programme, due to the smaller scale and localised nature of the activity, is potentially best determined at local level based on identification of needs and opportunities.

Clarity is needed on the proposed implementation mechanism which will ensure ease and timely access to the proposed funds. Scrutiny of funding applications would be best undertaken by a more locally based implementation body, which understands the local environment best, than by a centralised authority.

In comparison the development of institutional capacity and anti-sectarian activities may best be achieved through regional level activity which involves collaborative action by a number of stakeholders. This may therefore sit outside the scope of an individual peace action plan and is appropriate to sit in a separate regionally based funding strand – perhaps within Building Positive Relations.

1.3 Building Positive Relations

There needs to be a greater flexible approach to outcome towards a shared society and peace rather than every action having to be specific to cross community engagement. For example, undertaking skills development of people will encourage greater opportunities for economic growth and then for engagement in mixed workplace environment, rather than the skills development being about counting numbers of cross community participants. These should be linked to the strategic priorities within community plans.

It is noted that the budget for this theme has increased from €16.4m in Peace IV to the proposed €30m. There is an increased need for social inclusion following the pandemic and a focus on wellbeing. Funding which promotes social inclusion regardless of background will therefore assist in meeting this need and continue to support the development of a peaceful and just society where everyone can live in safety and in the absence of prejudice.

Additional clarity on how this activity strand is distinct from the Empowering Communities strand (1.2) would be beneficial in ensuring complementarity of funded initiatives and clarity for potential applicants.

1.4 Re-imaging Communities

Significant issues still exist in relation to the segregation of communities and the prevalence of contested spaces. In many cases this is not restricted to visible manifestations of contested space (such as peace walls), but also includes many areas within the region where patterns of segregation are reinforced by community infrastructure which accommodates segregation and prolongs community division. The fear of using unfamiliar spaces can deter people from using accessible facilities and spaces and thereby impede community cohesion.

The funding allocated to reimaging communities is a priority, however the scale of funding proposed at €60 million may not be sufficient to achieve the impact needed.
Theme 2 – Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation

The Council, in partnership with Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon and Omagh & Fermanagh Councils are developing a Growth Deal bid. Development of a Mid-South West (MSW) Growth Deal that will ‘supercharge’ the growth of our economy and ensure inclusive prosperity for the Mid-South West region. Any work by Peace Plus

on Economic Regeneration and Transformation should be done so in partnership with the MSW Growth Deal to ensure resources and benefits are maximised.
Investment programmes for research, green economy, economic growth etc. and need to have greater outreach to rural areas. This investment should be aligned to programme for government priorities to drive the regional forward, and to match fund key investments such as the MSW Growth Deal.

2.1 SME development and transition

The Mid Ulster region straddles the border and is a highly entrepreneurial, private sector led economy and the Council welcomes the focus of this particular policy objective. Despite the area's high concentration of SMEs and above average concentration of activity in advanced manufacturing, there is a need to foster higher levels of innovation, R&D and enabling advanced technologies e.g. AR and VR.
Assistance in the form of business support mechanisms such as training and mentoring programmes at a local level to help SMEs grow and develop is required, as well as building the capacity of others to take the first step towards entrepreneurship.
Sectors such as manufacturing, engineering, agri-food, construction, retail, hospitality and ICT contribute significantly to the economy of Mid Ulster. Going forward therefore, it is critical that a broad range of SME's from these sectors receive support to consider ways of becoming more innovative and export orientated, thus driving growth and productivity. The Council believes that a key component of driving economic development and growth is the provision of assistance for capital programmes to acquire and develop modern business support infrastructure (Business Parks, Innovation Centres, and Digital Tech Hubs).

Investment is required to reinvigorate the tourism sector which has been significantly impacted by pandemic restrictions. This sector requires not only innovation funding, but also support in ensuring visibility on a national and international stage and ensuring economic sustainability. Funding which enables clustering of tourism business and increased linkages around natural and cultural heritage tourism offerings would assist, as would infrastructure investment
The support and further development of the SME sector will address issues of economic inequality and enable sustainable economic and social development within the Border region, through increased opportunities for people to obtain employment, post Brexit.

2.2 Innovation Challenge Fund

The engineering sector is of profound importance to Mid Ulster's economy – especially in key specialisms such as the manufacture of mining and quarrying machinery, production of general and special purpose machinery etc., which have linkages and supply chain associations with the construction and food & agri-food sectors. For instance, 40% of world's mobile crushing and screening equipment is made in Mid Ulster. However, the continued growth and success of the engineering sector in the Mid Ulster area cannot be taken for granted. The sector faces challenges going forward including Brexit, technological disruption, skills shortages, access to talent and planning for Industry. The MSW Growth Deal aims to bring forward an Engineering Centre of Excellence within the district, dedicated to the pursuit of innovation in the

engineering sector and based upon the UK Catapult model. The MSW Growth would welcome support from the Peace Plus programme to this.
Given the need to upskill our young people and to increase regional STEM competitiveness, STEM based activities for young people should not be limited to designated TSN areas of deprivation. Many rural areas which are not economically competitive within this sector do not fall within the designation of disadvantaged/deprived, despite significant economic and social challenges. Young people across the region struggle to find job outside the traditional employment areas of retail, service and hospitality. Therefore, all should be eligible to benefit from additional STEM oriented training opportunities.

2.3 Programme areas skills development

Addressing the gap between skills demand and skills supply to create new jobs in the Mid Ulster region is a key priority. The Mid-Ulster sub region is home to over 8,500 small businesses, which is the second largest concentration of small businesses outside of the Belfast Metropolitan area. As the most entrepreneurial region in Northern Ireland, its business base provides the lifeblood of the local economy, whilst the skills and capabilities of its workforce are vital to its sustainability and growth. The availability of a high performing workforce, appropriately equipped to meet the current and future needs of the local industry's key sectors is therefore of vital importance. From education through to industrial strategy, the skills that are developed are important both for the local economy and for providing an opportunity for individuals.
However, the Council is in a strong position to target skills needs of priority/emerging growth sectors through the industry-led Mid Ulster Skills Forum, which have been established to bring a collaborative dynamic between local businesses, colleges/universities and industry sectoral bodies. The Council believes that skills and labour shortages can be addressed to meet the European Pillar of Social Rights through providing opportunities for equal access to skills training, apprenticeships and leadership development. This will add value by improving labour mobility and having better gender opportunities, equal rights, social protection and working conditions.

2.4 Smart Towns and Villages

The Mid Ulster region is facing challenges with the declining health of our town centres and villages as a result of online shopping and out of town shopping. These urban and rural centres play an important role in bringing citizens together and providing a social and community focal point for people all ages. However, they need urgently to adapt, transform and find a new focus in order to survive. The PEACE PLUS Programme provides an opportunity to enable the development and re-imagination of these centres as multi-functional places with a diverse offer, which contribute to the economic performance of the area as a whole. Investment in developing 'shared spaces' will contribute to peace and reconciliation.

It is noteworthy that local government is requesting the transfer of "Regeneration" powers and budgets from the Department for Communities. Such powers would enable Councils to maximise the potential funding under this particular policy objective.

Mid Ulster has the second worst broadband coverage in NI and therefore, the Council would support broadband enhancement across the region – with an emphasis on fibre and addressing key deficits in high speed broadband provision across the border region ensuring that existing limitations in provision do not become barriers for future provision. The increased use of remote working has emphasised the lack of broadband connectivity in rural areas and placed already disadvantaged communities. Funding is needed to support fibre broadband connectivity to public buildings, digital hubs, co-working spaces.

The potential also exists for 'innovation projects / hotspots' in selected areas with higher capacity (e.g. 5G networking) which have the potential to bring higher connectivity benefits to a larger critical mass of economic activity. These hotspots will help make locations 'technology ready testbeds' capable of attracting companies and related investment.

Theme 3 – Empowering and investing in our young people.

3.1 Shared Learning Together Education Programme

It is important under PEACE PLUS to consider the wider implications of people and society when engaging in peace building. Bringing people together has a role; however, a greater priority is social mobility through economic opportunity; through creating the environment and conditions to develop such opportunities.

The Council is of the view that the new Programme needs to give consideration to the overall outcome of what it is seeking to achieve and a more strategic direction is required. PEACE PLUS should concentrate on the strategic issues impacting on peace; including social mobility and poverty, which are impacted by education (including skills) to access economic opportunities. The wider environment to support people in education and long-term impact on change is also important including housing, environment etc. Delivery should be through a number of strategic organisations through co-design via community planning and focus investment on priorities and in particular education (education not just formal but education through skills development).

The new Programme should not seek to tinker at the edges of society in terms of addressing a peaceful society through small programmes, but focus on establishing a society where all people have the best opportunity in life through education (and skills) to access job opportunities alongside the creation of an environment where our services and spaces are shared and open to all (developing shared spaces and services).

It is recognised however, that young people need support now. Inclusive education provision within NI is most commonly achieved at early years and third level education. Therefore, priority should be placed on funding shared education activities for the primary and post- primary sectors.

3.2 Peace Plus Youth Programme

The Council is of the view that peace building activities for children and young people should be delivered through our schools and Education Authority (EA) Youth Division, to maximise young people's participation. There are existing projects such as the Signature project and EA Youth cross community leadership programme, where PEACE PLUS could add real value. Delivery within school time is important to give as many children and young people as possible the opportunity to develop cross community friendships.

The restricted age profile of potential beneficiaries (14-24) is a significant concern, particularly when recent press reports highlighted that children as young as 12 were engaged in active displays of violence on our streets. The approach taken in the shared learning together programme of incorporating "sharing from the start" should be mirrored for this investment area, to avoid losing a generation of young people whose views become entrenched before intervention is possible. Activity also needs to be allowed within the school day to maximise participation.

3.3 Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Recent reports outline that NI has one of the world's highest prescription rates for anti-depressants and prescriptions. Ulster University identified in 2020 a survey of mental health in young people 12.6% of children and young people in NI experience common mood disorders such as anxiety and depression – 25% higher than other UK nations. This investment area is therefore of high priority and budgetary provision should be reflective of the actual need.

There are good examples delivered with schools, universities and the Trust such as the Mid Ulster Post Primary Schools Peace IV funded Schools for Hope programme to engage all post primary schools across the district in a focused programme to improve children and young people's resilience and mental health. The Schools for Hope model needs to be sustained and extended to primary schools. Any mental health initiatives need to be through agreement with the Trust/ EA and link to the Mental Health Strategy for the areas.

Q7 Theme 4 – Healthy and inclusive communities.

4.1 Collaborative Health and Social Care

The Covid pandemic has highlighted the need for integrated and collaborative mechanisms for delivering effective health care to the whole population regardless of land borders. The pandemic will however, also have resulted in many individuals being delayed in obtaining diagnostic care and/or health care treatments for ill health and a huge challenge will be to clear waiting lists and deliver services on both sides of the border. Ensuring cross-border collaboration in the development and delivery of care packages will be a benefit to both jurisdictions.

Cross-border funding has played a key role in advancing and promoting health cooperation between the jurisdictions. CAWT is a very good example of how funding has advanced this and created an excellent model of partnership working.

4.2 Rural regeneration and Social Inclusion

The pandemic has amplified the benefits of remote working and quality of life to be achieved within a rural environment. This creates an opportunity to focus support on key investments including enabling remote working through enhancing infrastructure and developing a network of remote working hubs, and rejuvenating rural towns and villages, including addressing dereliction. Cross border connections cannot be about bringing people together on programmes it is the larger strategic infrastructure that will create sustained contact and real engagement between areas and communities. Examples include: the Ulster Canal, road links, shared services, creating shared spaces at our border communities.

In learning from Peace IV it is important that the new PEACE PLUS Programme give consideration to key principles and outcomes and not setting restrictive targets regarding engagement and contact time. Whilst it is important to bring people and communities together, it is still recognised that there are times when communities are clearly demonstrating they are moving forward and particularly in relation to the development of shared space. For example if a community is prepared to develop shared space through removal of graffiti, emblems, bonfires and reimaging art pieces; these are key outcomes for peace without the need to have cross community contact hours. Local delivery should concentrate on changing places and space for wider society.

4.3 Victims and Survivors

As referenced in the document.

Theme 5 – Supporting a Sustainable and Better Connected Future.

5.1 Biodiversity, Nature Recovery and Resilience
A Green Society is becoming increasingly important, and the focus and champions among young people is of great value to ensure our environment is not only sustained for our future but that it supports an equitable and quality life for all. The climate change agenda is important and there is a need for a coordinated approach to ensuring that everyone plays their part and contributes to protect our environment. We also must provide for economic sustainability and growth, as well as equitable quality of life for people so that they can afford the quality of lifestyle needed to support good health.

The focus of this policy objective should be inclusive of all opportunities for green innovation and target support to promote resource efficiency among SMEs. This would provide an opportunity for the private sector across Mid Ulster and the border region to make a positive impact on the environment.
Given the increased focus on biodiversity and the clear need to halt further decline, the current budget identified for this investment area has not significantly increased from Interreg VA. The actions detailed may be hindered by the indicative budget of only €15m.

5.2 Marine and Coastal Management
5.3 Water Quality and Catchment Management

5.4 Water Quality Improvement Programme

This investment area is supported. It is recognised that provision of good water quality is essential to both human health, and the health and vitality of our natural heritage ecosystems. The potential exists under this policy to improve water and waste treatment which is a major constraint on housing and on the development of serviced industrial land in Mid Ulster. This issue poses potential threats to the environment and delivery of the 'green agenda'. Also more sustainable solutions such as SUDs needs to be explored, to offset rainwater capture to alleviate pressure on the sewerage system re capacity. Council would therefore support greater consideration and investment in our sewer network and new eco-friendly development.

5.5 Geothermal Energy Demonstration Programme

The investment in renewables should be broadened across the spectrums to encourage hydro-power, tidal energy, passive heating and latest innovation in solar power. There is a need for enhanced support for the development of renewal/alternative energy sources drawing on the assets of the region. For example, Mid Ulster with its natural landscape has the potential to be sustainable through utilising its natural assets. Investigating and harnessing the potential of hydro-electric power as an alternative source of energy is one which should be strongly considered for inclusion within this policy objective.

The region needs significant investment in energy efficiency, particularly in older housing stock, which is common throughout our communities and which many home owners are unsure how to improve in a cost effective and sustainable way.

5.6 Enhanced Travel Connectivity

A Quality and fast moving road network is central to providing connectivity between towns and building our economy. There are currently significant delays occurring our strategic hub towns. This not only causes delay for travellers but reducing the environmental quality of these settlements. By taking the through traffic away from the town centres, it will be possible to take further actions to increase the attraction amenity and accessibility and improve the vitality and viability of those centres.

Following decades of underinvestment in infrastructure across the border region, there is potential under this objective to address key roads transportation infrastructure priorities including improved connections between the border region and key urban centres north and south. This includes upgrading roads as appropriate to facilitate necessary cross border linkages and access to services.

In particular, there is a clear need for providing connections and the development of a number of new roads, including the A29 Dungannon and Cookstown bypasses to ensure the border region is connected on an East-West axis and North-South basis.
The rail network in Northern Ireland is limited to the North and East with no connections in Tyrone or Fermanagh. It is an objective of the Regional development Strategy to increase use of more sustainable forms of transport, therefore it is important to

investigate whether it would be feasible to extend the railway network to the towns in mid Ulster.

In addition, investment in environmentally friendly solutions including the establishment of additional cross-border Greenways and connected Blueways would have multiple benefits including increased community cohesion. The Ulster Canal is one of the last major waterway projects awaiting restoration on the island of Ireland. Most major waterway routes have been restored or are undergoing restoration. The re-opening of the Ulster Canal is seen as a major cross-border infrastructural project with broad political, Government and community support on both sides of the border. There is also have a real need for sustainable transport options to enhance cross border, regional and local mobility. In the interests of balanced regional development and to help address the well-established transport infrastructure deficit across the region, it is argued that the use of this significant level of Peace Plus funding allocated, should be reconsidered towards resolving these long-standing deficiencies.

Theme 6 - Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration

6.1 Strategic Planning and Engagement

6.2 Maintaining and Forging Relationship between Citizens
These relationships are important but as a result and outcome of investment in programmes to support society take advantage of a peaceful society.

Administration

It is important that future funding has a shorter 'lead-in' time from Application submission to provision of funding to facilitate a longer period of preparation and delivery, which will maximise the impact and benefit of projects.
Further efforts to reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries are necessary. A more simplified appraisal and decision–making system reducing unnecessary bureaucracy should be agreed.
Accountability is very important and there must be the proper safeguards in place. However, a balance needs to be found between enabling an initiative to be implemented more efficiently and the administrative procedures required from an accountability perspective.

Report on	Mid Ulster Anti-Poverty Plan – Pilot Children and Youth Wellbeing Scheme
Reporting Officer	Claire Linney / Kieran Gordon
Contact Officer	Celene O'Neill/Oliver Morgan

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	As part of the Mid Ulster Anti-Poverty Plan, summer hunger and youth mental health are issues identified for action. To seek to address these issues it is proposed to deliver a pilot initiative for children and young people to both engage them in fun activities to support their mental wellbeing and alongside this, address some level of summer hunger.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	As part of Community Planning, in partnership with Council's Leisure and Good Relations Sections and in conjunction with the Education Authority Youth Service a pilot project has been developed. The project will seek to deliver under the Mid Ulster Anti-Poverty Plan, Theme 3: Health and Wellbeing, Actions 1. To review reduced rates for leisure activities, with support to engage people in poverty; 2. To provide free leisure during set times in the summer for children/young people on FSM/low income. Council has been allocated a further allocation of £85,599.30 under the DFC Emergency Funding support. It is proposed that an allocation of this funding would be used to support the two schemes. The remainder of the allocation will be confirmed in a report to Committee in June.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	The Pilot will involve two elements – <u>Pilot 1 Children's Wellbeing</u> A Summer Play Scheme that will target younger children aged 7 – 11. The play programme will be facilitated by a play provider (to be procured). It is proposed to concentrate the delivery of the play schemes within our main towns in areas that can attract people from the surrounding estates, and in Fivemiletown due to its rural deprivation: • Dungannon (Moygashel, Railway Park, Drumcoo) 2–3 sessions per area per week for 2 weeks per area (different children each week)

- Cookstown (Fairhill, Monrush and Ratheen) 2–3 sessions per area per week for 2 weeks per area (different children each week)
- Magherafelt (Meadowvale, 2–3 other locations to be confirmed possibly two schools) 2–3 sessions per area per week for 2 weeks per area (different children each week)
- Coalisland, Gortgonis 2–3 sessions
- Maghera 3G track and leisure centre 2–3 sessions
- Fivemiletown, Youth Annex 2–3 sessions.

Numbers at each session are estimated at between 30-50 children and pre-booking may be required to comply with Covid19 restrictions. The sessions would be a ½ day in delivery, 10am – 12pm with lunch and 2.00pm – 4.00pm with lunch from 1pm.

It is proposed the funding for the pilot project will be through the Department for Communities Emergency Funding.

Fun outdoor play activities will be delivered on green space (Council owned where possible or partner with a relevant statutory agency) and delivered by an external play delivery organisation and supported by Good Relations, Leisure Casual Staff and EA Youth Workers. To tackle summer food hunger, a packed lunch will be provided free of charge for all children.

The project will be delivered over the period August – September.

<u>Pilot 2 – Youth Wellbeing</u>
A leisure scheme for older youth aged 12 – 18 years. The provision of a discounted leisure scheme targeting all young people, and free voucher scheme. The free voucher scheme will be available to young people on Free School Meals and will include up to 10 vouchers for use at allocated times over a two month period (to be allocated in partnership with the post primary schools). The total number of young people on free school meals in post primary is 3,145. The number in the College is to be confirmed.

All of the above will be for Council leisure facilities at off peak times on specific days. The discounted scheme at off peak times will be £1.00 per session. We will seek to provide free water and fruit bowls at sessions.

The list of £1 activities includes the following (times/frequency/locations to be confirmed)

- teen gym, swims, courts, soft play, golf driving range (per basket of balls), golf par 3, track and tennis.

The project will be delivered over the period August – September.

Depending on Covid19 restrictions/easements, the Leisure Section is intending to deliver a schedule of summer camps at their centre locations, details to be confirmed.

	The soccer cages are available for use in the smaller villages and towns throughout the District for groups to access to encourage youth wellbeing. This project will complement the Council's Play Near Me delivery which may be rolled out this summer depending on Covid19 restrictions at our main Parks. Groups are also applying to the Council grants programmes to support summer youth activity programmes.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial & Human Resources Implications** Financial: Total budget £43,500 Budget £25,000 for Play Delivery Organisation to be procured Budget £10,000: refreshments Pilot 1 - £7875 for refreshments for children and young people (based on average £2.50 per child), Pilot 2 - £2125 Budget £8,500 to support the Leisure Services to support the voucher scheme. Human: Community Planning, Good Relations, Leisure Services Casual Staff
4.2	**Equality and Good Relations Implications** None
4.3	**Risk Management Implications** Council Risk assessment and the delivery organisation risk assessment will apply. All relevant Covid19 guidelines and protocols will be met depending on the restrictions/easements in place at that time
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	To agree to the proposal to deliver the pilot children's wellbeing play scheme. To agree to the proposal to deliver the pilot youth wellbeing scheme.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	None

Report on	Ballyronan Boat Club – Development Proposal
Date of Meeting	Thursday 13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Nigel Hill Head of Parks
Contact Officer	Nigel Hill Head of Parks

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	To seek members approval to engage with Ballyronan Boat Club in relation to scoping the potential for Club House development proposals at Ballyronan Marina.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	Ballyronan Boat Club was established in 1972 with 66 subscribing members under the auspices of well-known local people in the community. Activities that year included sailing for Mirror's and GP14s twice a week, with the boats stored in a small yard courtesy of a local landowner, and a sailing course supported by the Sports Council. A Glover site hut served as clubhouse/changing room, and boats were launched down a slipway adjacent to the old stone pier.
2.2	1975 saw the start of constructing the marina, which was completed the following year, just in time for the GP14 summer open meeting with some 30 boats from all over Ireland competing. In 1977 with the new marina providing an influx of larger craft, racing was run for cruisers as well as GP14s and Mirrors, with up to 20 boats participating twice a week.
2.3	In 1978 it became necessary to move the clubhouse to accommodate developments and a 40 year lease was agreed with Cookstown District Council for a site overlooking the Lough to the right of the car park. Regular sailing continued with the addition of an annual sailing course run by SELB.
2.4	Ballyronan was the venue for a series of training days for the Irish team going to the 1979 World Championship in Perth, Western Australia. The NI Championship of the Scorpion Class was hosted again in 1979 along with normal racing, cruising, and training events. With the clubhouse moving to the new site, a need was recognised to upgrade facilities to a modern standard, and plans were developed accordingly. However, the lack of grant funding in 1980 meant plans had to be revised. A second temporary building was acquired to provide changing accommodation.
2.5	The club worked on through the 1980s with an enthusiastic cruiser fleet to the extent that berth space in the marina was under pressure, but in common with other areas, a dwindling small boat fleet. Events were run for the GP14 fleet in 1981, '83, and '86, all well supported by visitors from all over Ireland.

2.6	Unfortunately, Ballyronan became a regular target for vandalism culminating with the destruction of the Council's toilet block and the Club's second building. Membership dwindled as a result, and eventually, the Club was forced to give up, relinquishing its remaining clubhouse and site.
2.7	In November 2000 a meeting was called and the Club was reformed. Sailing was organised with both racing and cruising events and membership climbed, in due course reaching over 70 subscribing members. The Club acquired a number of boats to facilitate running training courses and to provide for members who did not have their own boats.
2.8	To date the Club still lacks access to a clubhouse with the capacity to provide appropriate facilities for people participating in boating activities. This situation has led to a high rate of membership turnover with many people trying boating, liking it, joining the club, but parting after a time. With membership now growing strongly again, the Club is keen to investigate the options toward re-establishing facilities on site. This would enhance the presence for the Club and help promote the Marina as a water sports centre for our district and across the province.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Current development plans at Ballyronan Marina are designed to enhance the overall visitor experience, encouraging engagement in outdoor recreational activities such as camping/glamping, walking and children's play along with supporting new and innovative health and wellbeing pursuits such as open water swimming alongside passive leisure opportunities to a growing populous.
3.2	Ballyronan Boat Club are a key partner with Council at the Marina. The Boat Club work closely with council bringing people together to facilitate and promote water sports to a potential catchment population of 150,000 within 30 minutes of the centre. In order to proactively progress continued development at Ballyronan, the club wish to revisit the proposal of a permanent clubhouse base with appropriate facilities. To initiate the first step, the club are seeking Council support and engagement in discussions to develop an options appraisal.
3.3	The club have identified two potential sites. One to the south side of the old pier and a second option proposing a floating clubhouse in keeping with the new council developments on the site (appendix). The club are keen to progress discussions, as they strongly believe they have identified the need and that the base to develop from is necessary for the continued prosperity of the club and the expanding future of the Marina.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Council financial commitment remains to be determined on this project proposal. However, a request to lease lands for the purpose of development is likely to be an option for Council consideration.

	Human: Current staff compliment sufficient to progress project development proposals.
	Risk Management: In line with Council policies and procedures
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: In line with Council policy and procedures
	Rural Needs Implications: In line with Council policy and procedures
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1 5.2	Members as asked to consider the content of the report. Members approval is sought for council officers to progress discussions with Ballyronan Boat club and assist in creating a development proposal/concept plan for presentation to a future Development Committee meeting.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix A – Ballyronan Boat Club correspondence 12th January 2021 Appendix B – Ballyronan Marina site map

BALLYRONAN BOAT CLUB – CLUB HOUSE

12th January 2021

Dear Mrs Campbell

Ballyronan Boat Club (BBC), based at Ballyronan Marina, was formed in 1974 to promote sailing and water safety on the north western shores of Lough Neagh. It is a small but a very proactive club, which aims to provide facilities and promote participation in water sports for all sectors of the Mid Ulster and wider community. Water safety and skills development are core values of the club's ethos, and the Club is an approved RYA training centre.

Ballyronan Boat Club currently does not have its own club premises and this is proving to be a major restriction to current need and ongoing development. We have the use a room in the council amenity building, but size, limited to about ten people, and opening hours restrict use to committee meetings and other small groups. With the recent growth of the club it is not possible to accommodate a significant number of the members for club meetings or even to get together with a cup of tea after sailing.

As an RYA Training Centre, as well as water based courses, the Club delivers class room courses such as first aid, sailing theory, radio, and safety. To meet demand and make these courses financially viable normally requires more than 10 particiants, which is not normally possible at the amenity block and previously the BBC has sent both members and outside applicants to other clubs to obtain training. This limits the training aspect of the Club as well as curtailing an important income stream.

Ballyronan Marina is undoubtly the best facility on Lough Neagh and as a club we are looking forward to seeing the current renovations being carried out. The Club would like to recognise and congratulates the Council on it's vision for the site. As the site modernises, the club would also have plans to build a modern attractive club house in line with the Councils vision and believe it will enhance and benefit the Councils plans for Ballyronan Marina.

To date the quality of facilities has been highlighted as being a major determination as to whether people continue to participate in sailing and other water sports after an initial trial period and this is clearly displayed in the high turnover single year membership. BBC every year can have anywhere up to 30-40 new participants, but without a physical Club presence on site and appropriate facilities, many people tend to move on.

The quality of the playing environment has been shown to be a major factor in encouraging new participants to any sport including sailing/water sports and ensuring that they continue to participate. Facilities have a high impact on "satisfaction" of existing members and have been shown to be vital to attracting and keeping new members. Appropriate facilities are necessary to make sport attractive and fun, helping support running costs, and opening it to participatin by the whole community with access for all.

Lough Neagh is a wonderful facility for water sports, but its use is limited by lack of access. Ballyronan Marina is one of the few and arguably the best access point onto the Lough, and the Boat Club sees it as the prime location to offer on-water safe access. There is much discussion about the need for shared facilities amongst other users, such as canoing and the

new Lough Neagh On-Water tours. Not wanting to dwell but but what is needed apart from good access is the meeting place to include club room, kitchen, training room, and changing facilities to support a structured sailing development programme to grow participation through increased public access and defined high performance, community, club and school development programmes.

The club already has a number of vessels to facilitate those who do not have their own boats, and will encourage and further develop provision for people with disabilities, people on low income, young people at risk and women and girls.

Aims :-

1. Increase participation in boating, including sailing – both racing and family sailing and other water sports
2. Provide sailing opportunities for a member's lifetime.
3. Improve access to boating and clubhouse facilities for all.
4. Use sailing as an aspiration/ inspiration to deprived groups/communities and schools to improve health and well-being
5. Encourage disadvantaged groups to use sailing as a sport – in particular older members of the community and female sailors
6. Set up a local RYA Sailability centre for disabled sailors which will also increase access to sailing for the wider community
7. Host provincial and national regattas/ championships.
8. Create a pool of club sailing-racers to club race and represent Ballyronan Boat Club locally and internationally. Provide life-long coaching for members.
9. Provide quality coaching and racing for disabled sailors with the aim to produce sailors to represent Ireland and GB&NI at international events and future Paralympics if sailing is returned as a listed sport.
10. Provide facilities to house other water sports – open water swimming (triathlons), kayaking, etc.
11. Contribute towards reducing mental health issues I nt he community.

Whilst Mid Ulster Council owns and maintains the Marina, the Boat Club is the only organisation promoting, bringing people together, and facilitating water sport on the site. Indeed, it is the only such organisation on the western shore of Lough Neagh, and hence it provides a unique opportunity to promote water sports with all the health, social, self-awareness, confidence, safety awareness, risk assessment, and decision-making ability the sport provides. The population within 30 minutes access is currently in excess of 150,000, and within 60 minutes, 1.7 million.

In additon to the above The Club has an agreement with Cookstown High School including corporate membership and has had ties with local scout groups and youth clubs providing open days for some years. The Club is very keen to build on these relationships and with other organisations to enhance their programmes. At present we have the location, Lough Neagh, we have access through the Marina, and we have the boats, but we lack a clubhouse

and facilities of a suitable standard. Additionally, there are other activities at Ballyronan such as the triathlon and Lough Neagh Tours, which would benefit greatly from access to clubhouse facilities.

To meet our duty as a club in light of this very clear need, we are proposing the development of a permantent clubhouse with appropriate facilities. As a first step, as previously discussed, we are requesting the agreement of MUDC to this in principle, followed by agreement of a suitable site.

We are suggesting two possible sites as indicated on the enclosed plan, No.1 on the south side of the old pier, or No 2, a floating culubhouse in keeping with the new council developments on the site. We would be happy, indeed, keen to discuss these locations and any others you might suggest with you, with a view to coming to an agreement from which we can move forward.

It is our strong opinion that a thriving club is necessary for the future prosperity of the Marina, and through it, the greater enjoyment by all of the wonderful facility provided by Lough Neagh, and for this, a clubhouse with appropriate facilities is a prerequisite.

We look forward to hearing from you and meeting you to discuss this.

Yours faithfully

John McRobert

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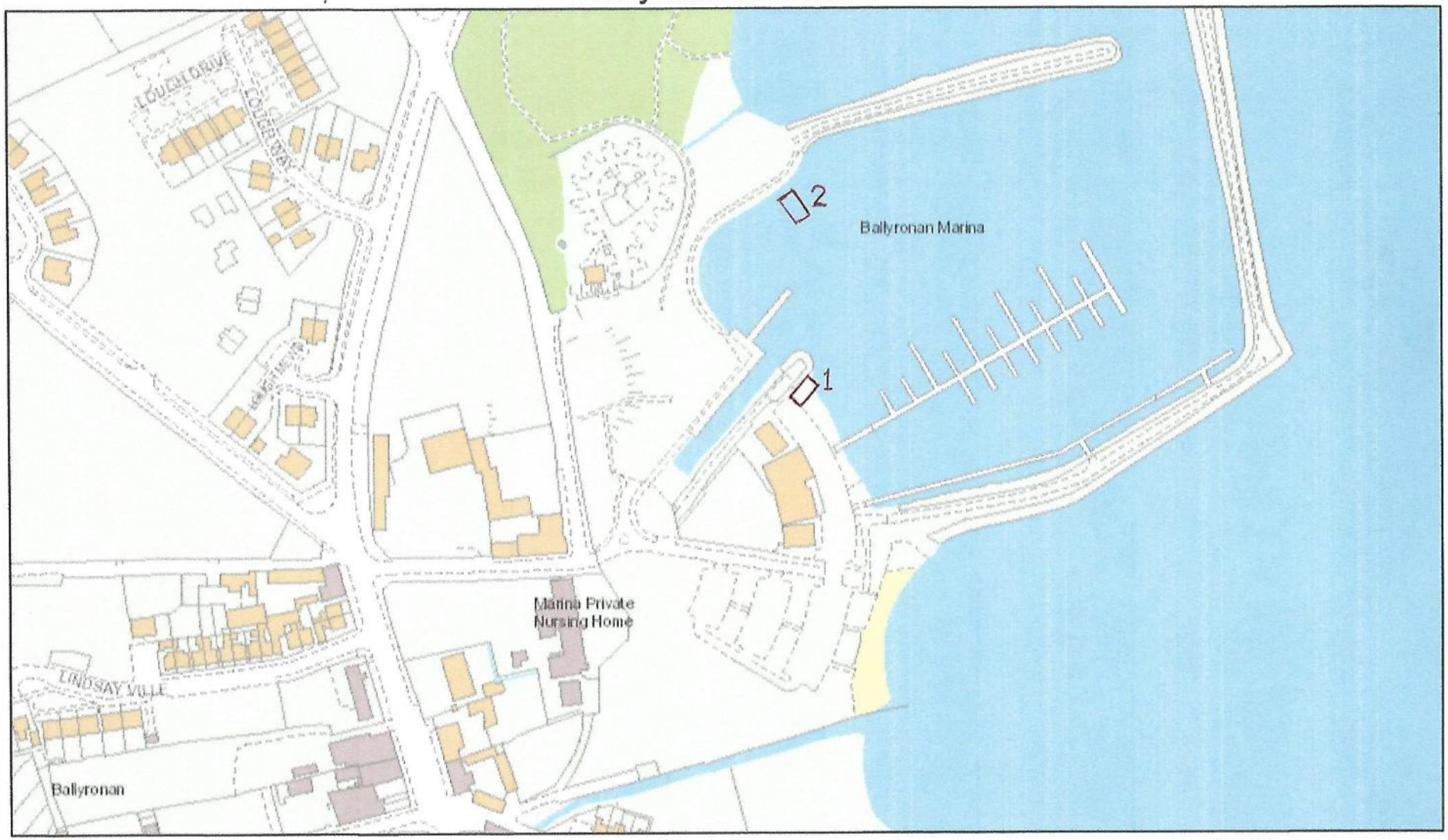
Ballyronan Marina



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Report on	Pricing Tariff for Ballyronan House Boats
Date of Meeting	Thursday 13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	N Hill Head of Parks
Contact Officer	A Reid, Parks & Countryside Development Officer

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	To seek Members approval for tariff structure associated to the provision of new house boat accommodation units introduced to Ballyronan Marina for 2021-22 season.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	Ballyronan Marina is a blue flag marina and caravan site with 20 hard stand caravan pitches and tent pitches. The current facilities include a woodland walk, BBQ site, football facilities, disabled toilets and a children's play area.
2.2	Following recent development Ballyronan Marina will provide state of the art all accessible play, improved woodland walk, landscaping, improved toilet facilities and a changing places toilet.
2.3	As part of this development there will also be four luxury floating glamping pods complimented by state of-the-art interpretive displays to enthuse visitors with the mythology of Lough Neagh. This will be developed in the form of augmented reality whereby visitors staying in the glamping pods will be able to experience the myths and legends of Lough Neagh and learn about the cultural heritage through innovative technology.
2.4	It is anticipated that this innovative project will enhance the appeal of the area for overnight visitors and will feed a growing demand for unique experiences on Lough Neagh. This is the first on-water glamping accommodation to be developed on Lough Neagh. It will also be the first accommodation with built in technology to tell visitors about the myths and legends of the area in a modern and engaging way. The project can therefore be classed as unique and innovative.
2.5	There is currently two glamping facilities in Mid Ulster District Council area: Sperrin View Glamping and Carntogher Cabins however these are not water-based pods. In addition to the Ballyronan caravan and camping site, there are 5 other campsite facilities in Mid Ulster: Dungannon Park, Roundlake Park Fivemiletown, Drum Manor Forest Park Cookstown, Annaginney Farm, Dungannon and The Shepherds Rest Draperstown.

Artists impression of Glamping pods at Ballyronan Marina.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Following the completion of the development within Ballyronan and the installation of the House Boats these will be marketed for short staycation rental. The all new House Boat units will be available for use and hire from early July 2021.

3.2 Regional and local Market Research has been carried out on similar products to enable council to establish an introductory mid-point tariff structure for the launch of the Ballyronan House Boat experience.

3.3

Glampsite	**Sleeps**	**Price (£)/pod/night**	**Minimum stay**
Let's Go Hydro, Belfast	6	200 (Apr – Oct) 150 (Nov & Dec)	2 night
Ocean View, Glenarm Castle	4	170 per week 180 wkend	2 night
Sperrin View, Davagh	5	110 – 150	none
Carntogher Cabins, Maghera	5	100 (plus £63 fees per booking)	2 night
Fair Head, Ballycastle	4	161 167 (July & Aug mid week) 178.50 (wkend July & Aug)	None 2 nights

The demand in self-catering accommodation has escalated since 2020. Based on market research and the uniqueness of the Ballyronan offering the following price structure is proposed:

House Boat, Ballyronan	**4/6**	**120**	**2 night (min stay)**

3.4 The normal House Boat season will run from 1st March – 31st October (as per the caravan park) and weekends only from Nov – Feb. The proposed tariff structure will be reviewed annually to reflect demand and market fluctuations.

3.5 The table below estimates the number of guests at the floating glamping pods per year. The occupancy rate is taken from the NI Local Government Statistics Self Catering Occupancy Rate for Mid Ulster District Council for 2018. (Information taken from Economic Appraisal Ballyronan Marina August 2020, CavanaghKelly)

No Pods	No guests per pod	No. nights available	Occupancy rate	No. guests per year
4	4	350	41%	2296

4.0 Other Considerations

4.1 **Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**

Financial:
Income from House Boats £17,220 (based on 41% occupancy rate)

Human:
Staffing levels at Ballyronan Marina have been under review given the recent developments, redeployment of resources within Leisure and Outdoor Recreation will provide for an interim staffing solution, which will be subject to review.

Risk Management:
In line with Council policies and procedures

4.2 **Screening & Impact Assessments**

Equality & Good Relations Implications:
In line with Council policy and procedures

Rural Needs Implications:
In line with Council policy and procedures

5.0 Recommendation(s)

5.1 Members approval is sought for the proposed tariff structure as presented for the Ballyronan House Boat accommodation units at £120 per night, per boat for a minimum stay of two nights.

	Members also approve discretionary pricing flexibility as and when required under the Scheme of Delegation to the Director to allow scope for sales promotions, site specific usage trends, etc.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	N/A

Report on	1. Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22 2. Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan 3. Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 21/22
Date of Meeting	13 May 2021
Reporting Officer	Fiona McKeown, Head of Economic Development

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	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	**Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22** Regeneration, revitalisation and business support are key priorities identified in the Economic Development Plan 2015/2020. To reflect such priorities, the Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22 highlights a variety of key activities for our businesses, towns and villages.
2.2	**Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan** Following the series of Trader engagements, which took place across the five towns within Mid Ulster, the three Regeneration Managers have developed an action plan based on further support and initiatives Traders would welcome from the Council over a 4-month period as they re-open after the lockdown.
2.3	**Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 21/22** The Rural Micro Business Development Scheme funded through DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation programme (TRPSI) will run again in 21/22 subject to approval of a business case and budget within the Department. July 21 has been targeted as a potential opening date for this year's scheme.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22** The Action Plan aims to prioritise the development of a comprehensive range of activities, programmes and support across Mid Ulster during the 2021/22 financial year. The Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22 lists initiatives under the following thematic headings as set out below **(Appendix 1):** 1. Marketing & Promotion 2. Business Support & Investment (Including Rural) 3. Events 4. Physical Regeneration & Improving Infrastructure.

	5. Business Start and Entrepreneurship 6. Business Sustainability and Growth 7. Business Information Service 8. Supporting Employability and Skills 9. Business Events 10. Supporting cross border initiatives 11. Renewable Energies / Strategic Collaborations 12. Strategic Projects 13. Supporting skills and apprenticeships 14. Mid Ulster LEADER RDP Programme 2016-2020.
3.2	**Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan** Following a series of meetings with Mid Ulster Traders during the week commencing the 7th March 2021, an Action Plan has been developed based on the discussions at these meetings. The following key initiatives summarise the action plan **(Appendix 2):** • Marketing Initiatives • Mid Ulster Gift Card/Voucher Scheme • Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Programme • Mid Ulster Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme
3.3	**Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 21/22** 21/22 will be the third year of the Rural Micro Business Development Scheme. The 20/21 Scheme was heavily oversubscribed with 333 applications received seeking grant in excess of £1m for an initial allocation of £66,000. Additional funding was allocated by DAERA which increased the allocation significantly to over £500,000. Based on early indications from DAERA, the overall allocation across all Council areas in NI will be £1m in project funding for 21/22. The exact allocation for MUDC is to be confirmed but may sit within the region of £140-£170k with an administration budget of 10% of the allocation awarded. The administration percentage has reduced from 15% in last year's scheme to 10% for 21/22. In last year's scheme, administration was fixed against the initial allocation of £66k however for this year's scheme administration is linked to project spend therefore should the initial allocation increase, so too will the administration budget available. There will be further robust discussions with DAERA regarding delivery of future funding initiatives to ensure that resource funding is commensurate with the level of staff time needed for delivery without placing further pressure on Council resources. It is likely that 21/22 will again see a high level of interest in this scheme therefore grant requested will outstrip grant available to award. In the event that initial funding allocations are not increased to accommodate demand it may be necessary to adopt a different approach to assessment of applications such as assessment by date and time order received until funding is fully committed to manage the process more efficiently. This will be kept under review but will be reflected within scheme guidance notes for applicants.

	Preparation of a joint business plan by the Council areas participating in this year's scheme will commence shortly for submission to DAERA.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: **Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22**– Provision has been made within the 2021/22 Economic Development Budget. **Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan** To be delivered within existing Economic Development Budget. **Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 21/22** Grant aid to be provided by DAERA subject to approval of business case. An administration budget of 10% of the funding allocation will be available to Council.
	Human: Officer Time **Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22** Officers time **Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan** Officers time **Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 21/22** Officers time
	Risk Management: **Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22** Council policies and procedures will be adhered to in the roll out of this plan **Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan** Council policies and procedures will be adhered to in the roll out of this plan
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: **Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22** Equality and Good Relations screening will be carried out prior of commencement of the Scheme. **Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan** Equality and Good Relations screening will be carried out prior of commencement of the Scheme. **Rural Micro Business Development Scheme** Equality and Good Relations screening will be carried out prior of commencement of the Scheme.

	Rural Needs Implications: **Rural Micro Business Development Scheme** Screening will be carried out prior of commencement of the Scheme.
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
	It is recommended that Members:- 5.1 **Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22** To approve those projects and costs within the Economic Development Action Plan for 2021/22. 5.2 **Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan** Approve Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan 5.3 **Rural Micro Business Development Scheme** Approve participation of MUDC in the 2021/22 Rural Micro Business Development Scheme (subject to approval of funding from DAERA)
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix 1 - Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/22 **Appendix 2** – Mid Ulster Traders Recovery Action Plan

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021 / 2022

INTRODUCTION

This Economic Development Action Plan 2021-2022 sets out how this Council will invest in the recovery to help address the damage done to our local economy.

We are witnessing the economic impact of Covid-19 across Mid Ulster, with increased vacant properties on our high streets, significant impacts on sectors like retail and hospitality, manufacturing, engineering and construction as well as an anticipated rise in unemployment levels.

Against a complex and challenging backdrop, the purpose of this Action Plan is to focus on activity and actions, which will support our businesses, high streets and economic recovery. Partnership working and collaboration will be crucial in ensuring the Action Plan is delivered effectively.

This Action Plan has been influenced by the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24, Community Plan 2017-27, Economic Development Plan and Mid Ulster Business Recovery Action Plan (2020) and reflects actions which local businesses have asked us to assist them with during 2021.

We are only too aware the pandemic is not over. Therefore, this Action Plan presents a range of flexible and agile support measures to assist businesses and communities across Mid Ulster as they emerge from the impact of Covid-19.

Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan
2021 /2022

Theme	Projects	Outputs	Methodology	Outcomes	Total Budget
Marketing & Promotion	1.1 "Welcome Back Campaign" after lockdown	**Phase 1** Initial marketing videos will focus on a **'Welcome Back Campaign'** through Council's Social Media Channels: - 23/4/21 - Close Contact Services (reopening videos) - 30/4/21 - Non Essential Retail & Outdoor Hospitality (reopening videos) - 24/5/21* - Hospitality (reopening videos, press ads) **Subject to Govt. guidance*	"Welcome Back" Videos recorded in association with local traders – rolled out via Council's social media channels to promote the key sectors as they reopen after lockdown.	• Encourage local residents to reconnect with their towns and village centres to support local traders as they return after lockdown • Contribute to increased footfall in towns and villages. • Demonstrate Council's commitment to town centre recovery by engaging with and recruiting local businesses to actively participate in local marketing campaigns. • Support the development of the brand identity of the three main towns.	£50,000
	1.2 "Love Local Campaign"	**Phase 2** Next phase of marketing videos will change to focus on a **'Love Local Campaign'** - Links to Public Health messaging - A range of marketing activities linked to key retail periods - Promoting Government High Street Voucher Scheme (when available). - Seasonal marketing / shop local campaigns, including Small Business Saturday.	"Love Local" Videos recorded in association with local traders and pushed out via Council's social media channels. Outdoor Advertising Radio Press Advertising, etc.		
	1.3 Town Centre Music	Introduction of music in the 3 main towns at peak weekend shopping intervals for an initial period (*to commence when permitted safe to do so – linked to Govt Guidance).*	Small music groups and buskers.	• Using music to create a welcoming ambiance in our town centres after lockdown.	

Business Support	2.1 Provision of Wi-Fi in 5 main towns, plus Bellaghy	2.1 Maintain free Wi-Fi in the five town centres of Coalisland, Cookstown, Dungannon, Maghera and Magherafelt, and Bellaghy.	2.1 Ongoing contributions to businesses hosting access points.	• To improve and grow the retail offer in the five towns across the Mid Ulster district.	£15,361 ongoing Wi-Fi costs
	2.2 Provision of Reduced Christmas Car Parking Charges	2.2 Provision of reduced Christmas car parking charges in charged car parks.	2.2 Council approval to reduce parking charges for a 6-week period.	• To encourage footfall to the five main towns in Mid Ulster District at Christmas.	£25,000
	2.3 Reducing Dereliction and Vacancy Levels in Dungannon Town Centre	2.3 An external town centre development management contactor to be employed for a 3-year period with the aim of reducing dereliction/vacancy levels in the town centre.	2.3 Council allocation of £120,000 towards a Dereliction Project in Dungannon over a 3 year period (2021/22 to 2023/24), subject to match funding from DFC.	Anticipated outputs are:- • Reduction in Town Centre Vacant Premises - 2% per annum • £500,000 investment by Developers in Town Centre annually	£120,000 over 3 years.
	2.4 Mid Ulster Gift Card	2.4 An external organisation will be employed to assist with the set up and ongoing support of the development and delivery of Mid Ulster Gift Card (Minimum Term Contract 3 years with break clauses annually)	2.4 Integral element of Town Centre Recovery Plan	• Support independent retailers by promoting Mid Ulster's unique retail offering • Lock in spend within Mid Ulster District Council area	Circ. £57,000 (over 3 years) (2021/22 to 2023/24)
	2.5 Small Grants Business Marketing Scheme	2.5 Rollout of a Small Grants Business Marketing Scheme to a minimum of 500 Mid Ulster businesses	2.5 Support provided to local businesses to assist them embrace new marketing and digital capabilities as they return after lockdown.	• Provision of revenue grants up to £300 to a minimum of 500 businesses for marketing and digital activities.	Minimum of £150,000 (*Scheme budget may increase if additional monies are awarded from Govt. Depts).*

Strategic Events	3.1 Calendar of Events in 5 town centres	3.1 Town Centres Events - (October-December 2021) subject to compliance with Government guidance. - Halloween in Dungannon - Halloween in Coalisland - Christmas Lights Switch On in Cookstown - Christmas Kingdom and Switch On in Dungannon - Christmas Market and Switch On in Magherafelt - Christmas Lights Switch On in Coalisland - Christmas Lights Switch On in Maghera	3.1 Officers Delivery, in conjunction with Events Team.	• Increased footfall / visitor numbers across the five towns. • Increased profile & engagement with town centre businesses.	£70,500 (excluding wages) Due to the pandemic no events will be held from April – Sept 2021. October – December 2021 events are subject to review based on Government Restrictions.
Physical Regeneration /Improving Infrastructure	4.1 Urban Regeneration Projects	4.1. Work associated with public realm schemes in Coalisland 4.1.2 Potential Coalisland Revitalisation Project	4.1 Partnership working with Technical & ICT Teams 4.2 Potential Revitalisation Scheme in Coalisland following Public Realm works in the town. Funding details to be confirmed with DfC.	• Enhanced townscape quality. • Improve quality of life for people in the rural areas of the district	Projects/Funding as per Council's Capital Budget previously agreed Potential scheme value (£) yet to be confirmed in writing by DfC

	4.2 Rural Regeneration Projects	4.2 Work in partnership with RDP to deliver Village Regeneration projects in Mid Ulster District over 4 years	4.2 Delivery of Rural Village Projects	• Creating new or improved infrastructure in rural areas to enhance the lives of rural dwellers.	RDP Projects & Funding already agreed by Council
	4.3 Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme (Year 3 of 4) 2021/22	4.3 Deliver the Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme for Mid Ulster towns & Villages	4.3 Officers work in partnership with Technical Services & ICT Team to deliver Projects. 4.3 Deliver Grant Scheme based on approved ranked list.	• Enhanced properties for business owners in the towns and villages across the district.	£250,000 (grant aid) & £8,200 (architect fees) previously agreed by Council

Theme	Projects	Outputs	Methodology	Outcomes	Budget
Business Start and Entrepreneurship	1.1 Delivery of NI Business Start Up Programme ('GoForIt') (1 April 2021 – 31 March 2023) 1.2 Women in Business 'Yes You Can' (11 Council Collaboration Initiative)	1.1.1 264 client-led Business Plans provided to Mid Ulster entrepreneurs 1.1.2 158 jobs promoted as a result of support provided 1.1.3 55 females from Mid Ulster participating in 5 initiatives to drive female entrepreneurship	• Raise awareness and secure client participation through regional and local marketing activities • Regularly monitor activity / performance and work with Lead Council (Lisburn &CCC) to address any issues • Highlight if remedial action required if performance falls below target	• Entrepreneurship stimulated and supported in Mid Ulster • Statutory Jobs Target achieved • Where relevant, on completion, clients to be signposted to Council's business support programmes to access follow-on support	£55,772

Business Sustainability and Growth	2.1 Gearing for Growth Programme 2.2 Tender Ready Programme 2.3 Digital First Programme 2.4 Transform Programme (*Above programmes funded by ERDF 60%; Invest NI 20% & Council 20%)* 2.5 Social Enterprise Programme (2021-23) Council funded	2.1 Supporting the sustainability and growth of 730 Mid Ulster's businesses and social enterprises (730 covers entire period for Progs 1-4 duration April 2020 – March 2023) and Social Enterprise Programme April 2021 – Sept 2023 Output budget figures refers to 2021/22 only	2.1 Promotion of Council support via range of channels to encourage business participation 2.2 Management of delivery agent Contracts to ensure targets are achieved 2.3 Regular monitoring of delivery agents' performance and spend against targets 2.4 Actions taken to address any identified areas of underperformance 2.5 Compliance with funders' requirements (ERDF and Invest NI) to ensure drawdown of funding	▪ To promote the sustainability and growth of 285 businesses/social enterprises, supporting their recovery and building their resilience, post-Covid ▪ 135 new jobs created ▪ £900,000 economic impact achieved (New work won, turnover increased, online sales increased)	£82,875 (Council's net cost is 20%) 4 Programmes total cost £334,375

Business Information Service	3.1 Mid Ulster District Council's Business E-shot Service 3.2 Economic Development Officers' signposting and support service for business	3.1 1,500 Mid Ulster businesses signing up to receive regular e-shots outlining key support and funding opportunities and information re Covid-19 supports and EU Exit legislation 3.2 Businesses contacting economic development unit are triaged by officers and receive assistance to identify support provision	• Officers' ongoing research & information gathering on business supports. • Targeted promotion of the service to Mid Ulster businesses to encourage more to sign up. • Funding and support opportunities also promoted on Council's website and social media channels (where appropriate)	▪ Registered businesses kept informed of new funding and support opportunities on a regular basis	Staff time Staff time
Supporting Employability and Skills	**ESF Funded Projects** 4.1 Step Up to Sustainable Employment Programme (SUSE+) (South West College) 4.2 Job Match Programme (Network Personnel) 4.3 Up for Work Programme (Network Personnel)	4.1 Supporting Employability and Skills in Mid Ulster by contributing match funding to 4 Mid Ulster employability and skills programmes 4.2 Programmes: (April 2018 – March 2022)	4.1 Promotion of programmes via range of channels to encourage recruitment of participants 4.2 Regular monitoring of lead project promoter's outcomes and spend against targets	▪ Employability prospects of 300 individuals improved; participants supported to re-engage with the labour market by: accessing employment/ self-employment; training and/or Further Education	£49,250

	4.4 Exploring Enterprise 4 Programme (3 Mid Ulster Enterprise Agencies)				
Business Events	5.1 'Programme Related Events' : - 3 No. Digital Webinars - 1 No. Tender Ready Seminar - 1 No. Social Enterprise Workshop	5.1 Five events delivered to a minimum of 120 participants	5.1 Work with Programme delivery agents to deliver and promote 5 business events to a minimum of 90 participants	▪ Building the profile and capacity of Mid Ulster's businesses and social enterprises through the provision of a range of practical support events covering key business areas	£17,000
	5.2 Mid Ulster Enterprise Week Events (Nov 2021)	5.2 Minimum of eight events providing information on a range of key business areas delivered to 240 participants	5.2 Council delivery and promotion of a programme of at least 8 events	Provide up to 10 key events for businesses during Mid Ulster Enterprise Week to assist businesses as they recover from the pandemic	£25,000-£30,000
	5.3 Decade of Anniversaries Event (March 2022)	5.3 "The Impact of Women Over the Last 100 Years" – Event to celebrate the key role of women over last 100 years and acknowledging key landmarks in our history such as the right to vote.	5.3 Delivery of two key events to celebrate the valuable contribution made by women, both currently and historically as leaders, entrepreneurs, activists, visionaries and innovators.	Two key events to take place (in North of District and South of District of Mid Ulster – locations to be determined)	£6,000

	5.4 Mid Ulster Business Awards 2021 supported, (subject to Council conditions) 5.5 NI Chamber of Commerce Regional Networking Event (Mid Ulster)	5.4 Eight Mid Ulster business finalists nominated 5.5 100 business leaders attending event	5.4 Council Sponsorship of 'Best SME 2021' Award Category (*to be agreed by Committee once details are received)* 5.5 Work with the NI Chamber to promote and deliver a regional event		Mid Ulster Business Awards £1,750 £1,000
Supporting cross border initiatives	6.1 Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN)	6.1 Strategic development of central border region supported, including projects: - Digital Connectivity - EU Exit - Creative Industries & Tourism - Roads Infrastructure - Urban & Rural Development Cross-Border Linkages 6.2 Collective Advocacy on behalf of the Region 6.3 Cross border linkages enhanced	6.1 Council's contribution is paid in two equal instalments, subject to Council being provided with the requisite documentation and Progress Updates, which will be furnished to Development Committee twice annually.	▪ Eight Councils from north and south involved in cross border development (Mid Ulster District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan County Councils). ▪ Strategic initiatives progressed on a cross border basis	£15,000
Renewable Engine / Strategic Collaborations	7.1 Renewable Engine Project (funded by Interreg V)	7.1 Facilitate knowledge transfer, technology development and innovation in 8 companies 7.2 8 enterprises co-operating with research institutes and participating in cross border	▪ Develop an internationally recognised cross-border research supercluster in *Renewable Energy and Advanced Manufacturing technologies*	7.1 Work with project lead (South West College) and project partners: IT Sligo, Queen's University, Catapult centre, University of Strathclyde, Manufacturing NI, Action Renewables.	Overall budget €6.1m (2017-21)

		transnational research into renewable energies 7.3 Research Report completed into future of renewables in Mid Ulster's engineering sector	involving four research institutes.		

Theme	Projects	Outputs	Methodology	Outcomes	Budget
Strategic Projects	1.1 Delivery of Mid South West (MSW) Regional Economic Strategy	1.1 Develop a range of strategic collaborative economic development projects as part of the Growth Deal. The following proposition papers, relevant to Mid Ulster, have been prepared and are currently with Government Depts for comment. • Lands at Desertcreat • A29 Cookstown Bypass • Engineering & Skills Innovation Centre • NI Agri-Food Robotics Centre • Cookstown Health & Care Hub • Development of the O'Neill Tourism Proposition • Sperrins Future Search • Industrial Investment Challenge Fund (*MSW wide*) • High Streets Challenge Fund (*MSW wide*)	Continue to work in partnership with Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon and Fermanagh & Omagh local authorities. Governance arrangements via the MSW Steering Group	Improved productivity and regional competitiveness	Growth Deal, Complementary Fund and other funding streams as appropriate.

Strategic Projects	1.1 To address barriers to economic recovery and growth to include Industrial land supply investment in strategic road infrastructure and funding.	1.1 Preparation of robust Business Case to support key investment to resolve the industrial land crisis in Mid Ulster. 1.2 Completion of disposal of lands at Drumcoo, Dungannon to enable additional workspace provision. 1.3 Identify potential industrial sites in Mid Ulster and ensure appropriate allocations in LDP. 1.4 Progress the A29 Bypass to Draft Orders Stage. Build the case for a funding package to progress a bypass for Dungannon. 1.5.1 Continue to identify and highlight to government the business sectors most in need of financial supports. 1.5.2 Continue to identify and share funding opportunities to support businesses and input to development of the Peace Plus and Shared Prosperity Fund.	1.1 To continue to engage with central government and present a strong case for the need for intervention. 1.2 Continue to work with DEC to expand their managed workspace portfolio. 1.3 Continue to work with project partners Invest NI, DfI, etc) 1.4 High level lobbying to ensure a bypass for Dungannon is included in the emerging RSTNTP. 1.5.1 Work closely with central government and engage with business community	• Improved opportunities to support the growth of local businesses. • Increased investment and creation of new business and job opportunities. • Ensure an appropriate supply of employment land and premises • Improved road infrastructure will support economic growth across the council area • Improved awareness of funding opportunities to support and sustain the local business base	£7,000

Supporting skills and apprenticeships	1.1 To provide appropriate support to the industry-led MEGA Network 1.2 To address skills and employability challenges facing the economic recovery	1.1 Delivery of MEGA Collaborative Growth Work plan and marketing activities. Development of a new 2-year MEGA Development Plan. Delivery of a Mid Ulster Apprenticeship Event during NI Apprenticeship Week (April 2021). 1.2 Establishment of new Labour Market Partnership (LMP) involving key partners and Work Plan developed. Strategic Assessment of labour market needs and identification of issues and priorities.	1.1 Work in partnership with MEGA and Invest NI. 1.2 Work with partners in the Skills Forum / statutory, private and community sectors	• Contribute to the sustainable recovery of the manufacturing and engineering sector. • Additional funding support secured to sustain MEGA • Contribute to increased skills levels and access to labour • Skills and employability issues improved by stronger partnership working and co-ordination.	£27,500 £1,000 Awaiting funding award from DfC.
Supporting skills and apprenticeships	1.3 Coalisland Great Places Project	1.3 The project is exploring the rich manufacturing legacy of the people of Coalisland and East Tyrone through a series of initiatives delivered in the local community by Lough Neagh Partnership.	1.3 Council is a member of the Steering group	• Community Archaeology Programme • Field & Placename interpretation • Poetry, Songs & Stories • The story of manufacturing in East Tyrone • Introduction to fine craft skills • Community Heritage Education • Community Plays • The way forward - sustaining our Great Place • Exhibitions	Project jointly supported by the Heritage Lottery £312,100 and Council £30,000

Theme	Projects	Outputs	Methodology	Outcomes	Budget
Business support / attracting investment	1.1 Full Fibre NI (FFNI)	1.1 £.3.4m of full fibre broadband infrastructure	1.1 Council part of 10 Council consortium	Delivery of fibre connectivity to 92 of the Council's own sites.	Council Capital Funding
Business support / attracting investment	1.1 Project Stratum	1.1 No. 12,289 premises eligible for FTTP in MIDC	1.1 Broadband Working Group 1.2 Broadband Survey 1.3 Meetings with DfE & Fibrus	354 premises officially remain outside the scope of Project Stratum. Need to address the significant gaps in the rollout of Project Stratum. Work in progress.	No Council Funding involved.

Rural Business support / attracting investment	1.1 Micro business development scheme (TRPSI)	1.1 Small capital grants for business development activities	1.1 Open call and assessment	Build production capacities and improve turnover within the rural micro business sector in Mid Ulster	Funding will be provided from DAERA in 2021/22.
Mid Ulster LEADER RDP Programme 2016-2020 **(2021/22 activities relate to programme closure)**	2.1 Rural Business Investment Scheme 2.2 Rural Services Scheme 2.3 Village Renewal Scheme	2.1 Delivery of the LAGs Local Rural Development Strategy	Partnership delivery between the LAG and Council	• 95 rural businesses supported with grant aid of £2.83m • 18 community hub projects supported to the value of £2.68m • 45 Village Renewal projects supported to the value of £3.5m	LAG allocation of £11.16m for the period 2016/22 *(£1.83m for admin delivery and £9.33m for project funding)* Council to lobby for Rural Development activities under the new Rural Affairs Policy

CONCLUSION

This Economic Development Plan contains a wide range of actions and commitments that will drive recovery during the pandemic and build the foundations for sustained recovery within Mid Ulster.

To help us deliver the Action Plan we recognise the importance of support from all our key partners across the public, private, community and education sectors.

We acknowledge there are many challenges ahead in the future and over the coming weeks and months we will continue to lobby government to ensure the necessary interventions are brought forward to support those sectors most affected by the pandemic. This will be vital to protect local businesses and sustain jobs within the district.

Approval is sought from Members to adopt the Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021-2022 and the projects and budgets contained herein.

Fiona McKeown
Head of Economic Development
Mid Ulster District Council

28 April 2021

Appendix 2

Mid Ulster Business Recovery Short Term Action Plan

Initiatives	Actions	ED Budget (£)
Marketing & Promotional Activities	Support initial re-opening of businesses following Covid-19 lockdown 1. To demonstrate Council's commitment to town centre recovery by engaging with and recruiting local town centre businesses to actively participate in the campaign. 2. To encourage local residents to reconnect with their towns and village centres thus supporting local businesses. **Phase 1** Initial marketing videos will focus on a **'Welcome Back Campaign'** through Council's Social Media Channels: - 23/4/21 - Close Contact Services (reopening videos) - 30/4/21 - Non Essential Retail & Outdoor Hospitality (reopening videos) - 24/5/21* - Hospitality (reopening videos, press ads) **Subject to government guidance* **Phase 2** Messaging will change to a **'Love Local Campaign'** - Linkages to Public Health messaging - A range of marketing activities linked to key retail periods - Outdoor Advertising, Social Media Videos and Press Ads - Promoting Government's High Street Voucher Scheme	£50,000
Mid Ulster Gift Card	- Procurement Specification prepared in readiness to tender the Mid Ulster Gift Card Scheme. Appoint suitable delivery partner. - Business liaison to encourage sign up and free participation in the scheme. - Gift Card Scheme Launch and associated marketing. - Liaison with larger companies to encourage corporate purchases of the Gift Card to distribute as gifts to employees (eg, at Christmas).	£57,000 (over 3 years)
Small Grants Business Marketing Scheme	- Small grants "business marketing scheme" proposes to award revenue grants of up to £300 to a minimum of 500 business, on a first come, first served basis until funding is allocated. - The scheme aims to assist businesses with their marketing efforts as they recover from the pandemic, eg, developing improved online presence, click&collect, promotional activity, merchandising and window displays, use of influencers/vloggers/bloggers, etc.	Circ. £150,000 *(scheme funding may increase if additional monies are made available by Govt Depts)*
Live Music	- Live music (small groups/buskers) in our 3 main towns at peak shopping times on Fridays/Saturdays for an initial period (will commence when permitted to do so based on Govt Guidance).	Circ. £8,000
Mid Ulster Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme	- Phase 3 (2021/22) - 72 letters of offer issued to businesses to the value of £250,000.	£250,000
Town Centre Events	- Delivery of Town Centre Events in 5 towns from Oct – Dec 2021 (delivery subject to compliance with Govt. Guidance).	£76,000
	GRAND TOTAL	**£591,000**

Report on	Railway Park
Date of Meeting	13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon , Head of Leisure
Contact Officer	Kieran Gordon , Head of Leisure

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	To present Members with a Business Case concept for the addition of a 3G pitch to the previously approved Railway Park project.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	Council previously approved the future development of Railway Park and an indicative budget of £1 million within the Capital programme to deliver on the project. This previously did not include a 3G pitch.
2.2	Within the previously approved Railway Park design, there was a large green open space planned within the development.
2.3	This Business Case concept has been prepared following a request received via the DEA working group of the proposed Railway Park development to consider the addition of a 3G pitch within the previously approved Railway Park development and for the potential of this large green open space to be developed into a 3G pitch.
2.4	This proposed addition of a 3G pitch as an additional feature on the large green open space may mean the Council may not have to source (and potentially purchase) land elsewhere within the Dungannon area to develop a 3G pitch.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Further details are contained within the Business Plan concept in Appendix A. The context for examining options is mainly derived from the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy as approved in 2018.
3.2	Council approved the Sports Facility Strategy in May 2018 which provided a framework for the future prioritisation, development and provision of sports facilities at a local level in order to meet identified community need, helping to

	increase participation, addressing health inequalities, and other local specific factors.
3.3	This proposed 3G development at Railway Park is about developing people by encouraging active lifestyles through the provision of facilities. The Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 audit evidences the Council's role in the provision of sports pitches and recreational spaces across the District therefore in the development of opportunities for active and healthier lifestyles. This proposed development comes at a time when an active lifestyle is recognised as vitally important in helping to reduce the incidence of a range of life-limiting diseases.
3.4	The Business Case concept has been developed on the basis of an engagement process resourced by the Council. The engagement process set out to establish, at a local level, if need and demand existed through engagement with groups and sports clubs in the Dungannon area and wider community stakeholders.
3.5	Through local engagement with various stakeholders, the development of a 3G facility at Railway Park will seek to provide effective partnerships with the private, education, public/local community and voluntary sector organisations which could bring benefits to the Dungannon area and wider District in a way that is open and accessible to all while at the same time maximises sustainability, efficiency and community benefit.
3.6	It is recognised that a shared, strategic approach to open space maximises its potential to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable future.
3.7	Due to the size constraints on site, this proposed 3G pitch will not be the required size for competition however is intended to be designed as multi-use in nature. The development of a 3G facility at Railway Park could be used to further develop the pitch infrastructure in the District in a way that is affordable, sustainably, inclusive, high quality and consistent with current best practice in public pitch provision.
3.8	As referenced in the 2018 Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy, it is the quality of existing pitch provision, as opposed to quantity that is the real issue. Many grass pitches do not drain well and therefore can be unplayable for several months. The provision of good quality synthetic pitches for training is therefore important.
3.9	As part of this Business Plan concept, a variety of strategic approaches were reviewed – national, regional, local – reflecting the broad reach of this project. It could be argued that this review demonstrates that the project fits well with a wide range of strategic approaches. It has the potential to deliver a wide range of outcomes which will benefit people of all ages and abilities whatever their aspirations relating to active lifestyles and wellbeing might be.

3.10	The development of a 3G facility at Railway Park allows for a cross Council approach to use of leisure pitches and recreational space with Leisure Services and Parks to ensure they are shared and maximised community assets.
3.11	A concept plan is contained within Appendix B. Further design work will be required. Reduction of the specification from 3G to natural grass sand mattress was ruled out due to other natural grass pitch provision within the Dungannon area, the need for 3G provision, additional training provision via a floodlit facility as well as the benefits of a 3G surface being available all year round.
3.12	For actual costings and designs to be worked up, Officers therefore would require the approval to add to concept of a 3G pitch to the Railway Park project and give approval for the development of this concept via an ICT team and the submission of full planning permission
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Indicative capital costs estimates would be up to £500,000. (excluding fees). These additional Railway Park project costings are contained within the Council's 2020 – 2024 Capital Framework as presented at 6 May 2021 Policy and Resources Committee. Indicative recurring annual revenue expenditure costs estimates would be approx. £26,275 (per annum – inclusive of indicative staffing and annual maintenance costs) Indicative costs for replacement carpet after approx. 10 years – approx. £200k
	Human: Staff estimated at 1 x attendant at 30 hrs per week (5 x hrs per days x 6 days to facilitate bookings, ongoing inspection requirements, etc) – approx. costs included within above financial section.
	Risk Management: In line with Council's policies and procedures. Project funding risks.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: Equality Impact Screening considered within overall Railway Park development.
	Rural Needs Implications: Rural Needs assessment considered within overall Railway Park development.

5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	That members note and approve the Business Case concept for the addition of a 3G pitch to the Railway Park project and give approval for the development of this concept via an ICT team and the submission of full planning permission.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix A – Business Case Concept Appendix B – Concept Design

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

BUSINESS CASE FOR: -

Railway Park 3G

Department: -

Leisure and Outdoor Recreation

Date: -

April 2021

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Business Case

1. Executive Summary

Council previously approved a concept development at Railway Park and an indicative budget of £1 million within the Capital programme to deliver on the project. This did not include a 3G pitch.

Within the previously approved Railway Park design, there was a large green open space planned within the development. This Business Case concept has been prepared following a request received via the DEA working group of the proposed Railway Park development to consider the addition of a 3G pitch within the previously approved Railway Park development and for the potential of this large green open space to be developed into a 3G pitch. This proposed addition of a 3G pitch as an additional feature on the large green open space may mean the Council may not have to source (and potentially purchase) land elsewhere within the Dungannon area to develop a 3G pitch.

The focus of the appraisal is a proposal by Council to invest in the development of multi-sport pitch and community provision in Railway Park, Dungannon.

The context for examining options is the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018.

The Business Case concept has been developed on the basis of an engagement process resourced by the Council. The engagement process set out to establish, at a local level, if need and demand existed through engagement with groups and sports clubs in the Dungannon area and wider community stakeholders.

Council approved the Sports Facility Strategy in May 2018 which provided a framework for the future prioritisation, development and provision of sports facilities at a local level in order to meet identified community need, helping to increase participation, addressing health inequalities, and other local specific factors.

Through local engagement with various stakeholders, the development of a 3G facility at Railway Park will seek to provide effective partnerships with the private, education, public/local community and voluntary sector organisations which could bring benefits to the Dungannon area and wider District in a way that is open and accessible to all while at the same time maximises sustainability, efficiency and community benefit.

It is recognised that a shared, strategic approach to open space maximises its potential to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable future.

As referenced in the 2018 Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy, it is the quality of existing pitch provision, as opposed to quantity that is the real issue. Many grass pitches do not drain well and therefore can be unplayable for several months. The provision of good quality synthetic pitches for training is therefore important.

The development of a 3G facility at Railway Park could be used to further develop the pitch

infrastructure in the District in a way that is affordable, sustainably, inclusive, high quality and consistent with current best practice in public pitch provision.

Sixteen strategic approaches – national, regional, local – are reviewed, reflecting the broad reach of this project. The review demonstrates that the project fits well with a wide range of strategic approaches. It has the potential to deliver a wide range of outcomes which will benefit people of all ages and abilities whatever their aspirations relating to active lifestyles and wellbeing might be.

The development of a 3G facility at Railway Park allows for a cross Council approach to use of leisure pitches and recreational space with Leisure Services, Parks, Health and Wellbeing, Community and Good Relations to ensure they are shared and maximised community assets.

2. Introduction & Overview

Give a brief description of the proposal including the key objectives.

Mid Ulster District Council covers an area of 1714 km2 and is the seventh largest of the eleven councils. According to NISRA – Mid-Year Estimate 2019, current population is 148,528 and the district has the fastest population growth in Northern Ireland, increasing by 18.4% from 2002 to 2018, compared with all the other Council areas and the Northern Ireland average of 10.3%. The population is projected to be 173,400 by 2037. Mid Ulster District Council is ranked 8th out of 11 district councils in terms of Multiple Deprivation indices.

Mid Ulster is home to more under 16's and fewer over 65's than the Northern Ireland average. A third of the population is based in and around the principal urban centres of Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt and two smaller towns, Coalisland and Maghera. Only 56% of the population meets recommended physical activity levels of at least 150 minutes per week (2012 figures). Rates of adult and childhood obesity are increasing according to the most recent Northern Ireland Health Survey results.

Growing obesity levels suggest there is a need to facilitate increased participation, and to ensure availability of quality sports facilities, which are both affordable and accessible to the local community. It will be important to ensure that communities have equal access to sports and leisure facilities to ensure that levels of obesity do not continue to show significant increases.

As the population continues to grow, demand for access to quality sports facilities will increase. The opening of facilities on education sites to create a greater level of public access could facilitate increased levels of participation in sport and physical activity, which could contribute to reducing health inequalities.

The project here proposed is important in that the intention through sports development planning and the addition of the 3G facility is to encourage more participation in sport and physical recreation.

Within the previously approved Railway Park design, there was a large green open space planned within the development. For the purposes of this business case, it is necessary to factor in an opportunity cost, that is, the value of the site in question. As Council own this site, therefore to add a 3G as an additional feature on the large green open space means the Council may not have to source (and purchase) land elsewhere within the Dungannon area to develop a

3G pitch – potentially at cost.

As referenced in the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018, to meet Sport Northern Ireland Sports Facility Hub priorities, it would be appropriate to support clubs and sports that will work together in the future e.g. GAA, Soccer and Rugby clubs with all teams using 1 x 3G pitch (up to 42 teams – the optimum number of teams per pitch as set out by the English Football Association in their new 3G Rubber Crumb Pitch strategy (not clubs within the area but teams that would have access to the pitch for training and competition).

Provision of additional 3G pitches would help to address accessibility issues for GAA, football and rugby, because existing grass pitches cannot always be used by everyone simply because many are of insufficient quality to meet demand, and some are on education sites where there is no access, and/or the pitches do not have floodlighting.

3. Market analysis/Strategies?

Identify aspects of the Organisational Strategy.

At this stage of any proposed investment project it's important to consider its potential to complement and contribute to national, regional and local strategic approaches, should it proceed. Government and its agencies recognise the important role that community activity, sport and physical recreation can play in the development of people and the communities in which they live. This section looks at a range of national, regional and local strategic approaches that have a relevance to the proposed project and considers how the project might contribute to their objectives.

This proposed 3G development at Railway Park is about developing people by encouraging active lifestyles through the provision of facilities. The Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 audit evidences the Council's role in the provision of sports pitches and recreational spaces across the District therefore in the development of opportunities for active and healthier lifestyles. This proposed development comes at a time when an active lifestyle is recognised as vitally important in helping to reduce the incidence of a range of life-limiting diseases. It also makes significant contributions to at least two of the five Council strategic themes in its Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024:

- Theme 2: Service Delivery
- Theme 5; Communities

This proposed development should take cognizance of current Strategic plans:

- Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024
- Community Plan for Mid Ulster District Council 2017 "Our Community Plan, 10 year plan for Mid Ulster" – promoting healthy and active lifestyles, helping address mental health, health inequalities and greater community development engagement.
- Mid Ulster District Council Local Development Plan 2030
- Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018
- Mid Ulster District Council Open Space, Recreation and Leisure 2015
- Mid Ulster District Council Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025

- Mid Ulster District Council Sports Club Survey 2019
- The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation 2009-2019 'Sport Matters'
- Sport Northern Ireland Corporate Plan 2015-2020
- Northern Ireland Executive: Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021
- Active Living: No Limits 2016-2021
- Sport NI Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan 2019-2025
- Active Places Research Report (Bridging the Gap) 2009
- Active Places Research Report 2014 Update, Bridging the Gap
- Draft Programme for Government 2016 – 2021; NI Executive
- Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC); NI Executive

Taken together these strategies and their outcomes have been influenced by and reflect other strategies and policies. Not least of these is the draft 'Programme for Government' whose strategic outcomes address, amongst other things, the attainment of good health and confident and peaceful communities, targeting 'those things that make real improvements to the quality of life for the citizen'.

'Sport Matters: The NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019'; Department for Communities/ Sport NI

The strategy sets out a shared vision of 'a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport. The case is made for ongoing investment in sport and physical recreation to 'deliver a range of sporting outcomes and support the wider social agenda in areas such as education health, the economy and the development of communities over the period 2009-2019.' Investment is directed towards three key areas:

(1) Participation (2) Performance and (3) Places

As with the community planning process a number of key principles underpin the strategy's development that could easily be applied to this project:

- Empowering individuals, groups and communities;
- Responding to need;
- Partnership working based on consultation and stakeholder buy-in;
- Promoting good relations and working towards 'A Shared Future'; and
- Focusing on outcomes.

The strategy highlights the importance of joined-up planning and partnership working at strategic levels as well as within delivery structures, adding that the pooling of resources, public and private is critical to achieving delivery.

Given the challenges posed variously by the economic downturn and local government reform since the strategy was published the targets for 'Places' have not been delivered in full.

However, one target is highly relevant to this project, that is:

PL25: 'By 2019 to ensure that 90% of the population have quality accredited multi sports facilities that have the capacity to meet demand, within 20 minutes travel time.'

The clarity of this target helps to inform the preparation of the Council's position for considered proposed developments such as that presented by this business case with relation to Railway Park, Dungannon.

Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018

The Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 provides a framework to inform the priority for the development and provision of sports facilities at a local level, to meet identified community need in Mid Ulster. The strategy rationale is to develop a framework for future prioritisation and development of sports facilities based on identified need, increasing participation, addressing health inequalities and other local specific factors.

The focus of the 2018 strategy was facilities analysis on sports halls (4 courts or above – except those on education sites), pools of 20m length and above, health and fitness suites of 20 stations and above, Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA's), and full size Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP's).

This was one of 11 Local Strategies that were developed in the context of the wider NI Sports Facility Strategy.

The consultation process for this Strategy identified a number of key issues and priorities that relates to this proposed 3G development at Railway Park:

- *Some existing facilities are unavailable for community access because they are on education sites. This impacts particularly on the supply of accessible sports hall, pitch facilities, although there are some existing good examples of facilities shared between the community and a school e.g. Fivemiletown College, Aughnacloy High School.*

- *Based on club feedback there is a lack of all-weather pitches/3Gs, particularly for training. New provision should be considered/supported where it would replace poorer quality grass pitches and can be shared between a number of local clubs/organisations.*

- *Development of additional 3G pitches; the priority is for those based on education sites which offer community use and the opportunity for multi-facility hub development. There is a need for additional club –based provision but again this should be shared between clubs as a minimum to ensure sustainability and provide the opportunity for multi-facility hubs.*

- *Investment to improve existing AGPs/3G pitches e.g. floodlights, fencing, surfaces, infrastructure such as changing rooms, storage*

The consultation process for the 2018 strategy identified that several local stakeholders felt there is a need for additional pitches within Mid Ulster District Council. The feedback on pitch provision, current and future, represents the majority of comments received. The consultation feedback identified the following:

- *There is a need for an additional grass rugby pitch, ideally this would be on a club site, but access to a pitch for competition games could be off site; the growth in the numbers*

of young players means more teams are playing more often, and existing pitch facilities do not have the capacity

- *There is a need for additional synthetic training pitch facilities for rugby given the number of teams now in the club and the condition of existing grass pitches,*
- *Upgraded existing 3G pitch to complement existing sports and social facilities*
- *Development of floodlit synthetic surfaces provision for training*
- *3G pitches for local clubs*

The strategy makes a number of recommendation to address the issues and priorities identified and provides a framework within which to develop sports facilities in Mid Ulster and many of these outcomes support the proposed 3G development at Railway Park.

Bridging the Gap – Active Places Research 2009

Bridging the Gap – Active Places Research 2009, and its subsequent update in 2014, have also informed the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018.

The 2009, 'Bridging the Gap' Active Places research report, produced by Sport NI (SNI), assessed the adequacy of existing sports facility provision (excluding education facilities), in Northern Ireland's 26 former and 11 proposed district council areas by comparison with National Facility Standards and/or the facility demand of potential users (determined by the Facilities Planning Model (FPM).

'Bridging the Gap' established three general findings:

1. There is a significant shortfall in sports facility provision in Northern Ireland
2. The deficit in provision is not uniform
3. There are a number of areas for concern regarding provision, particularly in relation to quality, quantity, accessibility, condition, universal access and specification.

Although 'Bridging the Gap 2009' identified significant need for sports facilities throughout Northern Ireland, the research stopped short of identifying where new or refurbished sports facility provision should be developed or located. The Programme for Government, Together Building a United Community, the Corporate Plan of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), Sport Matters and SNI's Corporate Plan identify a number of Government priorities that set the direction for investment in sport and physical recreation, because sport contributes to a range of wider social, economic and cultural needs.

Sport improves community health and well-being and can contribute to reducing inequalities in child poverty and social deprivation, as well as ensuring equality of opportunity.

The 2014 Update to Bridging the Gap re-calculated need for a number of specific facility types, to illustrate progress in developing the sports facility infrastructure in NI; the analysis still

identifies a significant shortfall in provision, however, particularly in terms of playing pitches.

Sport NI completed a 2014 update of figures quantifying all pitches in the 11 District Council Areas. They produced two tables covering Playing Pitches - Including education synthetic but excluding education grass pitches (Table below), which shows an assessment including both education synthetic and grass pitches.

District Council	2011 Population Projection	Perceived Acres Shortfall (SNI Standard)	Pitches Required i.e. shortfall
Cookstown	35,238	-4	-2
Dungannon	50,995	6	2
Magherafelt	43,682	-17	-7
		TOTAL	-7

Table 4.11 All Sites- Including Education synthetic and including Education Grass Pitches

District Council	2011 Population Projection	Perceived Acres Shortfall (SNI Standard)	Pitches Required
Cookstown	35,238	-30	-12
Dungannon	50,995	-48	-19
Magherafelt	43,682	-76	-31
		TOTAL	-62

Source: Sports NI- 2014 update of the Active Places Research Report

Taking into account that efficiency can be achieved through the use of synthetic pitches Sport NI calculated Mid Ulster's pitch provision on 3 acres (1.2hectares) per 1000 population rather than the old grass pitch NFPA target.

- From the above table, it can be seen that Magherafelt is best provided for in terms of pitches and actually has a large surplus of pitches.
- Cookstown has no pitch deficiency.
- Dungannon has a shortfall of 2 pitches when educational grass pitches are not included but doesn't have a shortfall when educational grass pitches are included – however there are known challenges associated with the "opening up" of educational sites for community access.

The Sport NI 2009 updated Bridging the Gap assessment identifies a need in Mid Ulster for additional pitches (grass and all weather).

Local Development Plan

The Council has prepared a Local Development Plan 2030 (LDP) and a Preferred Options Paper (POP) has been consulted on prior to the formal preparation of the LDP.

The Council has also developed a position paper of Open Space, Sport and Recreation.

The POP was prepared to consider issues that may have a direct impact on the district and set out possible options to address them as well as the councils preferred option. In the context of Open Space, Recreation and Leisure the POP concludes that there is no immediate need to address pitch provision and therefore Development Plan intervention is not considered necessary in relation to the zoning of land at this time.

The Draft Plan Strategy sets out the Council's vision for planning the use of land and details the objectives, planning framework and planning policies that will be used to deliver the vision.

Responsibility for planning passed to the Council in April 2015 as a result of Local Government Reform and the Draft Plan Strategy is the first strategic approach to local development under the Council. The Draft Plan Strategy recognises it is set in the context of the Executive's Programme for Government commitments and priorities as well as the Regional Development Strategy 2035, the latter being the overarching spatial planning strategy for Northern Ireland.

Open Space, Recreation and Leisure' is one of five social policies whose objective is accommodating growth and creating places. The policy explains that applications under sub-policy 'Policy OS1 – Protection of Open Space' will be informed by the following policy statement:-

'Development that results in the loss of open space shall not accord with the Plan irrespective of its physical condition and appearance.

An exception can be made where it is demonstrated that it will bring substantial community benefits that outweigh the loss of the open space and it will have no significant detrimental impact on open space provision, amenity, character or biodiversity of an area.

Where appropriate, adequate compensatory measures to include provision for more intensive recreational use (3G sports pitches) on site or in other locations capable of serving the area will be given consideration. Compensatory measures should be comparable to that which is lost.'

Benefits to the community include:-

'More intensive recreation facilities such as all-weather pitches.'

In Northern Ireland, the Department of the Environment recognises the need for provision of outdoor recreation space in Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. Section 5.15 states:

- *"In large developments there may be a need to provide more formal outdoor recreation facilities such as playing pitches to meet the needs generated by the development. In such cases the Department will consult closely with the recreation department of local district Councils."*

It therefore could be argued that the development of a 3G at Railway Park can assist with the strategic development of opportunities for increased participation in sport.

Planning policy is however necessary to ensure provision and protection of open space and also to ensure sports and recreation facilities coming forward are appropriately sited.

The Council's LDP Strategy for the retention, creation and promotion of Open Space, Recreation and Leisure is as follows:

- Provide policy for the protection and safeguarding of public open space;
- Require the provision of open space in housing developments and where appropriate equip it for children's play;
- Facilitate large scale leisure on opportunity sites within or near town centers and smaller scale elsewhere within settlement limit;
- Protect environmental open spaces for example parks, gardens and linear open spaces

such as pedestrian and cycle routes/walkways and river corridors that have open space value;

- Local Policies Plan designate important open spaces to be protected, zone new sites and offer protection through other means such as Local Landscape Policy Areas.

Source: Position Paper Seven Open Space, Recreation and Leisure 2 June 2015

Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC)

T:BUC outlines a vision of:

'a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.'

The strategy reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society. This strategy represents a major change in the way that good relations will be delivered across government. Departments will be expected to work together to ensure that outcomes are delivered on the ground. This will mean that funding is directed in the most appropriate manner through the most appropriate bodies on the basis of themes in this strategy.

The priorities of this strategy are:-

1. Children and Young People;
2. Shared Community;
3. Safe Community; and
4. Cultural Expression and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.'

District Councils in Northern Ireland have a statutory duty under the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986(5) to 'secure the provision for its area of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities. Generally speaking, the outworking of this legislation has been Council provision and operation of leisure centres and sports facilities and the preparation and delivery of activity programmes. The legislation doesn't specify the meaning of 'adequate' so over the years (the original 1973 Order started the development of leisure and recreation centres) each local authority developed facilities in accordance with their perception of need; for example, all of the former 26 local authorities developed at least one leisure centre with a swimming pool (Moyle District Council excepted). Sport NI's work in reports such as 'Active Places Research Report 2009; Bridging the Gap' was critical in beginning to assess the actual need for sports facilities based on existing provision matched to population. The 'Bridging the Gap' report, even by its very title concludes there is a shortfall in sports facilities that are 'community accessible'. Whilst local authorities are by far the biggest provider of community accessible facilities, schools are increasingly opening their sports facilities for shared use, so the picture of adequacy of provision is constantly changing.

4. Links to Council Policy/Strategic Context

Identify aspects of the Divisional/Unit Plan that are addressed.

Mid Ulster Community Plan 2017-2027; Mid Ulster District Council

The Council's vision for Community Planning reflects the plan's 5 themes, three of which have a particular resonance with the proposed 3G development at Railway Park:-

Economic Growth

- ***Help businesses do well and bring money into Mid Ulster.*** One of the strands to the economic growth theme is to get more people to visit Mid Ulster and spend money here.

Health and Wellbeing

- ***Help people live longer, healthier and more active lives.*** This theme speaks of having plans to help people being healthy in all areas of life, help with mental health and wellbeing and helping people age well.

Vibrant and Safe Communities

- ***Make our community feel safer and stronger.*** This theme speaks of helping organisations in the community and voluntary sector - this includes sports clubs - to do more and get more people volunteering.

The community in Mid Ulster, and more specifically the wider Dungannon area, is at the very heart of this proposed 3G development at Railway Park.

It could be argued that increased participation will follow by implementing this proposed 3G facility development and this will contribute to the Community Plan's health and wellbeing theme. It could be argues that local sports clubs will be able to grow their membership – the lack of a local floodlit all weather synthetic training facilities is a constraint on membership – and more volunteers will be needed to assist in servicing the growing clubs.

The strategic context for reviewing the adequacy of provision of pitches is quite simply to provide better quality facilities for a better quality experience, so encouraging more participation for all, including those in formalised sports and those not in formalised sports..

The particular challenge is to make best use of resources and to do so through partnerships that can deliver more by working together than working in isolation.

Mid Ulster District Council's vision within the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 reflects this:

- *To be at the heart of our community.*

This proposed 3G development at Railway Park is about developing people by encouraging active lifestyles through the provision of facilities.

The Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 audit evidences the Council's role in the provision of sports pitches and recreation space therefore in the development of opportunities for active and healthier lifestyles. This proposed development comes at a time when an active lifestyle is recognised as vitally important in helping to reduce the incidence of a range of life-limiting diseases. It also makes significant contributions to at least two of the five Council strategic themes in its Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024:

- Theme 2: Service Delivery
- Theme 5: Communities

Whilst the project here proposed clearly fits with delivery, it is first and foremost about people, in that it will create opportunities for active recreation that bring people and groups together, facilitating individuals' growth and the development of communities with positive outcomes for people's health and wellbeing. In providing and enhancing the quality of sports facilities the Council is effectively a community encourager.

The Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 states that "Each district council shall secure the provision for its area of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities and for that purpose may, either alone or together with another district council or any other person, establish, maintain and manage any such facilities". Furthermore, the Order 1986 goes on to state that "a district council shall, in carrying out its functions, have regard to the facilities provided by other district councils or by other persons. A district council may provide a facility for the whole of Northern Ireland or for an area or areas outside its own area".

5. Assessment of Benefits/Need

What are the opportunities and benefits for the Organisation and User(s)?

This proposed development comes at a time when an active lifestyle is recognised as vitally important in helping to reduce the incidence of a range of life-limiting diseases. It also makes significant contributions to at least two of the five Council strategic themes in its Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024:

- Theme 2: Service Delivery
- Theme 5: Communities

In addition, linked to Mid Ulster District Council's Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025, while each of the strategic themes has a clear focus and purpose, there are also a number of corporate commitments which are not tethered to one area of work, but are common to all and will be realised via this proposed strategy:

- Promoting Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations
  - *"Beyond a duty of compliance with our equality scheme, we aim to mainstream the promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations throughout the organisation, actively seeking out ways in which to enhance those opportunities and to build positive relations between and among the diverse communities across Mid Ulster."*
  - *Working in partnership our Good Relations and Community Development Teams to further promote shared spaces across Mid Ulster in all our towns and*

villages to seek to bring people together and maximise resources.

- Continuously improving our services
  - *"Whether through our formal Corporate Improvement Objectives and service-specific Performance Improvement Plans or the small, regular, routine changes which we make to services through feedback, we are committed to continuously improving what we do and how we do it."*
  - *Working in partnership with our outreach sports and leisure teams, Health and Wellbeing teams to promote active and health lifestyles for all.*

- Designing and delivering our services sustainably
  - *"From large-scale investment projects to new or changing service models, we place a value on ensuring that what we do not only meets current needs, but is designed and delivered to be sustainable in the longer-term, ensuring the needs of future generations are uncompromised."*

- Working collaboratively across the public, private, community and voluntary sector to achieve shared objectives
  - *"Collaborative working is key to delivering successful outcomes for local people. The Council is committed to embracing the opportunities to work with a range of other organisations on issues, projects and plans as they relate to every theme, priority and aspect of our work."*

Providing services across a significant section of the southern part of the Mid Ulster District Council area, the formerly named Dungannon & South Tyrone has a population of 57,852 a rise of over 10,000 between 2001 and 2011 equating to a 21.2% increase. The projected population of the area is expected to be 68,911 by 2022 representing a further growth in the population.

Dungannon is the main urban centre within the district with other settlements with a population over 1,000 being Coalisland (now falls under Torrent, with some of the former Cookstown areas), Moy and Fivemiletown.

Reflecting on the local economy and employment within the area an increase from 60% to 67.5% in economic activity rates took place between 2001 and 2011. Of those economically active and employed many work in agriculture, manufacturing and construction with the latter accounting for 10% of the labour market. The public sector provides employment for 26% of those employed. There is also a comparatively high proportion of the labour force in occupations linked to skilled trades, not dissimilar to Magherafelt and Cookstown Districts.

Dungannon as the highest growth town across the area – overall Mid Ulster is over 20% and NI average is around 7-8%, it could be argued that Dungannon is major driver of this.

Railway Park falls within the Ballysaggart ward. Railway Park also borders the wards and Super Output areas of Ballysaggart, Mullaghmore, Drumglass and Killymeal.

The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010, highlighted that the Ballysaggart Ward is one of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland, falling within the top 15%. Part of the

ward has been identified as an area of targeted need and is placed within the Neighbourhood Renewal Area of Dungannon West. Drumglass and Mullaghmore also have issues of deprivation, falling within the top 20-25% most disadvantaged wards across Northern Ireland.

During the past 10 years the Ballysaggart ward has grown by over 34% to a population of 2661, resulting in unprecedented building growth making it one of the highest urban density areas in the District at 7.8 density. Approximately 75% of the ward's residents live in social housing. It is one of the areas that has benefited most from inward migration.

Living environment, alongside crime and disorder are the most concerning regarding deprivation ranking as they are in the top 10% of most disadvantaged in the region.

The area is also in the top 15% most deprived wards across Northern Ireland related to income and health. There are specific issues in the area relating to healthy lifestyle diseases, lung and heart and diabetes which contribute to the death rate in the area being up to 7-10 years younger than other areas in the Council areas and across Northern Ireland. The average age at death is 73 years compared to 80 years for Northern Ireland.

Specifically related to children, the birth rate for this area is one of the highest in the Borough and NI region. Births to parents with medium/low or unknown social class in 2006 was 54.6% compared to 47.7% for the Northern Ireland average. It is anticipated this figure will have changed dramatically and will be much higher given the significant change in unemployment figures from 2006 – 2008.

Poverty is extremely high in this area for both working and unemployed households. Houses in relative poverty in the Ballysaggart Super Output Area according to NISRA is 40%, therefore almost every 1 in every 2 homes is in poverty.

Child poverty is also a major issue for the Ballysaggart area contributed to by low wages and high housing rents. Many children in the area are not registered with a dentist, have a poor diet and do not receive adequate exercise, all of which have implications for longer-term health and life expectancy.

23% of those living in the Ballysaggart ward and Dungannon overall, are young people which is higher than the Northern Ireland average.

Education, skills, training is also in the top 15% in relation to deprivation, where many children are performing up to 10% less compared to their counterparts 2-3 miles away particularly in the key skills of Maths and English.

It is recognised, that good quality open/green space can help address issues of poverty, health, education and social interaction and therefore significantly enhance the lives of those who live in the area. Developing Railway Park further with the addition of a 3G pitch could be argued as having great potential in being a key contributor to addressing the issues noted above for this area including children in poverty, elderly people, disengaged young people, migrants and people experiencing issues of disadvantage.

The addition of a 3G pitch could directly impact on the lives of people on health physical and

mental wellbeing, education, social interaction and pride in their community place. Alongside greater access to other communities and facilities there will be opportunities for both social and economic improvements.

Community/Sporting Group Survey

The purpose of this survey was to explain the potential for addition of a 3G facility to the Railway Park development, explore attitudes towards this and attempt to find out what indicative use may be if the facility was constructed. As part of the engagement process with local community/sporting groups, information was requested on potential use if the facility were to be constructed.

The following clubs/groups were asked for feedback:

- Dungannon Swifts FC
- Dungannon Utd Youth
- Dungannon Clarkes GAA
- Dungannon Eoghan Rua GAC
- Dungannon Rugby
- Dungannon Tigers FC
- Dungannon Ladies Hickey Club
- Naomh Treasa Camogie Club
- Aodh Ruadh LGFC
- West End Hibs FC
- AFC Dungannon
- Dungannon Rovers FC
- Reclain Rovers FC
- Caledon Rovers FC
- Mid Ulster Youth FC

Engagement focused on the following themes:

- Number of adult and under age teams
- Normal location for club outdoor activities (ie. club owned, hire of other pitches,etc)
- If a synthetic pitch were to be located at Railway Park, anticipation that their club would make use of this proposed 3G development at Railway Park, how and what would be their specific need of use (ie. Alleviate grass pitch congestion / usage / increase numbers of adult/junior teams
- Predication of potential usage if a 3G pitch were to be located at Railway Park
- Prediction of anticipated hours per week? (eg. daytime / evening / weekend / Spring / Summer / Autumn / Winter)
- Analysis of bookings at other nearby Council facilities – ie. Drumcoo
- Understanding if a 3G facility were to be developed at Railway Park and if they currently use Drumcoo, would they still require to use Drumcoo also and how

Summary

- Available space and the limitations of grass pitches in the Dungannon area tended to be included with all who responded – particularly weather issues and over reliance on grass pitches and unpredictability of availability for grass pitches that could result in planned activities being cancelled/postponed
- Indication of use amongst all who responded tended to range from a prediction of 2-3 hours per week to 12 hours per week
- Indication from some clubs that this proposed facility development would help them with aspiration of development of new activities and possible new youth teams being established.
- All who responded indicated it was to alleviate pitch congestion and primarily would be used for training.
- All who responded indicated continued use of both Drumcoo and any Railway Park facility

Analysis was also undertaken with primary and post primary schools that have a travel time to Dungannon less than 15 mins. Information was gathered to determine if a school already had a 3G facility on site and if it was open for public hire.

- 48 Primary Schools were contacted 31 replied = 65% response rate
- 10 Post Primary Schools were contacted 8 replied = 80% response rate
- Out of the 58 Schools across the Dungannon area, 12 schools have a 3G facility onsite = 21%
- Not all are open for public hire
- Out of the 31 Primary Schools that replied, only 3 meet the criteria of - 15m drive time, 3G onsite and open for public hire
- Out of the 10 Post Primary Schools that replied, only 2 meet the criteria of - 15m drive time, 3G onsite and open for public hire

The above tends to be reflective of the analysis within the following papers:

The Bridging the Gap – Active Places Research 2009, and its subsequent update in 2014, along with the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 evidence that there is a need in Mid Ulster for additional pitches (grass and all weather) and that the Dungannon area has a shortfall of pitches.

Mid Ulster District Council Participation Team

Council has committed to the work of sports development over many years; the recent departmental re-structuring reflects this ongoing commitment in the creation of the post of Participation Manager. The postholder, based at MUSA (with flexibility to work across other leisure facility sites) has the following three purposes/functions:-

- To develop, deliver and achieve strategically focused sport, leisure activity and participation programmes across the District.
- To increase participation rates in physical activity and improve health & wellbeing within the community.
- To assist in the development and implementation of policy and strategic relationships within Council and other partners to increase participation and overall health and wellbeing.

The Participation Manager's job description evidences the Council's focus on getting more people involved in sport and leisure activity to improve health and wellbeing. This is very much in line with the project aim and objectives through implementation of a future participation development plan should the 3G facility at Railway Park proceed.

6. Implications of not undertaking Proposal

What problems will arise if the proposal does not go ahead?

Railway Park concept/enhancement as previously approved and included within the Council capital programme would remain the same as it currently is without any 3G pitch addition/investment.

By not taking forward this proposal, it supports a status quo decision, which does not allow for maximising Council's current recreational assets for the wider benefit of all within the Dungannon area.

By not taking forward this proposed development, then this would not seek to target the analysis with the following papers:

- The Bridging the Gap – Active Places Research 2009, and its subsequent update in 2014, along with the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 evidence that there is a need in Mid Ulster for additional pitches (grass and all weather) and that the Dungannon area has a shortfall of pitches.

7. Alternatives/Describe the options available

What are the alternatives/options to undertaking the proposed development?

Council currently have a 3G facility at Drumcoo (approx. less than 10 mins drive). The nearest Council owned 3G's to this proposed development is Benburb (approx. 15 mins drive), Mid Ulster Sports Arena (approx. 20 mins drive), Aughnacloy (approx. 20 mins drive). Funding dependant, they may also be a future development of a 3G at Gortgonis (approx. 15 min drive).

<u>Potential for Displacement</u>

The potential for this proposed addition of a 3G at Railway Park to detract from other facilities (i.e., people/groups cease using other facilities in favour of the new facility) could be argued that it is low risk.

There are two elements of displacement to consider:

(i) Displacement from other sports clubs in the area

(ii) Displacement from similar facilities in the area

Considering the first element above, the proposed 3G facility at Railway Park is an enhancement of existing facilities that is planned for the Railway Park Development. Additionally it has the potential to be used for sports training and recreational play by a number of sports clubs and groups from the surrounding areas and beyond. There is a long history of sports club participation in the locality of Dungannon with well-established memberships that are

invariably clearly defined according to home location. The proposed 3G development at Railway Park is therefore not expected to cause movement of membership between clubs but rather allow for growth of each of the resident/anchor clubs with access to an additional facility.

Considering the second element above, whilst Drumcoo Playing Fields has a 3G facility and is approx less than 10 mins drive, engagement and feedback with local clubs/groups suggest that they will still need to use Drumcoo as the proposed development at Railway Park will be for the purposes of training and recreation as it wont be sufficient size for competitive matchplay therefore Drumcoo still has an important role to play. Additionally, when Bridging the Gap – Active Places Research 2009, and its subsequent update in 2014, along with the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 are taken into consideration, it was evidenced that there is a need in Mid Ulster for additional pitches (grass and all weather) and that the Dungannon area has a shortfall of pitches.

8. Organisational Areas Affected

What staff, processes and systems will be affected by the proposed development?

- Staff engagement and facilitation of stakeholder engagement – can be derived via existing resources
- Infrastructure/databases/communication capabilities – can be derived via existing resources
- Working group, across departments, to ensure an integrated approach to deliver to meet the wider corporate targets for leisure and sport, health and wellbeing, community development, good relations

9. Risks

What risks are involved in implementing the proposal and how will they be managed?

- Project funding risks.
- Lack of clarity of roles/ responsibilities for the project.
- Failure to deliver address identified needs and deliver project objectives
- Low levels of stakeholder engagement to the consultation
- Stakeholder resistance to proposed development

10. Investment Costs

What is the summary of capital investment costs for the proposed development?

a) Staff

- Staff estimated at 1 x attendant at 30 hrs per week (5 x hrs per days x 6 days to facilitate bookings, ongoing inspection requirements, etc) – approx. £22.5k per annum

b) Training

- N/A

c) Equipment, etc

- N/A

d) Other

- Indicative capital investment estimate would be up to £500,000. (excluding fees)
- Recurring annual revenue expenditure – total approx. £3775 inclusive of electricity approx. £2k per annum, maintenance approx. £1775 per annum (ie. Weekly Brush/Rake @ approx. £800 (48 weeks/ in-house), annual deep clean @ approx. £500, every two years 1-2 ton of rubber in-fill @ approx. £175 per annum. Carpet repairs @ approx. £300 per annum)

TOTAL

- Indicative capital costs estimates would be up to £500,000. (excluding fees)
- Indicative recurring annual revenue expenditure costs estimates would be approx. £26,275 (per annum – inclusive of above indicative staffing and maintenance costs)
- Indicative costs for replacement carpet after approx. 10 years – approx. £200k

11. Running Costs

What are the costs to run this proposal as a service/system?

The above would be presented as indicative costs and subject to consideration and approval by Members and included within the Council's Capital Framework therefore at this stage indicative costs won't be completely established until a procurement process is carried out.

A 3G rubber crumb pitch carpet lasts approximately 10 years before it will require replacing. To ensure sustainability of providing 3G rubber crumb pitches, a business and sports development plan for the pitch should be produced. A new replacement carpet can cost up to £200,000

12. Payback/NPV (Net Present Value

How and on what timescales will the projected costs be recouped as savings or benefits?

Whilst there would not be an immediate payback on the initial outlay of the investment for the strategy developed, it is anticipated that this proposed development comes at a time when an active lifestyle is recognised as vitally important in helping to reduce the incidence of a range of life-limiting diseases. It is anticipated that there will be non-monetary benefits with the development for the future prioritisation, development and provision of sports facilities at a local level in order to meet identified community need, helping to increase participation, addressing health inequalities, and other local specific factors.

13. Timescales/Phasing

What are the timescales and deadlines for the proposed development?

It is estimated that if this business plan concept is approved, this will move forward as part of the overall Railway Park development project and be included within that specific project timescales.

14. Conclusion

The project potentially delivers a range of benefits through provision of extended and new opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity for the entire community. These opportunities and the resultant benefits will be realised through a combination of facility provision and sports development programming.

The needs and demand analysis above can be summarised as follows:

- The Bridging the Gap – Active Places Research 2009, and its subsequent update in 2014, along with the Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 evidence that there is a need in Mid Ulster for additional pitches (grass and all weather) and that the Dungannon area has a shortfall of pitches.
- The socio-economic needs of the area indicate the catchment area to be deprived in terms of 'proximity to services'
- Local clubs have requested additional "all weather" pitch provision for training and to rely less on grass pitch (due to the seasonal inclement weather, maintenance schedules,etc) that will allow the local club's to further develop their membership bases
- The proposed addition of a 3G facility at Railway Park has the potential to be a 'community hub' to serve the various sporting clubs in the surrounding area, the schools, and general recreational play and therefore act as a catalyst for community cohesion and social wellbeing.

15. Recommendations

Has the proposal been approved, rejected, deferred etc. and do any conditions apply?

This business case recommends the further development of a 3G concept to be included within the previously approved Railway Park development.

Developed by	***Post***	***Date***
Kieran Gordon	Head of Leisure	28.04.2021

Authorised by	***Post***	***Date***
Anne-Marie Campbell	Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation	04.05.2021

Name of Assigned Project Manager	**Date**

RAILWAY PARK, DUNGANNON
CONCEPT PLAN
RAILWAY PARK - A PLACE AND SPACE FOR EVERYONE
MID ULSTER DISTRICT COUNCIL AND GM DESIGN (APPOINTED LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS) HAVE DEVELOPED CONCEPT PROPOSALS FOR THE FORTHCOMING REFURBISHMENT OF RAILWAY PARK, BASED ON COLLECTIVE, LOCAL COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS FOR OUR SHARED GREEN SPACES
OUR PICTURE BOARD ILLUSTRATION (BELOW) PRESENTS THE CURRENT CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PROPOSAL FOR RAILWAY PARK
FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:
Parks@midulstercouncil.org
THE IMAGES THAT FORM PART OF THIS DRAWING ARE INDICATIVE AND ARE INTENDED TO CONVEY THE POTENTIAL DESIGN FUNCTION OF THE AREAS.
OUTDOOR CINEMA
URBAN SPORTS PARK
NATURAL PLAY AREA
COMMUNITY MARKET
SCULPTURE PARK
FOOT BRIDGE
'WETLANDS' PARK
SHARED CYCLEWAY
HEALTH HUB
UNDERPASS LIGHTING
ART / SCULPTURE
ALLOTMENTS
KEY
1 Kickabout Area (Grassed)
2 New footbridge
3 Revitalised station platforms
4 Hoop Court
5 Urban sports Park
6 Natural play area
7 Small Step 'Giant Leap' Space
8 Allotments at Millcove Park
9 Revitalised sustainable car park
Bike Dock
Gateway
Proposed tree
Potential for future Art / sculpture
Connection into park
Bridge Underpass
New footbridge
New Maintenance Hub and Composting Area
Upgraded shared cycleway
Watercourse
Comhairle Chontae Lár Ulaidh Mid Ulster District Council
G/M Design Associates
DATE: JULY 2020
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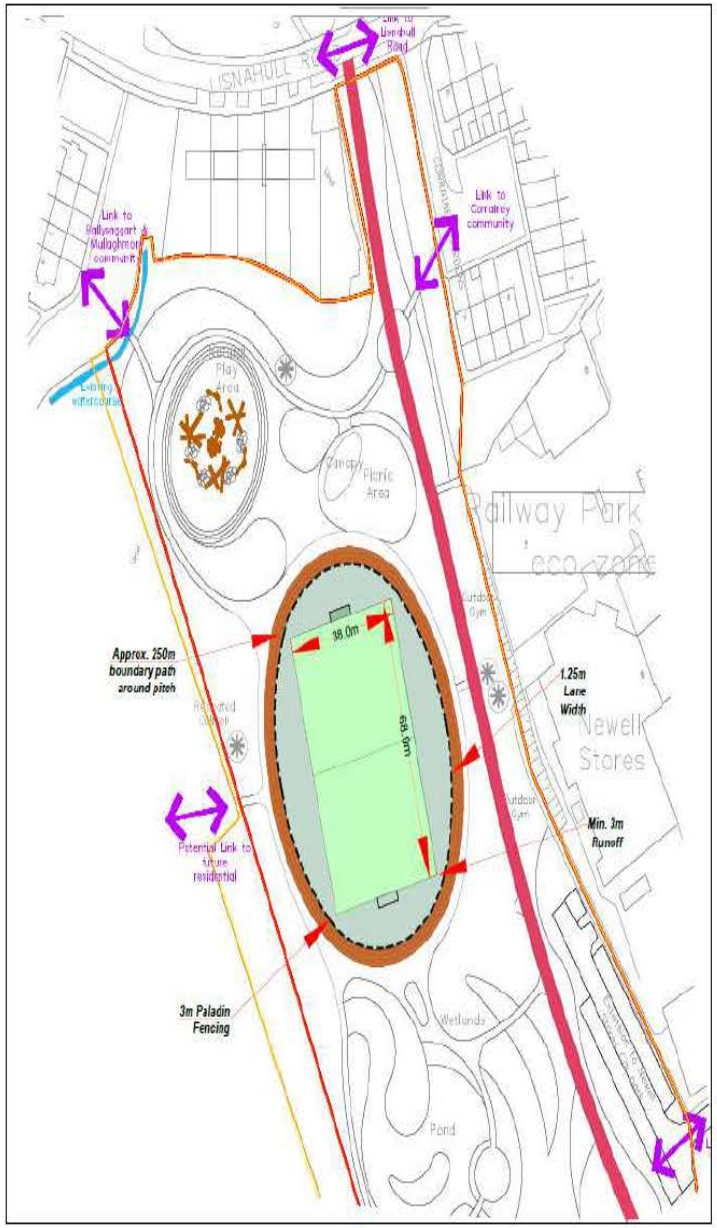
N


Link to Lisnahull Road
Link to Ballyscagart Mullaghmore community
Link to Corraley community
Railway Park eco-zone
Approx. 250m boundary path around pitch
38.0m
68.0m
1.25m Lane Width
Min. 3m Runoff
Newell Stores
Potential Link to future residential
3m Paladin Fencing
Wetlands
Pond

Minutes of Meeting of the Development Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 15 April 2021 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon and by Virtual Means

Members Present	Councillor McNamee Councillors Ashton*, Black, Burton*, Clarke*, Corry*, Cuddy*, Doris*, Elattar*, Hughes*, Kearney*, Kerr*, Milne*, Molloy*, Monteith*, Wilson*
Officers in Attendance	Mr McCreesh**, Chief Executive Ms Campbell, Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Mr Browne**, Head of Tourism Mr Gordon, Head of Leisure Mr Hill**, Head of Parks Ms Linney**, Head of Community Development Mr McCance, Head of Culture and Arts Ms McKeown**, Head of Economic Development Mr Greer, ICT Support Ms Grogan, Democratic Services Officer
Others in Attendance	Deputation: Fionnuala Boyle Mother & Baby Home Enquiry Councillor S McGuigan***

* 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.

The Chair, Councillor McNamee wished everyone a Happy New Year, he stated that last year was difficult but that there was now a vaccine and the infection rate was coming down and that he hoped the situation would improve in the coming months.

D059/21 Apologies

None.

D060/21 Declarations of Interest

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

D061/21 Chair's Business

The Chair advised that agenda item 16 Decade of Anniversaries Commemorations 2021/22 Updated Action Plan would be raised in open business and taken immediately after agenda item 9.

He also advised members that the Community Grants were now open and will remain open until the 5th May 2021.

The Chair referred to the welcome news coming out of an application to Sport NI in relation to the extension to Mid Ulster Sports Arena and happy to say we got an indicative funding offer for an 8 lane floodlit running track and a 3G pitch. He said he was pleased to advise members that the Council had received an indicative award of £1m for that project and wanted to say a huge thank you to all the officers and staff who had worked on this over the last number of years. He also wanted to thank the Cookstown DEA Councillors as this was started in the legacy Council when Michelle O'Neill was the DARD Minister with a few letters written to her seeking more land and thankfully the members received the right sound bites then and said all was looking good.

The Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation advised that confirmation was received yesterday that the Council had received £1m indicative award which meant that the Council could now move on to the next stage and actually start with the detailed designs, appoint ICT Teams and apply for planning permission to allow to put together a detailed plan for a floodlit 8 lane athletic track and 3G infield synthetic pitch with lights. She said that work had been ongoing through an Officer and Councillor team for a number of years and was delighted to have gotten it to this stage. Officers would be firing ahead in the next number of weeks to get designs and approval processed to get consultants appointed which would allow Officers to take to completion.

Councillor Kerr advised that he had been contacted by a representative from Killeeshil-Galbally Responders seeking Council's help on some issues. He said that the group had a major concern trying to open a bank account which was stopping them from applying for charity status. This organisation also carries out ambulance services and first responder treatment in conjunction with the Ambulance Service and the lack of house numbering for more rural housing was an issue and would like to highlight along with Council for homeowners to display numbering to help them find a residence to help them carry out their medical assistance. This group also carries out CPR, defibrillator and first aid training and believed that this would be beneficial to see if he Council could coordinate with the group to help raise awareness which was within their main functions and encourage council staff to undergo this type of training offered. He referred to the recent incident involving Michael Coleman in America who took a cardiac arrest, the term the 'widow-maker' and statistics have shown only a 12% success rate of survival outside the medical facilities. He also referred to incident involving Conor Gormley's father whilst attending a GAA match between Ardboe and Carrickmore who took a turn and thankfully the defibrillator was within reach and saved his life and also the sudden

death syndrome and a close friend of his Johnny Curran. He said that it would be very beneficial to issue an invite this group to make a presentation.

Proposed by Councillor Kerr
Seconded by Councillor Monteith

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to issue an invite to Killeeshil-Galbally Responders to make a presentation to a future meeting to make Council aware of the work they carry out and to encourage Council staff and the general public to participate in first responder training.

Councillor Monteith said that he would be happy to support Councillor Kerr's proposal as this organisation carry out fantastic work and also highlights the issue which he was aware of other groups coming across in terms of the inability of local voluntary groups to open bank accounts which was an ongoing and scandalous issue and should be up to Council to challenge these issues with Banks on behalf of local community groups. He said it was about time the Council started liaising with funders as there was a need for another mechanism for funding as Banks were not going to allow community groups and sporting groups to open accounts with funding having to be channeled in another mechanism as groups were on hold and not acceptable.

Councillor Doris concurred with points made by previous members but in relation to defibrillators raised an issue regarding an incident which happened at the Canal Walk this week with no signs to point to the nearest defibrillators were and asked if it would be possible for staff to erect signage on the route to point to the nearest defibrillators were.

The Chair said that he was aware of this being addressed through the Environment Committee and may be best referred to that team as there was a mapping exercise for defibs right across the District and any defib which was logged onto the mapping system the Ambulance Service was aware of it, but said that Councillor Doris' comments would be passed on to the Environment Committee.

The Chair said that he was glad to hear of Mickey Coleman's recovery and wished him well.

Councillor Molloy said that members would be aware of the meetings with the East Timorese Community and their formulated group and referred to press reports relating to traumatic flooding in East Timor and surrounding areas and the devastation that has caused to a lot of communities and many family members which were resident in the South Tyrone area. He felt that anything that members within the group could do to assist them or help them as there would be family members at home which need support, possibly even offering counselling and anything that the Council could do to support them would be greatly appreciated.

Councillor Monteith concurred with Councillor Molloy's comments and said that he was aware of the Council securing some resources for the people. He said that he had been involved all week in helping the East Timorese gather up essential items like food, tinned food, clothing, bedding and shoes etc, and would like to pay tribute to the East Timorese Community locally and to the nationalities and Irish who had really rose to the

occasion with an overwhelming response to the call for help. He suggested that to arrange a DEA meeting and for any other Councillor interested to get an up to date situation on what was actually going on as this has devastated the large capital city and surrounding areas and feedback from the people stating that this was going to be a long drawn out process of a rebuild. He said that it was important as a local Council to be involved as there was going to be some sort of campaign from the East Timorese people to get aid home on an ongoing basis and would be vitally important to support them. He advised that there was another flood last year and the East Timorese Community organised aid also but this was a lot more of a catastrophic natural disaster this time around and wanted to pay tribute to the ongoing work and was aware that Officers had been talking to representatives from East Timor community over this last 10 days or so. He said that it would be important that a meeting was organised asap on this issue to see what we can do or can't do as this Council wasn't found wanting when it came to emergency crisis this time last year when there was the Covid outbreak and would have no doubt they would be found in wanting helping out this emergency in East Timor.

The Head of Community Development to take the issue on board.

Councillor Black said as this was the first meeting of the Development Committee since the passing of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh last week he would like to take this opportunity to express condolences on behalf of the DUP to her Majesty the Queen at this sad time on the loss of her husband, their children on the loss of a father and their children on the loss of their grandfather and great grandfather. Prince Philip was a great role model, serving his country with courage, honor and distinction, both as a member of the armed forces and as a member of the Royal family. Prince Philip came across as having many passions in life none more so than setting up the Duke of Edinburgh award as this has benefitted many young people across these Islands, giving them a great opportunity for personal development and learning new skills and he knew many young people locally including himself who were very grateful for this opportunity and believed that this would be all part of a great legacy which he had left behind for future generations.

D062/21 Deputation – Fionnuala Boyle Mother & Baby Home Enquiry

The Chair welcomed to the committee Ms Fionnuala Boyle – Mother & Baby Home Enquiry and invited her to address the committee.

Ms Boyle thanked members for allowing her to make her presentation tonight as this was something very close to her heart. She advised that she was a survivor of the Mother and Baby Home and wanted to tell her story to members present and her ambition to help other people looking for their lost babies and mothers.

Councillor Kerr commended Fionnuala on her bravery and said that he fully supported her campaign and undoubtedly as a corporate body would support her going forward. He said that the way young mothers, women and children were treated was disgraceful and a crime against humanity and was aware of the previous good work she had carried out in the community and her passionate about helping people. He concurred with Fionnuala's comment about turning her negative energy into something positive

and very glad to see her going down this route as she deserved justice, accountability and transparency and wanted to stress that he was very sorry about what did happen to her brother but hoped that this would give her strength going forward and wanted to commend her again on her campaign.

Councillor Monteith commended Fionnuala as he was aware of how nervous Fionnuala was but said that she was brilliant and wanted to pay tribute to her bravery. He said that it was one of the most moving presentations brought before this committee and made the right decision as there was no need for a presentation with statistics as she spoke from the heart to get the message across very well. He stated that Fionnuala had spoken about the horror of the homes and said that this was exactly what they were, as those homes were horrific, horrendous and as Councillor Kerr had stated, a crime against humanity and he would most certainly supporting her in any way he could and was confident that all Councillors here would be of the same opinion and generate unanimous support for her campaign. He asked Fionnuala to keep the Council informed and come back on a regular basis and keep members up to date and if she thinks that this organisation could do to help her, never be afraid to get in touch. He felt that it was a very humbling presentation and couldn't stress enough the tribute he paid her.

Councillor Monteith said he wished to ask Fionnuala a question as it was the 32nd anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster and the panel involved with her campaign and was aware of Phil Scraton being involved with the Hillsborough families and couldn't be in better hands for someone to scratch back the layers of cover ups and asked her about the team which was working with them.

Ms Boyle advised that there were three experts on the panel, Deirdre Mullan, a social work background from the Department of Health, Dr Maeve O'Rourke, Barrister and Lecturer in Human Rights in University College, Galway and finally Phil Scraton a former Queens University Lecturer. She said that Mr Scraton had worked on some very high profile cases and had written a book into the high profile investigation into the Hillsborough disaster, he also worked with the people involved in Lockerbie and Dunblane and more recently he has been working with the families from Grenfell Tower in London as well. She said that when Mr Scraton introduced himself and heard his background, for the first time in years she had a glimmer of hope that actually something could be achieved and said the most important thing for her would be that this doesn't get lowered down the pile of issues with other things coming along deemed more important as Mothers which were in those homes were dying now and there was no time to wait and deserve to have peace, which was too late for her mother, but was determined to help every other family to get a resolution.

Councillor Burton said that she appreciated Fionnuala coming along and telling her story here tonight on the absolutely horrific things that happened during her life journey and hoped that going forward that she would be able to rise about this. She said as a mother of four children she couldn't comprehend this happening to her as life was so precious and a chance for a good upbringing but was encouraged to hear she had a good life with her adopted parents. She referred to the television programme Long Lost Families and said that that these people go through an awful time to try and find their families which was heartbreaking but said that the presentation tonight was from Fionnuala's heart and felt that sometimes the best way to get through difficult situations

was to speak about it. She concurred with other members asking Fionnuala to stay in touch and to contact the Council if she required any further assistance.
Councillor Doris thanked Fionnuala for her really emotional presentation and said that it was unbelievable that people use Christianity to shame women into this and responsibility should be all on them. She referred to the Irish Government's handling of this issue and said that it was absolutely disgraceful and advised that Linda Dillon MLA was working closely with Kathleen Funchion TD in the Dail in trying to get access to paperwork and this may not be the top priority on Fionnuala's list but it was something, someway which may be a help. She thanked Fionnuala for speaking tonight and said that everyone handles grief very differently and agreed what was said about some people not feeling comfortable about discussing the issue within their families and for Fionnuala speaking out and helping countless peoples to help them deal with their trauma. She said that she wished her well going forward in her campaign and was a real privilege to hear the story tonight.

Councillor Elattar thanked Fionnuala for sharing her touching story tonight and wished her every success in her campaign as she was confident that a lot of support would be given, especially by Dr Maeve O'Rourke. She advised that she was able to be part of a deputation from Mother and Baby Homes with her party and Martina Anderson MEP to Brussels to present their story to the EU and spent a few days with the group, with mothers and children who had been in these institutions and will never forget the stories in which they told, emotions that were involved and the long lasting consequences on what had happened to the people involved in these unfortunate places. She said that she would like to think as working as a midwife that this has changed and hoped that never again that people would have to go through such horrendous experiences which affected so many in the past and asked that the Council be kept updated on progress.

Councillor Kearney thanked Fionnuala for bringing it to members' attention tonight especially about neglect and hunger at those horrific times with no religious boundaries being shown at that time. He advised that his oldest grandchild was first year post primary and the same age as one of the victims and could relate to what Fionnuala was speaking about. He wanted to acknowledge her bravery in pursuing truth and justice for the victims of such horrific actions against the most vulnerable.

Councillor Molloy wished Fionnuala for the best for the future and was confident that she would generate the success she was campaigning for. He stated there were still a lot of countless other unmarked graves which was being currently worked upon in Dungannon as these victims needed to be given the dignity they deserved in such adverse times and have their graves marked out of respect.

Councillor Corry thanked Fionnuala for her harrowing presentation and said that anything that this Council could do to please come forward and get in touch. She agreed with Councillor Doris' comments around the name of Christianity and how these people were supposed to help the most vulnerable at that time.

Councillor Wilson advised that this was one of the most moving presentation that he had listened to in the last 30 years of being a Councillor. He said that Fionnuala was an incredible brave lady and wished her well in her campaign in the pursuit of truth and justice for all the victims and that Council would support her in any way they possible could.

Councillor Burton enquired if Fionnuala was aware of any mothers alive and children trying to find each other or whether this campaign was about lost children in the past.

Ms Boyle advised that there was still mothers and children looking for each other but there was some difficulty due to children being moved to another jurisdictions, across the border element. She said that she was aware of a man being born in Marianvale Home and ending up in Co. Donegal in another jurisdiction which was totally heartbreaking. She said that she was fortunate that she was one of the younger children in the Home, but this operation still continued up to 1990 and felt that people should have easier access to information as there were complete blocks for her trying to locate her mother and baby brother. She said her aim was to try and help other people as there were people out there in trauma over their past and also to try and match mothers and their children up as there was so many unclaimed babies.

The Chair thanked Fionnuala for sharing her story this evening and was confident that members would be very supportive and had no doubt that Officers would be in contact with her to see what they could do to help progress her campaign.

Councillor Monteith stated that in light of Fionnuala's campaign it may be an idea to try and help the victims to get their message across and proposed that this Council write to the 10 other Councils asking them to facilitate a presentation so Fionnuala and other people like her in their campaign in the pursuit of truth and justice. He said that the more elected members to hear these horrendous stories the better as the human story was needed to come out and felt that this was something proactive this Council could do. He felt that it would be useful for a presentation to be heard by victims in their own local Council area as enough people cannot hear these horror stories and would be certain that the Council Officers would take forward anything that was asked to do.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor Molloy and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to write to the other 10 Councils asking them to facilitate a meeting with Fionnuala and others like her to get their message across.

Ms Boyle thanked members for their overwhelming support and left the meeting at 7.52 pm.

Matters for Decision

D063/21 Collaborative Tourism Cluster – Partnership Agreement

The Head of Tourism presented previously circulated report to seek approval for Mid Ulster Council to enter into a partnership agreement with Antrim & Newtownabbey Council and for Mid Ulster Council to lead on the delivery of the Lough Neagh Shoreline tourism cluster.

Councillor Doris said that she was happy to propose the recommendation but in terms of Tourism Cluster which she had raised on numerous times and was aware that the Head of Tourism had sent an email which she hadn't an opportunity to read yet regarding tourism signage. She advised that Linda Dillon MLA had sent an email to Nichola Mallon, Minister for DfI regarding brown tourism signage, but their whole aspect of it was for redirecting traffic and not for advertising and more for traffic management rather than for tourist attractions. Ms Dillon MLA had then written to the Minster for Economy, but still awaiting a reply and was looking to see if this committee could write a letter to DfE and if need be to DfI also to see if there could be a change around legislation in terms of Brown Tourism Signage as this was something tourism businesses were crying out for.

The Head of Tourism concurred with Councillor Doris' perception around signage and directing of traffic not being related to tourism advertising and attractions. He said that he would put the issue on the agenda for the next Tourism Development Group as a subject for decision at that group.

Proposed by Councillor Doris
Seconded by Councillor Clarke and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council that Mid Ulster Council enters into a partnership agreement with Antrim and Newtownabbey Council and that Mid Ulster Council to lead on the Lough Neagh Shoreline cluster. Brown Tourism Signage to be put on Agenda for next Tourism Development Group as a subject for decision.

Councillor Kerr asked for clarity on whether there was any discussion with Lough Neagh Partnership as they carry out similar initiatives and if this was the case asked if it was possible to carry out a collaboration or duplication of Lough Neagh Partnership as he was aware of some members sitting here being on the board of LNP.

The Head of Tourism said that advised that Officers work closely with the team of Lough Neagh Partnership who were aware of the ongoing work and Officers always co-ordinate working with them an endeavor to work with them on this programme also.

D064/21 Economic Development Report – OBFD

The Head of Economic Development presented previously circulated report to provide an update on key activities and sought approval for the following:

(i) MEGA (Manufacturing and Engineering Growth & Advancement) Network

a) MEGA Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan

Councillor Molloy said that he would be happy to accept the officer recommendation.

Councillor Monteith sought clarity on whether there was any trade union involvement.

The Head of Economic Development advised that the MEGA group was not operated by the Council and was led by the private sector. She added it was not within the Council's remit to intervene regarding MEGA's membership. MEGA has proven itself over the last few years to be a very successful body to represent manufacturing and engineering businesses in Mid Ulster and Council is but one small funder in comparison to Invest NI. She said that as far as she was aware MEGA did not have union involvement but was focused on developing opportunities to grow this important cluster of companies in Mid Ulster.

Councillor Monteith said that he would have major issues with allocating the funding requested and proposed not to disagree to not award but to get in contact with the organisations involved and ask if they would accept a strategic input from some local trade unions at a strategic level as he would be more comfortable funding an organisation who have workers input.

Councillor Black said that he would be happy to second the officer recommendation, given the prominence of the engineering sector in the Mid Ulster area and the importance it has to the local economy

Proposed by Councillor Black

That MEGA be invited to present to a future committee once they had completed their strategic review to update us on the work in which they were doing, outcome of the review and their plans for the future.

The Chief Executive advised that the Head of Economic Development had outlined the structure of MEGA with amalgam with over 50 local engineering companies, small, medium and large which were self-sustained and self-established with many of them created family businesses with some of them being now multi-national conglomerates. He said that it has been an overwhelming success and was the talk of all career and skills discussions and now the go-to body for all NI agencies in terms of developing skills agenda and he suspected that it would be a major input into the new NI Skills agenda which was anticipated to be brought forward in the next 5 to 6 months. He said that there was a fine line as Council were not here to tell MEGA what to do and the success of MEGA was because it was not owned by Council or Invest NI or any other government body, but in relation to union representation, he had no difficulty relaying the comments back and asking them for this consideration and didn't foresee any issue relating to this. He felt that the way forward for these companies should be shaped by management, staff, customers and everyone alike.

Councillor Kerr said that he welcomed the Chief Executive's comments and seconded Councillor Monteith's proposal as we were fortunate to have a huge amount of engineering companies within the Mid Ulster area. He said that thousands of workers were employed locally and there was a need for trade union input in relation to salaries, longer breaks, better working conditions amongst other issues and any future discussion must include the invitation to trade unions for all sectors of the community.

Councillor Monteith advised that he wasn't against the proposal but to agree in principle until a conversation was held first regarding the involvement of trade unions being invited to the table to help all sections of the community.

Councillor Molloy said that he would be happy to agree with Councillor Monteith's proposal regarding the engagement of trade unions.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor Molloy and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve funding contribution of £5,000 from Council's Economic Development budget, subject to MEGA securing match funding from Invest NI's Collaborative Growth Programme to undertake a Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan. Discussions to take place first with MEGA at a strategic level to encourage Trade Union involvement.

Councillor Ashton seconded Councillor Black's proposal.

Resolved That it be recommended to Council that MEGA be invited to present to Committee once they had completed their strategic review to update on the work they were doing, outcome of the review and their plans for the future.

b) MEGA's Ongoing 3 Year Work Programme (2019/20 – 2021/22)

Proposed by Councillor Molloy
Seconded by Councillor Black and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council that approval be granted to reallocate £4,000 if its funding contribution to the MEGA Project in year 2 (2020/21) to year 3 (2021/22). This flexibility will allow various aspects of the project to be completed, having been delayed as a result of the pandemic. There is no additional cost to Council related to this request.

ii) Mid Ulster Gift Card

Councillor Corry advised that this was something that businesses were crying out for and enquired if this was across all sectors of businesses.

The Head of Economic Development advised that the Gift Card would be available to all businesses that wanted to participate across Mid Ulster.

Councillor Burton referred to the purchase of a gift card and in the event of the business closing down enquired what would be the outcome.

The Head of Economic Development advised that when a member of the public purchased a Mid Ulster Gift Card they could choose to redeem the card in any

participating Mid Ulster business, so if one business closed down, there would be lots of others businesses to choose from to spend their card value.

Proposed by Councillor Corry
Seconded by Councillor Burton and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve a budget of £57,000 towards the implementation of a Mid Ulster Gift Card Scheme from Council's economic development budget over a 3 year period (2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24) and progress to tender for a suitable organisation to develop and deliver the scheme. Note the budget is subject to variance as it is dependent on the number of businesses participating on the scheme on an annual basis.

Councillor Kerr referred to Coalisland Public Realm Scheme and said that now that it was almost completed it was unfortunate that there had been no financial commitment from any the statutory bodies involved for a major resurfacing schemes on the roads around the area as many roads have been neglected for many years. He proposed that a meeting be held with senior Council Officers and Road Service officials to try and get a commitment to improve the general roads in around Coalisland Town Centre.

Resolved That it be recommended to the committee to refer the matter to the Environment Committee requesting that a DEA meeting be held with Senior Officers from Council and DFI local section office to get the matter of resurfacing of certain sections of road in Coalisland which had been overlooked.

D065/21 Master Plan/Business Case – Maghera Walkways

The Head of Parks presented previously circulated report to seek Council approval to appoint a suitably qualified consultancy team to develop a Master Plan/Business Case for the potential development of lands between Mullagh Road/Tobermore Road as an outdoor recreational green space for the Maghera area.

Councillor Corry said that she like to propose the item as it was very welcome news for Maghera as the Walled Garden has been a huge success and a well-loved and well used feature in Maghera and had also increased the appetite for further development of outdoor recreational greenspace for the village. She said that getting outdoors has been a great importance for people, especially during the past year for physical and mental health and this addition to increase greenspace would be a great asset with community input to the masterplan and the creation of habitat, biodiversity and conservation, natural play and a network of community trails in the area. She stated that this would add to enhance the Walled Garden and the Largantogher Walkway and looked forward to seeing the development of the project.

Councillor Black seconded the recommendation and concurred with Councillor Corry's comments regarding the appetite within the local community for some time for further greenspace to be provided and was no doubt that these calls would be strengthened due to the importance that has been placed on greenspace over this last year since the

onset of the pandemic. He said that he believed on the progress on securing this land and the commissioning of a consultancy team to put together a masterplan for the provision of greenspace and an outdoor recreation area in Maghera has shown that the Council had been listening to the requests coming from the community and trusts that this would be the next step in delivering what would be a great amenity for the people of Maghera and its surroundings areas.

Councillor Kearney wished to place on record his thanks to Council officials who had negotiated the purchase and transfer of the significant 37 acres. The physical development and action plan with the key message for Maghera at time which was devised as a vibrant welcoming place where people work in referred to the five opportunity sites which were heralded in the 2017-2030 action plan. He said that it was great to add another project to the list alongside another recent development the Trim Trail at the former PSNI station and felt that the greenspace identified would go a long way to satisfy the interests and needs of the people and looked forward to the next phase of this development and the involvement of the consultancy team to develop a master plan and business case as these were exciting times.

Proposed by Councillor Corry
Seconded by Councillor Black and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council be granted to progress procurement of a suitably qualified Consultancy Teams to develop a Master Plan/Business Case for the potential development of lands between Mullagh Road/Tobermore Road as an outdoor recreational green space for the Maghera area.

D066/21 Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Service Level Agreements 2021/22

The Head of Parks presented previously circulated report to agree proposals on Community Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for the financial year 2021/22 only.

Councillor Clarke declared an interest in Broughderg Area Development Association (BADA).

Councillor Kerr said that he was very happy to see this and knew of a lot of community groups organising litter picks etc within their local communities. He said that he had been contacted regarding issues relating to Washingbay Walkway in relation to the replacement of bins on the public walkway and asked if comments be brought to the attention of the relevant department.

Councillor Burton advised that as a Council it was important to support these facilities and ensure that leisure was an option for those areas and the tie in they have with the community and schools.

Proposed by Councillor Elattar
Seconded by Councillor Clarke and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council:

i) Members are asked to note record of Council Minute D092/20 - (9th July 2020) which refers to the Development Committee's recommendation to accept option two as presented:

***Option 2**. Subject to Council approval, Service Level Agreements impacted upon by Covid-19 restrictions would be paid as per current terms and conditions, without pro rata reductions.*

ii) To grant approval to extend current arrangements afforded to Community Service Level Agreements under the terms of option two, subject to Full Council Approval.

iii) To grant approval to make annual payments in full associated to Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Service Level Agreements for the period 2021/22 financial year only.

D067/21 DfC Strategy for Sport Consultation

The Head of Leisure presented previously circulated report to seek members' approval in responding to the consultation for the new Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland, prepared by the Department for Communities (DfC). A copy of the proposed consultation response is in Appendix B.

Councillor Monteith advised that this was a very comprehensive response and had no difficult with its contents but wanted to highlight a few things that he felt needed added to give it substance.

He referred to:

- Question 4 – There was a need for infrastructure as there was a need for pitches and facilities which needed funded and done. He felt that any strategy which hadn't the significant money for increased facilities was ultimately going to fail and this was needed for non-elite sports as the majority of Council owned facilities were primarily of those competing at a competitive level whether locally or on a higher stage. If Council were serious about life-long sport then this was where it was needed for more pitches and facilities as there weren't enough facilities to deal with the current sporting activity which were concentrating on and around competition and if people were expected to take on life-long sports then funding must be made available for major facilities.

- Question 6 – Not enough facilities especially in urban areas as there could be a tendency sometimes to look in a different direction and sometimes the suggestion of major sporting hubs and agreed there was a role for them but this was not going to be possible necessarily in urban environments. There was an onus on Council to make sure that there were facilities available in local communities for a mixture of urban and rural facilities which were accessible and immediate to people's local environment.

- Question 7 – The need for adequate funding for life-long sports and encourage funding through other streams as well as our own. He said there was a need to reassure people that the Council would consider funding a sport which wasn't competitive but more life-long and recreational.

- Question 12 – Onus on the Council as an organisation for housing developments passed to have access to greenspace. He reiterated the need as a condition for approving housing developments to have open greenspace on zoned lands and to tie in with the area plan as the Council had the ability to change the mind-set going forward.

Councillor Molloy concurred with Councillor Monteith's comments and commended the officer team which collated the response. He said that over the last 12 months has shown that peoples' quality of life had changed dramatically but was encouraging to see the huge uptake of walking and running in the fresh air. He agreed with non-competitive/organised sports as we have seen successful projects in different areas where facilities were provided for non-competitive sports for people to come together like football, squash etc. but to engage in physical activity but funding was the key criteria and this should not be a wish list but the reassurance that funding would be provided.

Councillor Kerr concurred with the previous speakers and said that it was important to not just target elite sports but to entice all abilities to come together as the last 12 months have shown how good sports was for physical and mental health and this was important to broaden out the target audience.

The Head of Leisure said that he would take the comments on board and reflect that within the response. He said that it was anticipated to bring forward a paper in May outlining the previous update given in February about the future pitch and open space strategy when consultants were appointed outlining what the strategy may look like.

Councillor Burton referred to her meeting with the Head of Leisure in Fivemiletown along with John Hughes from NILGA last week and she took the opportunity to lobby for not 3G pitches but for also floodlit 3G pitches for all sections of the community in that area. She also referred to the wish list to have a hub and a great need right across the place for better hockey facilities and felt that the whole view of this consultation across the community was to have a strategic framework for a departmental, ambitious and comprehensive approach promoting participation in excellence in sports and physical activity and hoped at the end of this that there was a long term view on what was needed in the community and working with them to try and ensure that physical activity was something that was easily accessible. She said that over the pandemic that if it hadn't been for the outdoor spaces to help with physical and mental health things could have been much worse as she had seen numerous people out walking and running in towns, roads and especially the forests to get their head space and looked forward to helping the community in getting what they want out there and hoped that the Head of Leisure would keep in mind that there were rural football groups that need the encouragement to tap into this consultation.

Councillor Kearney concurred with the previous speakers and due to the week that was in it felt it was important to recognise the achievements of local man Kenny Shiels and the Northern Irelands Women's Football Team which started from very humble beginnings. He advised that Kenny had been in that job from 2019 and had brought great belief and unbelievable success in that short time and had brought the ladies football to a new level for qualifying for the Euros. He said that Kenny was a very plain speaking no-nonsense person and his proven record of success has stood him in a very good stead with everyone being really proud of him and suggested that he and his team be invited for one of the training sessions at the new pitch in Maghera. He wanted to mark the success of Kenny and Northern Ireland's Women's team here tonight.

Councillor Burton advised that whilst previously speaking she had meant to congratulate the team as Mid Ulster had their own representative on the team, Samantha Kelly from Castlecaulfield who had played on the night and was fantastic to see what the girls had achieved. She said that they were real ambassadors in speaking in the aftermath of the event and in previous years they had to wear men's gear and now it was great to see them wearing their own and encouraging to see the younger girls coming on at the end of game and great to see what can be achieved within our communities on role models for sports.

The Chair advised that he knew the goalkeeper really well Jackie Burns and was a tremendous achievement.

Councillor Black concurred with all previous comments and wished to be associated with them and said he also knew Kenny and Jackie. He said that this was a tremendous achievement and were great ambassadors for the area and exciting to look forward to see them progress.

Councillor Wilson also wished to add his congratulations to the team and felt that everyone played their part in this success and no one player should be individualised as people can easily forget as we had Jackie Burns from Cookstown, Simone Magill originally from Magherafelt but now playing for Everton, Samantha Kelly from Castledawson. He also wanted to pay tribute to the backroom team including Kenny and Dean Shiels as well as Dwayne Nelson from Castledawson and Gary Boyd from Dungannon and felt that this was the complete list of all those in the Mid Ulster area and said that it was important to recognise the success of everyone from this area.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor Molloy and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the consultation response to the new Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland, prepared by the Department for Communities (DfC).

Councillor Ashton said that it would be important for the Council to recognise the success of Northern Ireland Women's Team getting to the Euros.

Proposed by Councillor Ashton
Seconded by Councillor Wilson and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to look at recognising the Northern Ireland Ladies team and those associated with it as part of our receptions procedures.

D068/21 Decade of Anniversaries Commemorations 2021-2022 Updated Action Plan

The Head of Culture & Arts presented previously circulated report and sought members' approval for the Decade of Anniversary Commemorations 2021/22 Action Plan.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Ashton and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve the Decade of Anniversaries Commemorations 2021-2022 Updated Action Plan.

Councillor Monteith advised that he had no difficulty in supporting the plan but felt there was still a lot of room for manoeuvre on a few issues and said there was a need to come back before this was implemented as each person's experiences were different in relation to community representation, exhibitions etc. and the incorporating of grants.

The Chair agreed that there was a need to have a balance.

Matters for Information

D069/21 Minutes of Development Committee held on 11 March 2021

Members noted minutes of Development Committee held on 11 March 2021.

Councillor Clarke referred to Davagh and its success for over 40 years and continuing to do so with people coming in droves daily and weekends. He said that Davagh attracted different types of people, whether for mountain biking, walking, recreational and family days out and felt that upgrades were badly needed on basics like toilets as they were really backward for a lot of visiting families and not fit for purpose due to the lack of investment over the years. He also referred to the old effluent system which dated back over 50 years and not up to standard and the old pump track which needed maintained or repaired and asked that these concerns be taken on board.

Proposed by Councillor Clarke
Seconded by Councillor McNamee and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to look at upgrading facilities at Davagh to improve modestly what was there to meet the needs of the site in relation to mountain biking, playpark, toilets etc. Investigations to be carried out on the effluent system and pump track.

Councillor Wilson enquired if Mountain Bike Clubs were consulted on new trails around Davagh as they had complained that they were not consulted and asked that going forward that they be kept in the loop as to bring them along with us.

Councillor Burton referred to Knockmany and said that a lot of mountain biking enthusiasts used the Forest which was picked up by the press and asked that Mountain Bikers within other areas of Council be also kept up to date on issues.

Councillor Burton referred to D048/21 – Provision of Access for Outdoor Recreation in Northern Ireland – Key Stakeholder Consultation. She referred to White Lough and commended the work which had been done as it was a great job on the new footpath which was carried out by the Rivers Agency and the involvement of Council staff but felt that the area would benefit from the installation of a bin and asked if this could be looked at.

She commended that work carried out at the Brantry and White Lough which were very busy, but asked if there were any future plans for Creeve Lough to be upgraded as the public can only walk a little of the way and would be great to see this area getting attention also during these unprecedented times of the pandemic to encourage people to get out and about. She said that Brantry Lough was so busy now at the weekends people were going to the White Lough and would be wonderful to see the upgrade at Creeve Lough and asked if there were any future considerations in the pipeline and if not she proposed to have it looked at.

The Head of Parks advised that White Lough was still managed through the Inland Fisheries and was not in the Council's remit but discussions have ensued with the Rivers Agency and Inland Fisheries in reviewing the circumstances around the lakes and proposed that White Lough comes along with other venues also regarding litter lifts and they have been included in the discussions and hoped to bring proposals to committee in the not-to distance future.

In relation to mountain biking the Head of Parks advised that consultations had taken place with mountain biking groups including Grassroots Mountain Bikers in relation to Davagh and Knockmany as commitment was given to include them with a certain line of communication being open. He advised that meetings had been held with Grassroots Mountain Biking group at Davagh but would continue to liaise with them going forward.

Councillor Burton advised that there was a need to continually promote mountain biking at Blessingbourne.

In relation to query regarding Creeve Lough, the Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation advised that there was a Playpark Strategy and an Outdoor Recreation Strategy and funding which Council had allocated was towards those strategies but can check to see if Creeve Lough was included in those, but if not, funding may not be there. The Capital Programme was being reviewed but would provide an update to the member on the situation.

Councillor Monteith referred to item D052/21 Paupers' Grave and enquired if there was any response to the letter sent to Southern Trust regarding Workhouse Graves at South Tyrone Hospital.

The Head of Community Development advised that a letter was issued to the Southern Trust on 26 March 2021, but to date no response has been received. She advised that

a meeting was scheduled to take place with the local History group to follow up on Council's support through them.

Councillor Molloy referred to earlier comments made by Councillor Clarke regarding the influx of people visiting Davagh and the deluge of traffic on these inadequate roads which were not fit for purpose. He said that recently there had been a public announcement asking people not to visit Cuilcaigh Mountain due to the high volume of traffic and felt that this was akin with Davagh and suggested that a mechanism needed to be explored to reduce the huge volume of traffic on these types of roads possibly the investigation of providing shuttle buses to ease congestion.

Councillor Monteith in referring to the Workhouse Graves was disappointed at the cover up by the Southern Trust and their refusal to work with local authorities. He said that it was dismaying to say the least and the next invite the Trust were invited to attend a committee meeting they should be asked for their reasons for not working with this Council.

The Chief Executive advised that the issue of Workhouse Graves would be followed up with the Southern Trust tomorrow with any update being forwarded on to members.

The Chief Executive stated that the demand for outdoor recreation had went through the roof with the Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation and her team working to the best of her ability with the existing budget in place. He said that this was now about realigning the existing budget to cover demand where it was needed most and as an organisation there was a need to reflect where customer needs are.

In response to Councillor Kerr's query regarding ambulance response times, the Chief Executive advised that he would this up but was confident that something had been received.

The Chair advised that there were huge volumes of people taking part in outside activities and would be beneficial to have a bit of refresh to promote outdoor recreation.

D070/21 Economic Development Report – OBFI

Members noted update on Mid Ulster District Council Traders Engagement.

Councillor Corry referred to dereliction and vacancies within the report and noticed that this issue hadn't been raised by Maghera or Magherafelt traders and asked if this could be something that was added on and looked at the same as the other towns like Cookstown, Coalisland and Dungannon as this was an opportunity for premises for new businesses and bringing a shopping experiences to towns again.

The Head of Economic Development advised that she had no issues including Maghera and Magherafelt but with limited funding available in the economic development budget, additional funding would be needed to tackle derelict and vacant premises across Mid Ulster's towns and villages. She added that she had been lobbying the Department for Communities (DfC) for funding on this matter as they have responsibility and corresponding budgets for town centre revitalisation. At this stage, DfC has agreed to

work with Council to look at dereliction in Dungannon and Council has previously set aside a budget (over 3 years of £120k - £40k per annum) to match fund any scheme that DfC may bring forward to assist Council in this regard. At present, there's no additional financial assistance to tackle dereliction in other towns and villages across Mid Ulster.

Councillor Corry asked that other small towns be also considered.

Councillor Monteith also raised concern regarding villages not being included in the consultation and although he accepted the fact that there was a need to start somewhere, it was unfair to exclude small towns and villages and felt that a mechanism needed to be put in place going forward.

He suggested that Economic Development organise engagements with DEA elected representatives and traders of small villages through technology (zoom) to provide them with an opportunity to liaise with Council to hear their views.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor Kerr and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council that Economic Development organise engagements with DEA elected representatives and traders of small villages through technology (zoom) to provide them with an opportunity to liaise with Council to hear their views.

Councillor Monteith sought clarification regarding rumours relating to the future of Ann Street and asked that a DEA meeting be organised or for any other interested councillor who wished to attend.

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to organise a Dungannon DEA Meeting to provide Members with an update on the Ann Street Development.

Councillor Elattar concurred with previous members' comments regarding small villages like Ballinascreen and enquired if it was envisaged to have any available funding for any sources for dereliction of villages.

The Chief Executive said that officers were always up for engagement but there was also the need not to create an expectation. He said that 71 letters of offer for shop front schemes had been issued this week for the 2021/22 financial year providing a quarter of a million pounds funding to traders which clearly demonstrates that Council is leading from the front.

Councillor Molloy said that it was good to see engagement from traders and would like to see more but one thing that stood out to him was restrictions around on-street parking and the 2 hours waiting time limit. He enquired if his could be brought to the attention of DfI with the possibility of engaging in conversation to see if anything could be progressed.

The Chief Executive said that this could be brought forward and if members minded that this would be brought to the highest possible level, but everyone would anticipate what

the answer was going to be, but a letter would be issued to the Department tomorrow as a corporate body.

D071/21 Regional and Minority Language Implementation Working Group Minutes of meeting of 3 March 2021

Members noted Regional and Minority Language Implementation Working Group Minutes of meeting of 3 March 2021.
In relation to Councillor Corry's query, the Head of Culture & Arts advised that the website development was currently being looked at by the Irish Language Officers on what could be translated into Irish. In referring to issue relating to social media channels used the Head of Culture & Arts advised that key events where promoted through the appropriate social media channels that would target those audiences that engage directly through the medium of Irish language.

Councillor Ashton recorded the DUP's objection to the update.

D072/21 Community Development Report

Members noted key activities relating to:

- PCSP Plan 2021 – 2022
- Community Development

D073/21 Community Planning

Members noted Community Planning report which provided an update on Community Planning Process for Mid Ulster District.

Live broadcast ended at 9.10 pm.

Local Government (NI) Act 2014 – Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor Milne and

Resolved In accordance with Section 42, Part 1 Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public be asked to withdraw from the meeting whilst members consider items D074/21 to D076/21.

Matters for Decision
D074/21 Economic Development Report – CBFD

Matters for Information
D075/21 Confidential Minutes of Development Committee held on 11 March 2021
D076/21 Economic Development Report – CBFI

D077/21 Duration of Meeting

The meeting commenced at 7 pm and concluded at 9.15 pm.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

Report on	Facility Update – US Grant and The Bridewell
Date of Meeting	13 May 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Genevieve Bell and Sharon Arbuthnot

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	To provide an update on the enhancements to both US Grant and The Bridewell.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	Staff within the Tourism and Events team have used the Covid-19 restrictions to their advantage. Seeking and securing funding from various funders to enhance sites with the Mid Ulster District during the closures.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**<u>USG Exhibition - Ulster Scots Agency</u>** The Ulster-Scots Agency identified a further opportunity to promote the Ulster-Scots (Scotch-Irish) story and its connection with the United States through the story of Ulysses S. Grant. Grant was one of the most iconic American military and political leaders and was well aware of his Scotch-Irish heritage. The ongoing work will significantly enhance the interpretive treatment of the site including the introduction of welcome signage at the entrances and exits to the site; directional signage to help visitors navigate around the site and suitable interpretive displays within and around the buildings. Work on all exhibition material is planned to be completed by May 2021.
3.2	**<u>New Play Park DOC - Access and Inclusion Programme</u>** Mid Ulster District Council were granted £30k for the introduction of new DDA compliant play equipment at U.S. Grant Ancestral Homestead. The new equipment includes an accessible inclusive pod swing, a wheelchair accessible inclusive ground level roundabout, a wheelchair accessible in ground trampoline and 4 sensory panels. The work was completed at the end of March 2021.

Early indications have shown that visitor numbers (in particular local people) have increased significantly since the new play park was finished.

3.3 The Bridewell Enhancements

Over the last twelve months the Bridewell has received funding from the Access and Inclusion Programme.

The Bridewell is located in Magherafelt Town Centre; housing the Visitor Information Centre; the library and a community hall on the lower ground floor.

In April 2020 funding was received to refurb the toilets on the ground floor. The renovation included female and male toilets in addition to an accessible toilet.

Additional funding was then secured to install a Changing Places facility on the ground floor of the building along with the refurbishment of two unisex toilets. The project will be completed by mid- May 2021. This will be the first Council owned Changing Places Facility located within one of Mid Ulster Councils Town Centres. A corner accessible toilet is already in situ on the lower ground.

The changing places facility is a fantastic asset for the Bridewell and Magherafelt Town Centre. It will be the third CP completed by Council and only the second to be open to the public. The strategic aim for the Bridewell is to develop an Accessible Town Centre based Hub a safe place that caters attracts people with disabilities and their carers.

The next phase of the enhancement to the Bridewell will be within the Visitor Information Centre. Funding was secured from TourismNI for a digital touch screen which will enable visitors to build an itinerary around individual interests and hobbies.

The enhancement of the Bridewell and Visitor Information Centre will continue as additional funding sources become available.

4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial:
	Human: n/a
	Risk Management:
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	N/A
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	N/A

Report on	1. Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP) 2. Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group 3. Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure
Date of Meeting	13 May 2021
Reporting Officer	Head of Economic Development

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	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	**Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP)** Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (the LAG) is responsible for the delivery of a local rural development strategy in Mid Ulster funded through the LEADER element of the current Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.
2.2	**Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group** The Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group was established in September 2018. The Council is aware of a significant number of prevailing broadband deficiencies across our district. We have major concerns that whilst the Department for the Economy and their delivery partner, Fibrus, are focusing their efforts on rolling out Project Stratum, there remains many parts of our district that will be left behind. As such, these premises will not benefit from any upgrade works, nor be in line to receive a 30mbps broadband service.
2.3	**Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure** A delegation led by the Council Chair met with senior Bank of Ireland officials on 25th March 2021 to voice Council concerns following the bank's announcement (on 1st March 2021) that it will close 15 branches in Northern Ireland, including its Dungannon Town Centre branch.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	**Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP)** Funding of £9.33m was allocated to MURDP for the duration of the current RDP 2014-20 for the delivery of the LAGs local rural development strategy. The LAG has now reached 100% commitment of available funding with £8.14m in grant aid spent to date across funded projects within rural Mid Ulster. The remaining balance of grants will be claimed by March 2022. There will be no further calls for applications by the LAG within the current RDP. The service level agreement between the LAG and Council for the provision of administration support will also cease come March 2022. An evaluation of the LAGs local rural development strategy will now be carried out to report on achievement of strategy objectives and the effectiveness of the LEADER approach for delivery of the strategy. A promotional piece is also being developed to showcase a variety of the RDP projects assisted during the 2014-2020 period. In terms of future support for rural development initiatives post March 2022, DAERA is due to launch a public consultation on the new Rural Affairs Policy Framework this summer to seek views on the nature of support needed within the rural economy. Thereafter DAERA will use the consultation feedback to finalised potential support initiative as well as delivery arrangements.
3.2	**Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group** Minutes of the Broadband Working Group meetings on 21 January 2021 and 24 February 2021 are attached on **Appendices 1 and 2.** From 15th February until 8th March 2021 Council undertook a Project Stratum Broadband survey across the district to gauge the level of broadband concerns that were arising from the roll out of Project Stratum from January 2021 onwards. In January 2019, postcodes that were within the “White postcode list” as identified by the Department for the Economy (DfE) were to be included in Project Stratum. In January 2021, it became evident that there were many premises within DfE’s “White postcode list” that were not included in Project Stratum. In order to explore the extent of the problem, Council undertook a Mid Ulster Project Stratum Broadband Survey **(Appendix 3)** to seek comment from our residents and businesses. The short survey conducted over a 3 week period in March 2021, produced a significant body of evidence to suggest there are many issues which need addressed right across Mid Ulster. A high number of respondents indicated that whilst their postcode was on DfE’s “White Postcode List”, when they checked Fibrus’ Hyperfast broadband checker, their address had been excluded. Another sub-set of respondents provided evidence to say they do not currently receive a 30mbps broadband connection and had received no

	indication from their current broadband supplier that they would be upgrading their service. This is another major concern, and needs urgent attention by DfE, as these respondents would need to migrate to DfE's "Whilte Postcode List" and therefore, benefit from Project Stratum. If they remain on the "Grey Postcode List" where they are, they will not benefit from any broadband improvements via Stratum.
3.3	**Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure** A file note of the meeting held with senior Bank of Ireland officials on Thursday 25th March 2021 is attached on **Appendix 4.**
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial:
	Human: Officer Time
	Risk Management:
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
	It is recommended that Members:-
5.1	**Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP)** **Note** progress in the delivery of the Local Rural Development Strategy (2014-2020) for Mid Ulster.
5.2	**Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group** **5.2.1** **Note** update on the body of ongoing work to address the issues related to the rollout of Project Stratum in Mid Ulster. **5.2.2** Also to **note** two sets of Broadband Working Group Minutes on 21.1.21 & 24.2.21 and Mid Ulster's Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report (March 2021)
5.3	**Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure**

	Note enclosed 'File Note' on meeting held with senior Bank of Ireland officials on 25th March 2021 regarding the closure of their Dungannon Branch.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix 1 - Broadband Working Group Minutes - 21.1.21 Appendix 2 – Broadband Working Group Minutes – 24.2.21 Appendix 3 – Mid Ulster Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report - March 2021 Appendix 4 – File Note - Meeting with Bank of Ireland on 25.3.21 – Closure of Dungannon Branch

Appendix 1

Comhairle Ceantair Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group

Thursday 21 January 2021

At 7pm

Via Webex

Present: Councillor C Mallaghan – Council Chairman Councillor K Ashton Councillor W Buchanan Councillor S Clarke Councillor C Corry Councillor M Graham Councillor S McAleer Councillor B McGuigan Councillor S McPeake Councillor W Robinson **Officers in Attendance:** F McKeown B O'Hagan C McKenna **Apologies:** Councillor J McNamee Adrian Mc Creesh	
1. Welcome Councillor S Clarke (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Broadband Working Group.	
2. Apologies Apologies were received from Councillor J McNamee	
3. Election of Chairperson	

It was previously agreed to use the d'hondt system to appoint a Chairperson annually to the Broadband Working Group. C McKenna advised that Councillor Clarke (SF) is stepping down as Chair this evening having served his year in office and the new incoming Chair for the year ahead will be Councillor Ashton (DUP). Cllr Ashton thanked Councillor Clarke and said she would like to focus these meetings on the issues relating to broadband deficiencies in Mid Ulster but will work in partnership with other Councils when it is fitting to do so.	
4. Consider response from DfE following Council's request for additional information on Project Stratum A letter was issued by the Council's Chief Executive to Ms Geraldine Fee at the Department for the Economy (DfE) in relation to Project Stratum Broadband on 21.12.20. Council was asking for clarity on certain issues related to Project Stratum. A response was received on 8.01.21. The key points within the response letter were: **(i) Premises Out of Scope of Project Stratum** • Council requested the details of all 354 premises identified by DfE as being beyond the scope of Project Stratum. A spreadsheet with the addresses of the 354 premises was supplied. From this information Council could plot on a map within the DEA's the exact location of all premises. • In relation to the premises removed from Project Stratum, the Department was asked if they could guarantee they will receive a future proofed FTTP solution also. Unfortunately, DfE could not provide this. **(ii) Reduction in the Number of Premises within the Intervention Area for Project Stratum** • DfE were asked for a breakdown of each Council area of the 19,000 premises removed from the white postcode list regarding Project Stratum. A table was supplied that showed MUDC area had 3,023 premises reclassified and removed from the white list. • DfE were asked to provide evidence of how the premises in Mid Ulster that were removed from the "white postcode list". They were also asked when and how will these premises be appropriately addressed to receive access to a minimum 30mbps service. DfE advised that they revised their data during the (OMR) Open Market Research with Telecom Providers. Some (unknown) Providers indicated that they were planning to	

provide broadband in these areas that were being removed by 2022. There was no further information on this. • Key issues outstanding included finding out who were the providers, what was going to be the final broadband solution and what is the timeline for delivery of 30mbps broadband to the 3,023 premises within Mid Ulster reclassified and removed from the White list. **(iii) Remaining Premises in Mid Ulster without Superfast Broadband after Project Stratum** • Asked for a definition of (NGA) Next Generation Access DfE said advanced technology is capable of delivering reliable high speeds such as FTTP or advanced wireless systems. B O Hagan presented a map, which plotted all 354 premises outside the scope of Project Stratum and their respective DEA's. Members were provided a link to the map so they can review it any time they choose. Members were informed that the White list postcodes were the postcodes benefitting from Project Stratum. The Grey list postcodes were out of scope of Project Stratum as there are plans for one Telecom Provider to start work in this area by 2022. The Black list postcodes was out of scope of Project Stratum as there were plans for more than one Telecom Provider to start work in this area by 2022. Several members expressed that confusion currently exists with their constituents because there are premises that are within the white list postcode areas who are being informed that they are not eligible for an upgrade on the Fibrus postcode checker. Members wanted assurances for their constituents on the white postcode list that they can be included. There is also no clarity regarding what is to happen to new builds. There is a danger of Project Stratum being rolled out and it will be too late to raise issues or complaints afterwards. Therefore, answers are needed now. Members agreed the need to do more than exchange letters therefore a meeting is to be organised inviting DfE and Fibrus to discuss broadband issues raised by a wide range of constituents. They will be forwarded the issues in advance to allow them to report on them at the meeting.	It was agreed to write to DfE to ask for additional layers for our map to show where Fibrus are employed, as we do not have all the required information. It was agreed to organise a workshop for all Councillors and invite DfE and Fibrus to discuss all issues.

5. Outstanding Issues C. McKenna will organise a workshop for all members with DfE and Fibrus to discuss several outstanding issues that need addressing. The outstanding issues needing addressed are: • An updated White postcode list to include new premises • A list of MUDC addresses indicating when they can expect delivery of Project Stratum – same as Fibrus are working to. • What broadband solution can the 3,023 premises removed from MUDC White list, now on the Black and Grey lists expect to receive? Who will deliver this and what is the timeframe? Will delivery co-align with Project Stratums delivery timeframe? • An updated list of Black and Grey postcode lists within MUDC area for quality assurance and transparency of the proposed Stratum project.	
6. FFNI Update The full fibre project contract between Fibrus and Council was signed and sealed December 2020. Fibrus has commenced site surveys in the Maghera and Magherafelt areas. Mid Ulster District Council got the largest grant of all 10 Councils involved, which was £3.4m. Along with the Consortium Members' sites (9 other Councils ex. Belfast), the Business Services Organisation (BSO) will use the grant funding to connect Health (Doctors' surgeries for example), Fire and Ambulance sites. In Mid Ulster, the funding will deliver fibre connectivity to 86 Council owned sites. There are 41 BSO sites within Mid Ulster being connected and BSO will manage their own sites separately with their own contract. Site visits and inspections have begun and Fibrus are anticipating to begin early 2021. The Council will be granted a 35-year IRU (irrefutable use) of the fibre into each of the building scope within the contract.	
7. Any Other Business C Mc Kenna said he had a Teams call this morning with key personnel from BT Openreach from England who recently sent an	

email to the Chair of the Council. They wanted to update the Council of what they are planning to do in the coming weeks. BT Openreach are delivering the Broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) across the UK. It would appear that most people did not know that since 20th March 2020, every home and business has had a legal right to request that BT deliver a 'decent' broadband service to them. 'Decent' broadband service defined as one that supports a 10 Mbps download speeds and 1 Mpbs upload. This can be via either 'fixed-line' broadband into your home, or via a 4G Mobile network. In Mid Ulster there are up to **2,873** homes or businesses that may be eligible to get a faster broadband connection under the USO. BT are in the process of writing to all these **2,873** homes and businesses in Mid Ulster to inform them that they are eligible for an upgrade. Upgrades are free if the cost does not exceed £3,400. Therefore, there will be a charge for upgrades if BT estimate the costs to be over £3,400 per premise. If the cost for upgrades are below this threshold, BT will arrange for an upgrade to happen at no cost to the resident or business owner, and this normally is within a 12 months period. There may also be an option offering in certain cases wireless broadband. MUDC is of the view we all should be getting Fibre to the Premise and not Wireless. There is a cost-sharing system option to allow neighbours/clusters who are USO eligible and would collectively benefit from upgrading the infrastructure to share the overall 'excess' costs to all be connected at once. There is a Postcode checker: https://www.bt.com/broadband/USO and if people find that they are eligible, they are to call helpdesk on 0800 783 0223.	
8. Date of next meeting The date of the next meeting will be confirmed at a later date.	

Appendix 2

Meeting of Broadband Working Group and Elected Members

Wednesday 24 February 2021 @ 5.30pm

Via Teams

Present: Councillor C Mallaghan (Council chair) Councillor K Ashton (Chair Broadband Working Group) Councillor K Black Councillor W Brown Councillor W Buchanan Councillor F Burton Councillor R Colvin Councillor C Corry Councillor N Doris Councillor C Elattar Councillor P. Gildernew Councillor M Glasgow Councillor M Graham Councillor I Milne Councillor D Molloy Councillor N McAleer Councillor S McAleer Councillor C McFlynn Councillor B McGuigan Councillor S McGuigan Councillor P McLean Councillor D McPeake Councillor S McPeake Councillor W Robinson Councillor T Wilson **Officers in Attendance:** F McKeown B O'Hagan C McKenna (minutes)	

N Doris O Donnelly	
1. Welcome Councillor K Ashton (Chair of Broadband Working Group) welcomed everyone to this brief meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to update members and get their support regarding the Project Stratum Broadband Survey.	
2. Apologies There were no apologies.	
3. Project Stratum Broadband Survey C Mc Kenna provided a brief update on the current responses to the Broadband survey. To date there were over 400 responses that were coming in from all across the District. Over half of the responses were from people who had premises within the white postcode list identified by DfE as the areas being addressed by Project Stratum. It was Councils understanding if postcodes included on the white postcode list then all the premises would be assured of benefiting from Project Stratum. Unfortunately, DfE declared that there were 354 premises within Mid Ulster as being outside the scope of Project Stratum due mostly to the higher cost of connecting them. At this early stage in the survey, those areas suffering the worst broadband service were coming to the fore again. Many respondents to the survey were not completing the information in full. It is the intention of staff to contact them to retrieve all information required. Members were asked to inform officers of any additional organisations they would like Council to raise awareness of the survey in additional to those contained within the report. Councillor Burton asked that COSTA be included in the list. Members were updated on the various mechanisms to promote the survey, e.g. schools, community groups, churches etc. Cllr Wilson raised the point that towns require enhanced broadband surveys also, as many of the constituents and businesses cannot receive a 30mbps service. Cllr S Mc Peake welcomed the work being undertaken and said he was aware of roads in his area that half the premises were included in Project Stratum and half were not, and this did not make sense. It is hoped the survey will collect such discrepancies.	

Cllr Mc Lean also praised the work being undertaken and wanted to ensure that we were trying to get DfE to future proof our broadband with FTTP and not wireless. This is the also the Council's position. Cllr Black added that there are many new builds in Mid Ulster that needed to be included. C Mc Kenna advised that as part of the survey and report, the officers are going to provide the Department with details of all new builds in Mid Ulster since January 2019. F McKeown said that Council had requested DfE to work in partnership with us ahead of the roll out of Project Stratum and requested sight of the Terms of Reference however, the Department declined. Many of the difficulties we are experiencing now could have been avoided.	
4. Date of next meeting Members to be advised of the date of the next meeting.	

Appendix 3

MID ULSTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

PROJECT STRATUM BROADBAND SURVEY REPORT

MARCH 2021

1.0 Introduction

Following the start of the roll out of Project Stratum, Mid Ulster District Council undertook a Project Stratum Broadband survey across the district to gauge the level of broadband concerns that still exist within Mid Ulster. The survey covered the period 15th February to 8th March 2021.

It was targeted at the properties within the "White postcode list" as identified by the Department for the Economy (DfE). This was the posted areas understood to be included in the Project Stratum. Initial indications showed that there were many properties going to be excluded from the broadband upgrades being delivered by Fibrus the broadband Provider.

The Project Stratum programme is a welcomed as a major game changer in broadband provision for over 12,000 rural premises in Mid Ulster. It will bring full fibre to these premises and future proof broadband for a generation. This vital technology will enable the region to grow, expand and stop playing catch up.

Today broadband technologies are of critical importance especially in this area to our to SMEs to enable them to be global players. Our SME's are the lifeblood of this region's economy. Moreover, during the Covid pandemic the importance of broadband has never been more critical to all our citizens who are now working from home and home schooling their children from home.

The importance of Internet in 2020.

- Adults are spending 4 hours a day online on average, as coronavirus changes communications.
- Twice as many using video calls to keep in touch during lockdown.
- One in three now watch online video more than traditional TV, with two in five making videos themselves.
- UK adults are now spending more than a quarter of their waking day online – the highest on record – with services such as TikTok and Zoom seeing unprecedented growth

Source: Ofcom's latest study into the nation's online lives.

To recap, in January 2019 The Department for the Economy undertook a consultation with broadband suppliers and members of the public to help ensure they had correctly identified all those postcodes that contain premises currently unable to access 30 megabits per second (Mbps) broadband services.

- White' area postcodes are those in which there is no qualifying broadband infrastructure and none is likely to be developed within 3 years. These postcodes will be targeted for public investment through the Project;

- 'Grey' area postcodes are those where only one network is present or is to be deployed within the coming 3 years. These postcodes will not be specifically targeted for public investment from the Project;

- 'Black' area postcodes are those where at least two networks of different operators exist or will be deployed in the coming 3 years. These postcodes do not form part of the Project.

It is unfortunate that Council is discovering as Project Stratum is being rolled out that rural issues are still ongoing. This is causing a source of genuine frustration to those who are experiencing them, whether it is as a domestic or business user. The local issues in broadband are exceeding what was first thought. Therefore, in a response from citizens looking help Council has undertaken this broadband survey.

Properties on Project Stratums "White postcode list" but not on Fibrus' Contract list

Mid Ulster District Council is committed to ensuring that high quality broadband is accessible to all our citizens. For this reason, the Council undertook a Project Stratum broadband survey following phone calls from citizens who started to use Fibrus postcode checker in January 2021 and they found out that although they were on the Project Stratum "White postcode list" they are **NOT** included in Fibrus' rollout plans.

They received the following message:

"Unfortunately your property is not within the project Stratum area. A broadband service with a speed of 30 Mbs is already available at your address, or is expected to become available in the coming months. If you have concerns about how this assessment was reached, please contact the Department for the Economy at stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk.

In greater numbers than before citizens contacted Council to say they are not receiving a service of 30Mbps as per message above. Secondly, when they contacted BT and Fibrus who are the main fibre providers in the rural areas about 30mpbs being available in the coming months they were disappointed when told by the Providers they were not making it available. Many citizens are now concerned

their properties will be left outside of Project Stratum. Now, they have no idea if they will get an upgrade or when they will eventually get an upgrade. They need answers.

For example, 79 Drummurrer Lane, Coalisland, BT71 4QJ is on the "White postcode list" and currently gets between 1 and 3 mbps download speed and received the response above.

Council has therefore become concerned that there might be significant numbers of citizens getting a similar response. Council was aware that there were 354 premises on the "White postcode list" who have been identified as falling outside of Project Stratum.

Simply the expectation was that premises included within the "White postcode list" were guaranteed of being included on Project Stratum. Councils were never provided with the exact addresses within the "White postcode list" and did not know that such specific detail existed. This information was not known until January 2021 when property owners could check the Fibrus HyperfastNI link for themselves.

For this reason, Council undertook the broadband survey to investigate any further issues that might exist and they were not aware of.

There is also concern that at the time of the Open Market Review process in January 2019 those Providers using a selection of Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies responded to DfE.

Question: Can DfE confirm if Providers of Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies responded to DfE OMR in January 2019 as being able to provide broadband in rural areas?

Council has always maintained the position that Project Stratum should be FFTP. It is the Councils experiences that Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies to date have proved less reliable and are often limited in terms of customer support services.

In another example 63 Sherrygrim Road, Stewartstown, BT71 5PP, Fibrus poles are being installed at the end of the drive. The property is on the "White postcode list" but not on Project Stratum. Resident currently does not receive 30mbps as per HyperfastNI checker. The concern is that they may be losing out.

Question: In appendix one there are 329 properties on the white postcode list. Council needs clarification on why these 329 properties are on the Departments white postcode list and not on Fibrus contract list.

Properties on "Grey postcode list" and not on Fibrus Contract list

There were 304 responses to the broadband survey from postcodes that were on the "Grey postcode list". These responses were checked and showed that 251 of these premises were also not receiving 30mbps. It is clear from the comments that citizens are concerned that they are outside of Project Stratum and do not have clarity around what is happening to them.

For example, 32A Annaghnaboe Rd, Coalisland, BT71 4QH, is on the "Grey postcode list". Residents are using 4G for their internet access there download speed with broadband was 1.5mbps maximum.

Question: In appendix two, there are 251 properties on the Grey postcode list currently receiving less than 30mbps and not on Project Stratum. They are receiving no information on when they will see improvements. Please provide clarity on when, what and how these properties will receive 30mbps?

LPS Pointer

Pointer is a comprehensive address database, which holds address information for every property in Northern Ireland. Land & Property Services (LPS) who maintain it supplied pointer to DfE. It was used to inform DfE of all properties within the Project Stratum catchment area at January 2019. Premises that were not classified, as 'Built' and 'Approved' on Pointer as of January 2019 were not included in the target intervention area.

Unfortunately, Pointer does not seem to be up to date and it excluded some properties that should be included within Project Stratum.

For example, number 6 Kilmakardle Road, Pomeroy, BT70 2UF was on Pointer as commence/under construction 2007 and states provisional. The property was completed in circa 2008. The postcode is within the "White postcode list" but within HyperfastNI checker the premises is not included in Project Stratum. Next house is number 8 Kilmakardle Road, which is also within "White postcode list" and on Project Stratum to be completed in autumn 2023.

Another example is 53D Ballymacomb Road, Portglenone, BT44 8NS, which is also on Pointer as commence/under construction November 2007 and states provisional. The house has long been completed and is adjacent to 51 & 53 Ballymacomb Road. The neighbouring properties are included in project Stratum but number 53D is not.

Question: Council requests DfE or Fibrus advise the solution in order to get those properties included on the white post code list and allow Council to respond to the people most affected?

New Properties Post January 2019

Within Mid Ulster, there are approximately 982 premises that were not classified as 'Built' or 'Approved' at the time of Open Market research at January 2019. Therefore, they would not be included in the target intervention area. As a result, many property owners would have their postcode on the intervention list but their specific house would not be included for upgrade by Fibrus. People are genuinely concerned that existing neighbouring properties will be upgraded and they will miss out. There are examples where new property owners have reached out to DfE and Fibrus as instructed. The responses do not fill them with encouragement.

For example, 15 Kelly's Lane, Dungannon, BT70 3SU a new build. It is on the "White postcode list" surrounded by other existing properties on the same postcode. The existing properties are being upgraded as per Hyperfastni website. Fibrus and DfE have both been contacted about not being included on Project Stratum.

At no stage were individual addresses mentioned regarding who was or was not being connected within a postcode list. If you were on the "White postcode list", you believed you were being upgraded.

Question: How can these new builds be included in Project Stratum?
Question: Can DfE provide a response for Council to relay to the people on when they will get FTTP?

Universal Service Obligation (USO)

BT Openreach are currently contacting around 2,000 premises in Mid Ulster regarding delivery of the Broadband Universal Service. Council asked BT Openreach if they could share the addresses in an effort to know where exactly the premises are located. This would enable Council to see if some of the 354 properties excluded from Project Stratum are going to get any assistance, or if other problem areas were being targeted. There is surely going to be overlap with Project Stratum in Mid Ulster and Council would be keen to find out if this is the case and where? BT Openreach were asked for the addresses but were unwilling to supply.

Question: Will DfE provide Council with information around what properties will benefit from delivery of the Broadband Universal Service Obligation in Mid Ulster?

Project Stratum Broadband Survey Results

Council undertook an end-user broadband survey to get a snapshot of the number of properties that were on the "White postcode list" but not included in Project Stratum.

Three were 878 responses in three weeks to the survey, which was quite overwhelming. However, in closer analysis there were 329 survey responses from property owners within the "White postcode list" and not included in Project Stratum.

What Council did not expect was the responses from people on the "Grey postcode list" 354 in total. Although these premises are outside the scope of Project Stratum, there were 293 responses from people not receiving 30mbps and are concerned that they are being left behind.

It is 2 years since the Market research in January 2019 was conducted with Providers who indicated that they would be servicing the "Grey postcode list" by January 2022. People are concerned if this is still a reality.

There were a further 100 responses for property owners who were already on the white list and already included on Project Stratum. Please see overview of responses in Table 1.0

Table 1.0: Survey Overview Responses

Responses from	Number of Responses
Properties on White postcode list and **not** on HyperfastNI list for upgrade	329
Properties on White postcode list and **are already** on HyperfastNI list for upgrade	170 *(34 of these had wrongly indicated they were not on white list)*
Properties on Grey postcode list who are not included in Project Stratum - Receiving less than 30mbps - Receiving more than 30mbps	304 grey postcode list responses 251 53
Total Properties on White postcode list and Grey postcode list and **not** on HyperfastNI list for upgrade receiving less than 30mbps	580
Properties not in MUDC/ Answers incomplete/Duplications/ Not on any list	75
Total	**878**

- This sample survey highlights 329 properties on the Departments White postcode list and are not on the Fibrus contract list. Appendix 1
- There were 304 responses from properties on the Grey postcode list who responded. Appendix 2
- This was checked and found 251 properties on the Grey postcode list were also receiving less than 30mbps.
- The sample survey highlights that there are 580 properties under 30 mbps in Mid Ulster uncertain of getting broadband improvements in the near future.

All 580 properties received the following message from the HyperfastNI checker:

"Unfortunately your property is not within the project Stratum area. A broadband service with a speed of 30 Mbs is already available at your address, or is expected to become available in the coming months. If you have concerns about how this assessment was reached, please contact the Department for the Economy at stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk.

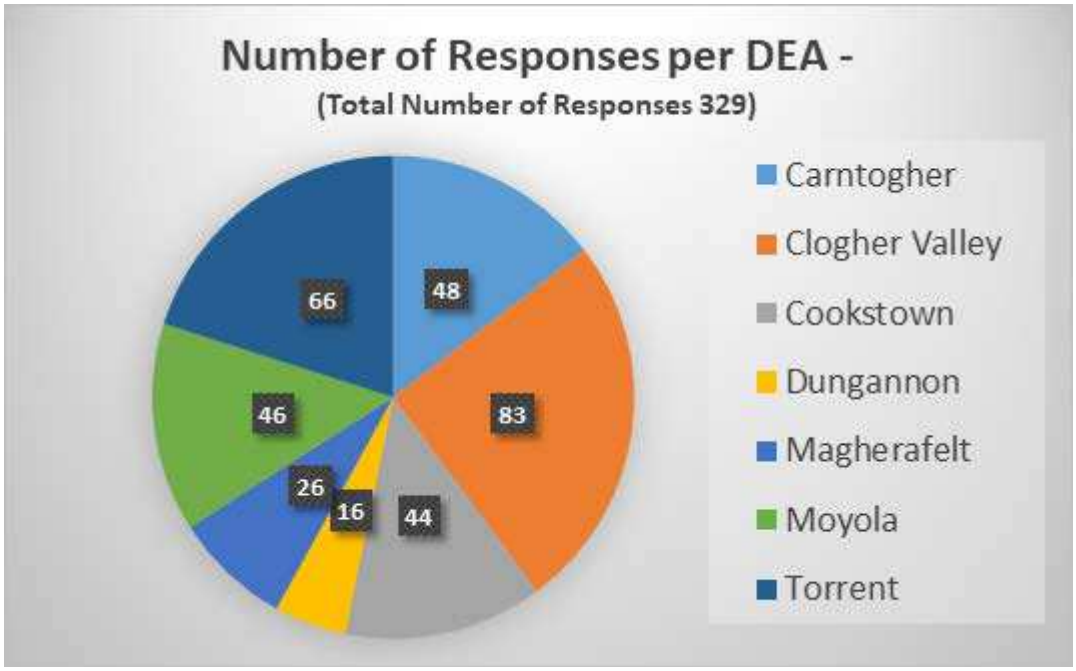
Within the survey, there were 75 responses from people who submitted twice, resided outside the area or were not on any list. Staff attempted to contact all people who submitted incomplete forms.

Table 2.0 below presents the number of survey responses received from users in each DEA Council area on the “White postcode list” and not included in Project Stratum.

Table 2.0: Number of Survey Responses Received in DEA on the “White postcode list” and not included in Project Stratum.

Council Area	Number of Responses
Carntogher	48
Clogher Valley	83
Cookstown	44
Dungannon	16
Magherafelt	26
Moyola	46
Torrent	66
OVERALL TOTAL	**329**

From the response to the survey, it is clear that the Clogher Valley and Torrent are the areas have the most issues. Clogher Valley area was already identified as having the most properties (in Mid Ulster) outside the scope of Project Stratum with 171 properties out of 354 properties de-scoped.



Council has always argued that the worst affected areas should have been addressed first because these areas remain at the bottom of the list.

Question: Project Stratum has been awarded with lower than anticipated costs. The Department has potentially scope and resources available to address the identified gaps and anomalies in Mid Ulster (who are part of the early deployments in Project Stratum). How does the Department propose to address and resource Mid Ulster's Project Stratums issues and develop a mechanism to address wider NI deployment issues?

Appendix 4

FILE NOTE
Zoom Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council with Bank of Ireland (Host)
Thursday 25th March 2021 at 4.00pm

MUDC: Cllr Cathal Mallaghan, Cllr Dominic Molloy, Paul McCreedy.

Bank of Ireland: William Thompson, Head of Consumer Banking NI, Niall Devlin, Head of Business Banking NI, Paul O'Brien, Head of Public Affairs, Sara Holland, Head of UK Communications.

1. Welcome and introductions

William Thompson, Head of Consumer Banking NI and Niall Devlin, Head of Business Banking NI introduced the BOI team.

2. Introductions and context for meeting

It was noted that Cllr W Cuddy, Cllr B Monteith and A McCreesh were unable to connect to the meeting following several failed attempts.

Cllr Mallaghan introduced the Council representatives present and outlined the deep concerns of the Council in relation to the decision and timing to close the Dungannon branch, the damage to the high street and retailers, adverse impact on staff and elderly customers, and rural communities with poor broadband. Cllr Mallaghan, on behalf of Council requested that BOI reconsider its decision.

3. Update from Bank of Ireland on review of Northern Ireland business and context for decision to reduce branch network

W Thompson outlined the rationale for the decision to close 15 branches in NI:-

- Branch closures were in response to changes in customer behaviour over the last four years and the seismic shift to digital services like online shopping meaning customers are using physical branches less and less.
- Banking has become much more technology based.
- BOI's review was undertaken with the Regulator and many stakeholders.
- BOI is seeking to restructure and re-size the business.
- Post Office network will have enhanced services
- The bank's UK head office will relocate from London to Belfast
- Closures to begin from June until the end of 2021, with more specific dates for branches released in due course.

4. Questions

In response to questions from Council represents, the BOI officials stated the following:-

- The decision to close the Dungannon branch has been made and will not be reconsidered or reversed.
- The ATM will be closed.
- There will be no compulsory redundancies and the bank would seek to redeploy staff to other roles within the bank.
- Footfall in the Dungannon BOI branch had reduced by approximately 70% and the analysis which informed the decision was completed on pre-pandemic trends.
- BOI officials gave an assurance that letters to both personal and business customers will be issued outlining clear options and alternatives to access BOI services.
- There will be further investment in the remaining two BOI branches in Mid Ulster.
- An assurance was given that the property at Scotch Street would not fall into disrepair.
- BOI would still be interested in supporting town centre forums and community projects in Dungannon as previous. BOI's Business Team staff will still be working on the ground and happy to contribute.

Report on	Leisure Services – Service Improvement Plan 2021/22
Date of Meeting	13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Head of Leisure
Contact Officer	Kieran Gordon, Head of Leisure

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	To note the Leisure Services - Service Improvement Plan for 2021/22.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The social and economic disruption caused by Covid 19 had had a significant impact on our District, our citizens, our services and the way we provide them. Effectively planning ahead will determine how well the Leisure Service adapts to the challenges and opportunities within the current and post Covid 19 environments, as lockdown restrictions are anticipated to ease, social distancing measures are relaxed and service provision gradually recovers, transitions and adjusts to the "new" normal.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	The 2021/22 Leisure Services Business Plan is anticipated to be dynamic, flexible and responsive to the turbulence and volatility of the internal and external environments arising out of the Covid 19 pandemic. As such, this plan will be a living document which represents the current and planned activity but may need reviewed and/or adjusted in response to any legislative changes arising from any future NI Executive and/or Public Health measures.
3.2	The 2021-22 budget for all departments has been agreed. However, responding to the impact of COVID-19 may have an impact on planned expenditure during this financial year, with some areas within leisure anticipating an overspend and/or underspend. In relation to income, as a minimum, little or no income is anticipated to be received within leisure during the first 2-3 months of the financial year as a result of facilities being shut, operating under restrictions as easements progress through various stages and the hope that no further lockdowns/facility closures are anticipated. Even though leisure was able to re-open during July 2020 to December 2020, it was at times under significant restrictions compared to pre-March 2020 and it is not yet known what the true impact will be on expenditure/income.
3.3	Leisure will aim to provide quality Sport and Leisure facilities offering recreational and sporting opportunities both indoor and outdoor. It will aim to provide opportunities for citizens and visitors to improve their health and wellbeing through physical and recreational activities.
3.4	By listening to stakeholders, Leisure Services will aim to provide innovative services in safe, quality environments in the most efficient and effective ways using highly trained, engaged staff.

3.5	Leisure Services is part of the Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Department and is made up of the following service areas: • Leisure Centres including facilities, classes, courses and activities. • Participation team including disability hub, referral/intervention programmes and grants • Sport including facilities including outdoor facilities, bowling greens and golf centre
3.6	This plan helps ensure that Leisure Services within Mid Ulster District Council are accountable, planned and that performance and improvement are a key element of service delivery. It will also help deliver the Council's mission and strategic outcomes set out in Council's Corporate and Community Plans. The plan also identifies challenges, opportunities, customers' needs and risk management implications.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Service improvement plan projected delivery within allocated budgets however budget is subject to review and in year service savings that may be required to reflect the financial pressures arising from Covid 19 Pandemic.
	Human: Current staff structure sufficient to deliver on Service Improvement Plan outcomes.
	Risk Management: Noted with in the Service Improvement Plan.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: Leisure service provision aims are intended to be fully inclusive, and are designed to encourage wide participation from all sections of the community and aims to promote and support good relations between all sections of the community within Mid Ulster.
	Rural Needs Implications: Rural Needs have been considered in the formulation, development and implementation of the Service Improvement Plan for Leisure Services 2021/22.
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	Members are asked to note the Leisure Services - Service Improvement Plan for 2021/22.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
6.1	Appendix 1 – Leisure Services - Service Improvement Plan for 2021/22.

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Leisure Service of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation

SERVICE PLAN - 2021 / 22

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Foreword

At the start of 2020, Northern Ireland faced the spread of the global Covid-19 pandemic, which in turn has impacted on the way, Mid Ulster District Council delivers its services to communities. The Council's initial response was to protect frontline services, support the vulnerable in the community and ensure continuity of services.

On the Council's road to recovery and reinstatement of services, we have established 'Recovery Activities' that will enable the Council to learn from the impacts that Covid 19 caused, i.e. the new and emerging challenges that services face and the opportunities that have emerged from new ways of working. These 'Recovery Activities' will support the Council's Corporate Plan and this Service Plan will also support the delivery of these higher level objectives and associated outcomes for the residents of the District.

To make sure that we are transparent in what we are aiming to achieve, there is a series of activities outlined within the Service Plan. It should be noted, that it is proposed, that this will be a dynamic service plan, in light of Council's ongoing response to the Pandemic, reflecting the changing context within which it has been developed. Any changes that need to be made to the service plan (i.e. new actions added, or actions removed) will be reported to the Director of the Department as well as being reported as part of our 'business as usual' performance monitoring activity through committee papers during 2021/22.

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1.0 OVERALL PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE SERVICE

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Service

Leisure will provide quality Sport and Leisure facilities offering recreational and sporting opportunities both indoor and outdoor. It will provide opportunities for citizens and visitors to improve their health and wellbeing through physical and recreational activities.

By listening to our stakeholders we will provide innovative services in safe, quality environments in the most efficient and effective ways using highly trained, engaged staff.

The following leisure facilities provide indoor and outdoor leisure services as above:

- Cookstown Leisure Centre
- Mid Ulster Sports Arena
- Fairhill Bowling Green and Tennis Courts
- Football Pitches and Pavilions

- Dungannon Leisure Centre
- Drumcoo Playing Fields including Bowling Green
- Gortgonis Centre and Playing Fields
- Outdoor Facilities to include Football Pitches, Pavilions Tennis and Bowling

- Greenvale Leisure Centre
- Meadowbank Sports Arena
- Maghera Leisure Centre
- Tobermore Golf Centre
- Moneymore Recreation Centre
- Football Pitches and Pavilions

In addition, the service is responsible for Participation promotion, Macmillan Move More (funded programme) Physical Activity Referral (Public Health Agency funded programme) and general business development across the leisure service.

1.2 Responsibilities

The Department delivers a range of functions such as the management of indoor leisure facilities, outdoor leisure facilities and participation programmes and focuses their activities on delivering a number of the corporate priorities by adopting a partnership approach. Partners include other Council departments, statutory agencies, charities, stakeholders, community and voluntary groups.

Leisure Services contributes to a range of wider social, economic and cultural needs by aiming to improve community health and well–being through interaction with the Development Committee of the Council. The service can contribute to reducing inequalities in child poverty and social deprivation as well as ensuring equality of

opportunity. With that in mind, Leisure provides quality facilities, programmes and services to our citizens and visitors.

The section is specifically responsible for the following functions:

- Leisure Centres including facilities, classes, courses and activities.
- Participation promotion including disability hub, programmes and grants
- Sport including facilities including outdoor facilities, bowling greens and golf centre

1.3 Customers & Stakeholders

Customers & Stakeholders
• Internal: Elected Members
• Internal: Staff
• Internal: Other Council functions such as Environmental Health, Health and Safety, Property Services, Technical Services, Community Services, Human Resources, Finance, Legal Services, ICT, Marketing and Communication
• External: Customers, visitors/tourists
• External: Partners in Projects and Service Delivery
• External: Community/Voluntary Organisations such as Sports Clubs, Youth Groups etc
• External: Public Health Agency
• External: Sport NI and National Sporting Governing Bodies
• External: Macmillan Move More
• External: Local Schools/Education Authority
• External: Health Trusts

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1.4 Performance Overview in 2020/21

The Covid-19 pandemic has been one of the most significant challenges that Mid Ulster District Council has ever faced. It has required sudden and dramatic changes to the way we work, as Councillors and officers. The previous year has saw Council hold fast with front line service delivery and the section below outlines; our response during 2020 to 2021 i.e. what we achieved, the remaining challenges, and how our service made a difference.

2020/2021 Performance Response/ Overview (What we achieved- Measured Activities)	**End of Year Progress Status: Activity was - Completed /Commenced/ Other**
• User satisfaction and mystery visits survey.	Completed
• Leisure capital project – Maghera LC outdoor enhancement	Commenced – due to complete by June 2021
• Partnership with Disability Sport NI and facilitation of a Get Out Get Active Officer	Completed
• Implement proposals for future leisure delivery model	Completed Leisure review. Commenced delivery of agreed model including review and implementation of new opening hours within leisure facilities
• To address all anomalies and align all job descriptions and terms and conditions within Leisure Services.	Completed Terms and conditions and job descriptions for all staff and remaining management structure filled.
• Implement App for Leisure facilities.	Completed with launch of Leisurehub in July 2021
• Membership options aligned	Completed with launch in July 2021
• Implement investment programme for leisure equipment	Completed Years 1-3. Commenced Year 4 (Greenvale LC) – due to complete by October 2021.
• Implement appropriate Leisure Marketing Strategy and action plans for facilities, programmes and events	Completed Social media evaluation. Commenced action plan (on hold due to Covid)

2.0 IMPROVING OUR SERVICE AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE - 2021/22

The 2021-22 budget for all departments has been agreed. However, responding to the impact of COVID-19 may have an impact on planned expenditure during this financial year, with some areas within leisure anticipating an overspend and/or underspend. In relation to income, as a minimum, little or no income is anticipated to be received within leisure during the first 2-3 months of the financial year as a result of facilities being shut, operating under restrictions as easements progress through various stages and the hope that no further lockdowns/facility closures are anticipated. Even though leisure was able to re-open during July 2020 to December 2020, it was at times under significant restrictions compared to pre-March 2020 and it is not yet known what the true impact will be on expenditure/income.

The working arrangements for the entire workforce have also been affected by COVID-19.

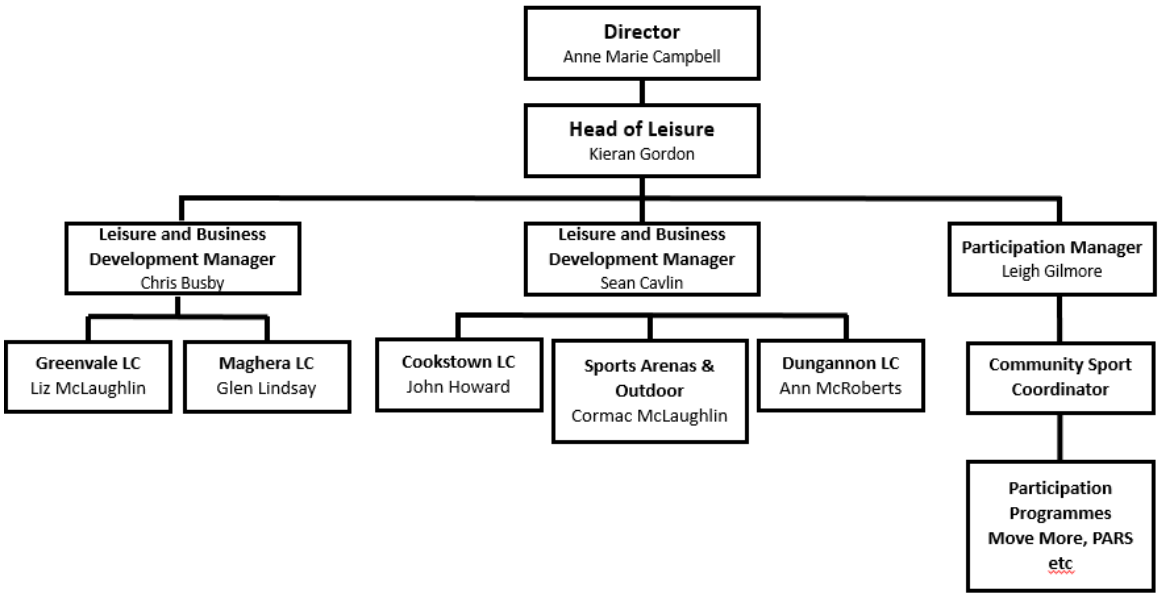
The following tables confirm the resources, financial and people, which the Service has access to throughout 2021-22 to deliver its actions, activities and core business.

2.1 Budget 2021/22 *

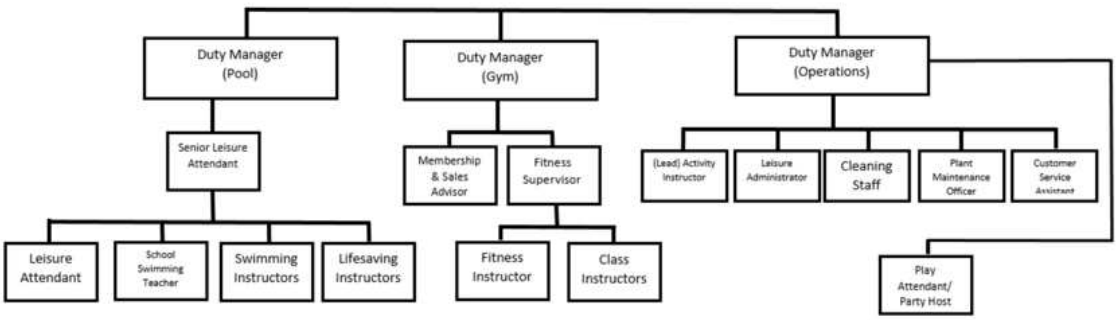
Service Budget Headings	**£**
Cookstown Leisure Centre Total	£870,857
Dungannon Leisure Centre Total	£958,078
Gortgonis Citizen Centre Indoor Total	(£11,179)
Gortgonis Playing Field Total	£58,376
Greenvale Leisure Centre Total	£1,016,729
Maghera Leisure Centre Total	£581,343
Meadowbank Sports Arena Total	£243,506
Mid Ulster Sports Arena Total	£177,292
Moneymore Recreation Centre Total	£56,451
Outdoor Sport Cookstown Total	£19,362
Outdoor Sport Dungannon Total	£122,121
Outdoor Sport Magherafelt Total	£23,126
Sports Development Total	£190,226
Sports Grants - Capital Total	£165,000
Strategic Sports Grants Total	£88,000
TGDR - Tobermore Golf Driving Range Total	£27,173
Gross Budget	£7,973,834
Income	(£3,386,881)
Net Budget for 2021-22	£4,586,953

**** Final 2021/22 budget not yet circulated – above figures represent 202/2021 pre-Covid budget and this is anticipated to be reflective in the 2021/22 year as a result of recent rates process. Budget is subject to review and in year service savings that may be required to reflect the financial pressures identified above.***

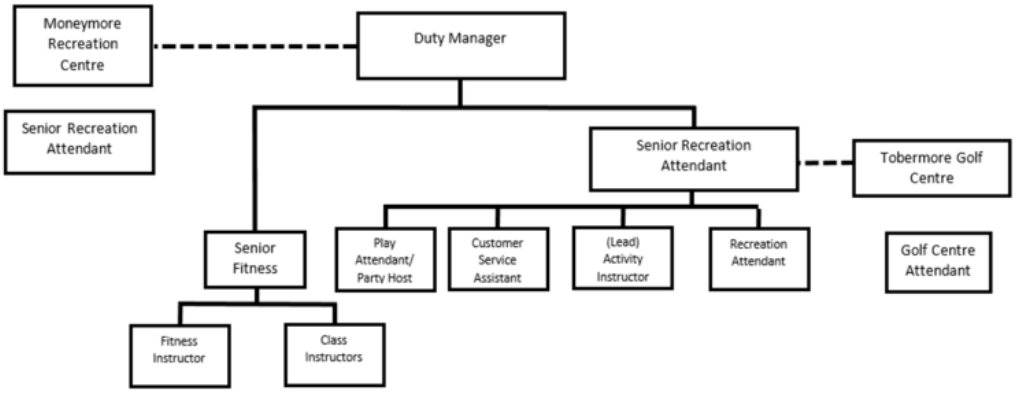
2.2 Staffing Complement - 2021/22



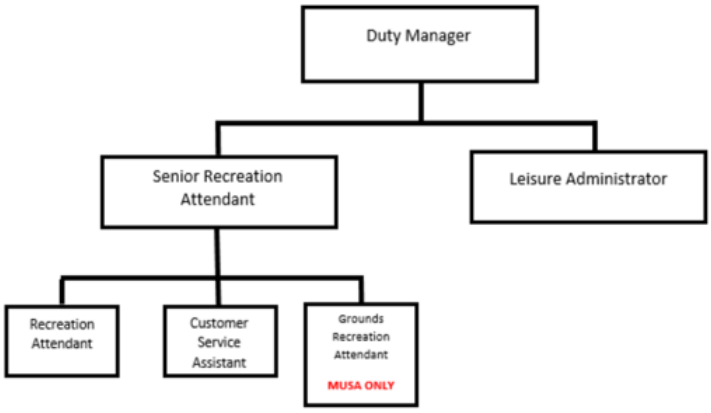
Centre Structure – Cookstown LC, Dungannon LC and Greenvale LC



Centre Structure – Maghera LC (to include Moneymore RC and Tobermore GC)



Centre Structure – Meadowbank Sports Arena and Mid Ulster Sports Arena



Staffing	**No. of Staff** *(excluding current vacant posts)*
Head of Service	1 FT
Managers	3 FT
Centre Managers	5 FT
Duty Managers	11 FT 2 PT
Remaining Team	68 FT 107 PT
Casuals	169
Total	88 FT 109 PT 169 Casuals

2.3 Service Work Plan - 2021/22

This plan confirms the core activities and actions, which will form the Service Work Plan for 2021-22. This is a high-level capture of the Service activities as well as some improvement undertakings which the service will focus on throughout 2021-22. The Plan links to the Council's new 2020-2024 Corporate Plan priorities, Annual Corporate Improvement Plan Objectives, Corporate Indicators and Mid Ulster Sustainable Community Plan themes & outcomes:

The Leisure Service Work Plan for 2021/22 consists of three main areas of action:

- Normal Operations
- Implementation of the leisure service review objectives and delivery
- Capital projects

It is anticipated that this year will bring additional issues but also opportunities to consider and progress as part of the Council's response to COVID-19, which can be summarised below:

Challenges

Legislation

- Social distancing will have an impact on the way all services can be delivered effectively in the future, and new models of service provision and engagement should be explored.

Community

- The closure of leisure facilities may have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of citizens and customers and may lead to increased levels of social isolation, anti-social behaviour and mental health issues.

Resources

- Potential loss of income and higher net costs across all leisure facilities.
- The anticipated economic downturn in the post COVID-19 environment may have a negative impact on leisure centre memberships.
- It is not possible for all employees to work remotely, due to the nature of their jobs.

Service Provision

- The service may not be in a position to meet the current corporate objectives and community planning outcomes around health and wellbeing until full services resume.
- Capital projects have been delayed.
- The Council may not meet the targets agreed in the Letters of Offer received by various funders, such as the Public Health Agency and Macmillan.

Opportunities

Community

- There may be a renewed emphasis on health, wellbeing, community cohesion and social capital in the post COVID-19 environment.

Resources

- Some employees can work remotely which provides opportunities for future flexible working arrangements.
- Some employees have been re-deployed successfully which may present opportunities for upskilling and multi-skilling in the future.

Service Provision

- The provision of virtual physical activity programmes provides new, alternative mechanisms to engage customers in sport and leisure and promote healthy lifestyles.
- Hosting virtual meetings in the future may provide an alternative way to meet and conduct business.
- The further integration of electronic systems of data collection will help to identify users, communicate with them, enhance their experience of our facilities and track progress on their journey to a more active and healthy lifestyle.

Facilities

- The ongoing investment in facilities will allow us to operate with attractive, efficient and functional environments, which will help to encourage citizens to become involved in physical activity as well as contributing to the tourism potential of the borough and providing opportunities for economic development.

Customer / Stakeholder Needs and Expectations

- The expectations of citizens and customers is likely to change, in relation to physical and psychological social distancing, hygiene standards and a willingness to engage and participate in Council activity and services.
- The expectations of key stakeholders, including community groups and sports clubs are likely to change, and they may require more support and leadership from the Council and community planning partners in the future to sustain their activities.

Contingency Planning / Risk Management

- A prolonged pandemic or further lockdowns/restrictions will have an impact on whether the service can recover from COVID-19 during the 2021-22 financial year.

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SERVICE WORK PLAN 2021/22

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	Provide Indoor & Outdoor leisure services taking in account impact of Covid 19 pandemic
Link to Community Plan Theme:	**Align to Corporate Plan Theme**
CMP 4.2 Health & Wellbeing - We have better availability to the right service, in the right place at the right time.	*Service Delivery: 2.1 We will improve services for our citizens through the development and delivery of an innovation agenda*

What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Provide Indoor & Outdoor leisure services taking in account impact of Covid 19 pandemic. Due to the current position and working through the pathway out of restrictions, it is anticipated the below actions will take into consideration potential for restriction of activity numbers due to social distancing. • Deliver leisure recovery plan as we move through the NI Executive Roadmap to Recovery • Deliver Health and wellbeing programmes. • Deliver facility activity programmes and promotions. • Maintain quality service provision. • Develop the role of leisure in the health agenda through enhanced partnerships with PHA/Health Trusts/Charities	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure and Leisure Management Team	Better access to indoor recreational facilities and improved health and wellbeing for children and adults.	• 800,000 users* • Mystery visitor average ratings over 85% • 80 programmes* **Figures reduced as a result of Covid 19 Pandemic*

What **Service Development/Improvement** will we undertake in **2021/22? (actions):**	By When (Date?)	Lead Officers(s)	What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)	How Will we Know? (Measures)
Provide Indoor & Outdoor leisure services taking in account impact of Covid 19 pandemic. Due to the current position and working through the pathway out of restrictions, it is anticipated the below actions will take into consideration potential for restriction of activity numbers due to social distancing. • Implement marketing plan.	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure and Leisure Management Team	Better access to indoor recreational facilities and improved health and wellbeing for children and adults.	• Number of social media interactions • Number of online enquiries and engagement with online platforms

• Enhancing the digital opening for customers of Leisure facilities. • Review further options for development of a leisure mobile app				• Number of new member signs ups versus cancellation (positive net member gain)

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	**Deliver upon the objectives of the Leisure Review and seek to complete the recommendations**			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	**Align to Corporate Plan Theme**			
CMP 4.2 Health & Wellbeing - We have better availability to the right service, in the right place at the right time.	*Service Delivery: 2.3 We will enhance our financial performance & strength, identifying opportunities to increase income & reduce deficits, as well as to leverage external funding*			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Deliver upon the objectives of the Leisure Review and seek to complete the recommendations • To imbed the new ethos of all job descriptions and terms and conditions within Leisure Services.	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure and Leisure Management Team	Modernise Leisure Services to be able to embrace new opportunities and be the best Council provider of Leisure Services that it can be.	• All job descriptions at all tiers addressed, in place and initial recruitment completed • Operating recovery rate – over 40%

What **Service Development/Improvement** will we undertake in **2021/22? (actions):**	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Deliver upon the objectives of the Leisure Review and seek to complete the recommendations • Have a common aligned approach to the delivery of Leisure across Mid Ulster; • To ensure Health and Safety requirements and obligations are fully discharged; • To deliver Leisure Services in the most efficient and effective manner; • Membership options aligned • Pitch and Recreation Spaces Strategy	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure and Leisure Management Team	Modernise Leisure Services to be able to embrace new opportunities and be the best Council provider of Leisure Services that it can be.	Implementation of a leisure service integrated management system with common approach to procedures, work instructions and customer accessibility and experience. Achievement and approval for a Pitch and Recreation Spaces Strategy.

• Establish Corporate Membership partners via the new Corporate Membership Package • Development and delivery of an annual Active Recreation Plan				Number of new corporate partnerships established. Implementation of an Annual Active Recreation Plan and increase in participants.

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	**Progress implementation of proposals for key capital projects**			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	**Align to Corporate Plan Theme**			
CMP 4.2 Health & Wellbeing - We have better availability to the right service, in the right place at the right time.	*Economy: 3.5 We will have a prioritised, sustainably resourced programme of capital investment supporting the enhancement of facilities for local people & contributing to the regeneration of the district.*			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Progress implementation of proposals for key capital projects • Consultancy and construction teams appointed • Design programmes of work established and agreed • Source and agree funding	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure Service Head of Technical Services Leisure and Business Development Manager	Production of high quality, responsive indoor and outdoor leisure facilities.	• **Funding sources agreed and in place** • Implementation of programme of work at relevant construction stages by March 2022.

What **Service Development/Improvement** will we undertake in **2021/22? (actions):**	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Progress implementation of proposals for key capital projects • Maghera LC outdoor enhancement launch (by June 2021) • Gortgonis (currently at ICT design stage) • Mid Ulster Sports Arena (progressing to ICT design stage)	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure Service	Production of high quality, responsive indoor and outdoor leisure facilities.	Gortgonis, Mid Ulster Sports Arena, Maghera LC outdoor enhancement - Implementation of programme of work at relevant

		Head of Technical Services Leisure and Business Development Manager		construction stages by March 2022.

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	Implement investment programme for leisure equipment			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	**Align to Corporate Plan Theme**			
CMP 4.2 Health & Wellbeing - We have better availability to the right service, in the right place at the right time.	*Leadership: 1.3 We will work collectively to meet the identified needs and priorities of our citizens & connect the people of Mid Ulster*			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Implement investment programme for leisure equipment • Council approval and 7-year work plan agreed • Procurement and delivery of contract year 1, 2 & 3 completed by March 2021 • Procurement and delivery of contract year 4 (Greenvale LC fitness suite) for 21/22 • Consult staff on customer service requirements to refine designs.	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure Service Head of Technical Services Leisure and Business Development Manager	Production of high quality, responsive indoor and outdoor leisure facilities.	Equipment procured, delivered and operational at designated sites

What **Service Development/Improvement** will we undertake in **2020/21? (actions):**	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Implement investment programme for leisure equipment • Benchmark leisure facilities in N Ireland. • Site visits and competitor analysis at private facilities.	From April 2021 to March 2022	Head of Leisure Service	Production of high quality, responsive indoor and outdoor leisure facilities.	Equipment procured, delivered and operational at designated sites

• Establish trends and develop initial designs for each facility. • Establish priority areas and undertake investment implementation on a needs basis. • Contract for provision of equipment • Completion of delivery and implementation at designated sites on a cyclical basis.		Leisure and Business Development Manager		

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2.4 RISK MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE

The purpose of risk management is to manage the barriers which prevents the Council from achieving its objectives. This section of the service plan includes space for the Service to input their key risks (in summary form), which have been identified during the business planning process. The Council uses risk management to maximize opportunities and minimize risks. This improves its ability to deliver priorities and improve outcomes. This is why the Council deems it important to link business planning and risk management. Risk Management aims to:

- Help the Council achieve its overall aims and objectives
- Manage the significant risks the Council faces to an acceptable level
- Assist with the decision making process
- Implement the most effective measures to avoid, reduce and control those risks
- Balance risk with opportunity
- Manage risk and internal controls in the most effective way.

This table illustrates the risks identified to deliver the Services business in 2021-22.

Risk Ref Number	Description of Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation Activity
1.	LR01 - Failure to comply with legislation / regulatory guidance (eg. Disability legislation) & adherence to policies / procedures	6	Policies & procedures updated. Regular /ongoing communication with staff. Training rolled out to LS staff & all relevant staff. Checklists. Audits.
2.	LR02 - Significant reduction in funding / income	9	Ongoing budget reviews, Regular engagement with funding stakeholders, Marketing & communications plan.
3.	LR03 - Inadequate strategic planning of leisure / sports services	6	Service Improvement Plan aligned to Corporate Plan, Local Development Plan, Community Plan and Stakeholder needs. Sports facilities Strategy 2018 Capital Programme 2020 - 24
4.	LR04 - Failure to respond effectively to issues e.g. contamination	6	Regular staff communication, Inspection protocols, Regular reporting & escalation if required. Risk Assessments & Harriet system for managing hazards etc.
5.	LR05 - Failure to prevent fraud, bribery & corruption	5	Cash handling / management procedures, Anti-fraud / corruption policy in place. Employee code of conduct. Income held in safe with access restricted to limited individuals. Safe limits set & contents regularly checks. Management authorisation required for refunds / credits. Cash collection services.

			Computerised booking management system which is password protected, authority actions & restricted levels within. Regular staff communication, training & review / updating procedures, Inspection protocols, Regular reporting & escalation if required.
6.	LR06 - Loss of key supplier / goods	6	Regular ongoing review of Contracts Register. Ongoing engagement with Suppliers. Adhering to procurement processes. Monitor complaints on products.
7.	LR07 - Ineffective governance arrangements in place	6	Regular staff communication, Inspection protocols, Regular reporting & escalation if required.

Rating	Descriptor
16 - 25	**Extreme Risk (immediate action required)**
10 - 15	**High Risk (urgent action required)**
7 - 9	**Moderate Risk (action required)**
1 – 6	**Low Risk (keep under review)**

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3.0 OUR STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

In carrying out our responsibilities, the Service is cognisant of the statutory duties placed upon the council in the delivery of its services. Whilst the Service operates, under various obligations it is however mindful of the changing context in which it operates and endeavours to mainstream the equality and rural needs duties in the design and delivery of our functions.

3.1 EQUALITY DUTY

The council and by consequence our Service is committed to contributing towards its part in working towards fulfilling obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure adequate time, staff and resources to fulfil our duties.

The Service will also work towards adherence to the council's Equality Scheme ensuring equality duties, together with promoting positive attitudes towards persons with a disability and the participation of people with a disability in public life when carrying out our functions.

3.2 RURAL NEEDS DUTY

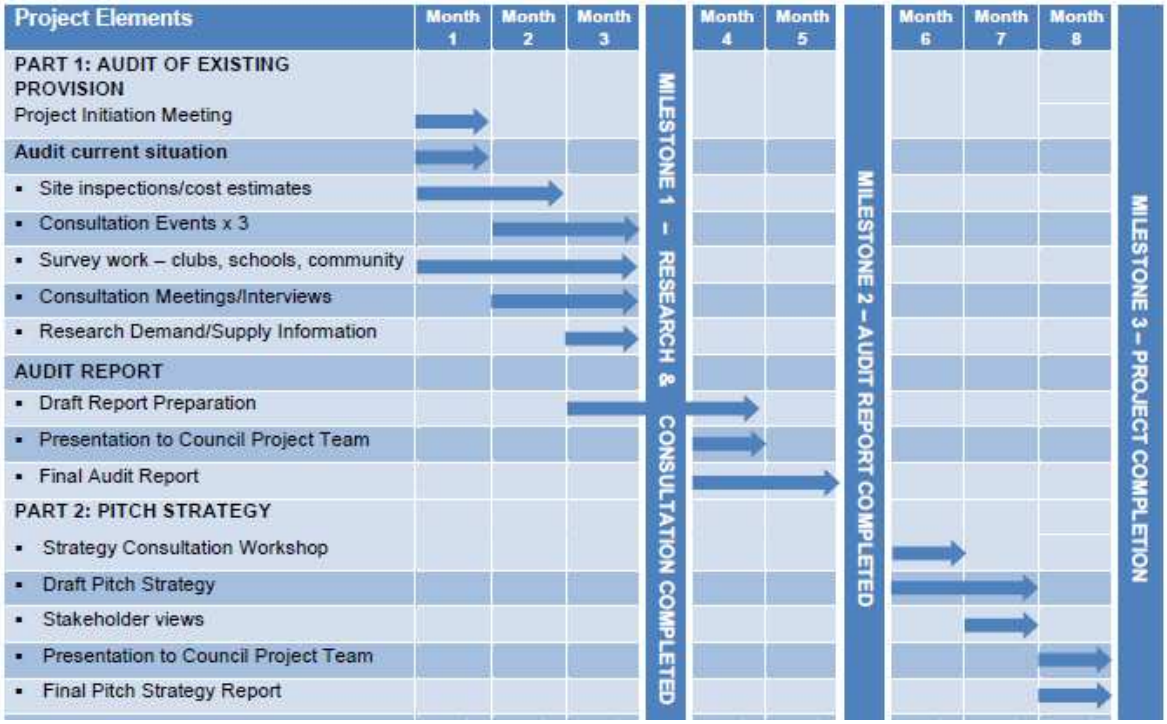
The Service will be mindful of the rural needs of its customers when carrying out its functions and subsequent responsibilities, particularly in developing any new policies, plans or strategies throughout the year. In line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 we will give due regard to rurality in terms of needs in carrying out the activities within our Service.

Report on	Pitch and Recreational Spaces Strategy Update
Date of Meeting	13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Head of Leisure
Contact Officer	Kieran Gordon, Head of Leisure

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	Council approved the Sports Facility Strategy in May 2018 which provided a framework for the future prioritisation, development and provision of sports facilities at a local level in order to meet identified community need, helping to increase participation, addressing health inequalities, and other local specific factors. With reference to grass pitches, it was noted to Members in September 2018 that it was recognized that the limitations to the strategic planning work undertaken included the fact that every natural grass pitch could not be visited and for this reason, the Strategy focused only on headline issues, with the realisation that natural grass pitches needed to be examined through a more detailed piece of research.
1.2	Previously in February 2021, it was noted to Members that Officers were continuing with work to develop a Mid Ulster District Council Pitch Strategy (which is an action reflective of a recommendation from the previously approved 2018 Sports Facility Strategy) and that updates on progress and proposed options to move forward would be presented to a future Development Committee for consideration when available.
1.3	This report seeks to provide information on what the project entails and key milestones to be achieved.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	Following a procurement process, Otium Leisure Consultancy have been commissioned to undertake the work associated with this strategy development.
2.2	Further details on the project brief are provided within Appendix A and it is estimated that it should take 6-8 months to complete this initial work with an anticipated presentation of initial recommendations for Members consideration by October/November 2021.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	The strategy development brief is detailed within Appendix A but in summary it is for a two part study to be carried out:

	(1) Part one should focus on an audit into the current design, distribution, demand/supply information and condition of each Mid Ulster District Council site that hosts Council owned and leased outdoor 'pitches' and associated changing facilities in the District. This should also include consultation and engagement with key stakeholders. (2) Part 2 should then build upon the part one audit and use that as a framework to create a strategy that could be used to further develop the pitch infrastructure in the District in a way that is affordable, sustainable, inclusive, high quality and consistent with current best practice in public pitch provision.
3.2	It is envisaged that the final reports will provide a practical working tool to which Council can refer to whenever decisions relating to pitch provision are made in the future and this should reference indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates.
3.3	Additionally, the development of a strategy allows for a cross Council approach to use of leisure pitches and recreational space with Leisure Services, Health and Wellbeing, Community and Good Relations to ensure they are shared and maximised community assets.
3.4	Presently the project team are carrying out detailed visits and assessments on all Council sites regarding condition/quality, location, size, usage profile, accessibility and ancillary facilities.
3.5	It is anticipated that the commencement of the stakeholder consultation and engagement with begin with three evening consultation events in Magherafelt (7th June), Cookstown (8th June) and Dungannon (9th June). There will also be a virtual event scheduled (date to be confirmed) and alongside these events there will be ongoing surveys and questionnaires with all interested stakeholders. All engagement opportunities will be advertised via the Councils online communication platforms and mailing lists.
3.6	An indicative project plan is itemised below:



3.7	Officers will continue to provide updates on progress and options for any decisions required via future Development Committee's when available.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Costs for strategy development within existing revenue budgets.
	Human: Officer time.
	Risk Management: In line with Council policies and procedures and will continue to ensure a more robust and standardised approach across Leisure services and facilities.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: Will be carried out prior to each part of the strategy development and to be considered when future options are presented.
	Rural Needs Implications: Will be carried out prior to each part of the strategy development and to be considered when future options are presented.
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	To note the contents of this report on the development of a Mid Ulster District Council Pitch and Recreational Spaces Strategy.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**

	Appendix A – Pitch and Recreational Spaces Strategy Development Brief

Appendix A – Pitch and Recreational Spaces Strategy Development Brief

Mid Ulster District Council approved its Sports Facility Strategy in May 2018 which provided a framework for the future prioritisation, development and provision of sports facilities at a local level in order to meet identified community need, helping to increase participation, addressing health inequalities, and other local specific factors. With reference to grass pitches, it was was recognized that the limitations to the strategic planning work undertaken included the fact that every natural grass pitch could not be visited and for this reason, the Strategy focused only on headline issues, with the realisation that natural grass pitches needed to be examined through a more detailed piece of research.

An action arising from the Sports Facility Strategy 2018 was that Council seek to develop a pitch strategy.

Presently, Council do not have a framework for the consideration of specific developmental and/or leasing requests by clubs or groups within leisure or a capital investment programme for pitches (outside of "normal" routine maintenance).

Mid Ulster District Council issued a quotation specification during March 2021 for a competent specialist organisation/individual to undertake a condition survey of all Council pitches / recreational spaces and to make recommendations for a Council pitches / spaces strategy.

The scope of work and service required is for a two part study to be carried out into the current Mid Ulster District Council 'pitch' (and associated changing) provision and to create a strategy that could be used to further develop the pitch infrastructure in the District in a way that is affordable, sustainably, inclusive, high quality and consistent with current best practice in public pitch provision.

It is recognised that a shared, strategic approach to open space maximises its potential to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable future.

The development of a strategy allows for a cross Council approach to use of leisure pitches and recreational space with Leisure Services, Health and Wellbeing, Community and Good Relations to ensure they are shared and maximised community assets.

Strategy, Polices and Plans

The focus of this strategy is about developing people by encouraging active lifestyles through the provision of facilities. The Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018 audit evidences the Council's role in the provision of sports pitches and therefore in the development of opportunities for active and healthier lifestyles. This proposed strategy development comes at a time when an active lifestyle is recognised as vitally important in helping to reduce the incidence of a range of life-limiting diseases. It also makes significant contributions to at least two of the five Council strategic themes in its Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024:

- Theme 2: Service Delivery
- Theme 5: Communities

This strategy development should take cognizance of current Strategic plans:

- Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024

- Community Plan for Mid Ulster District Council 2017 "Our Community Plan, 10 year plan for Mid Ulster" – promoting healthy and active lifestyles, helping address mental health, health inequalities and greater community development engagement.

- Mid Ulster District Council Local Development Plan 2030
- Mid Ulster District Council Village Plans
- Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018
- Mid Ulster District Council Open Space, Recreation and Leisure 2015
- Mid Ulster District Council Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025
- Mid Ulster District Council Sports Club Survey 2019
- The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation 2009-2019 'Sport Matters'
- Sport Northern Ireland Corporate Plan 2015-2020
- Northern Ireland Executive: Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2021
- Active Living: No Limits 2016-2021
- Sport NI Wellbeing in Sport Action Plan 2019-2025
- Active Places Research Report (Bridging the Gap) 2009
- Active Places Research Report 2014 Update, Bridging the Gap

In addition, linked to Mid Ulster District Council's Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025, while each of the strategic themes has a clear focus and purpose, there are also a number of corporate commitments which are not tethered to one area of work, but are common to all and should be realised via this project and strategy development:

- Addressing rurality
  - *"Close to 70% of Mid Ulster's population live in a rural setting, a fact which has strongly influenced the Council's approach to service delivery, investment and long-term planning. The importance of addressing the needs of a rural region, whether socially or economically, is undiminished and remains one of the Council's corporate commitments."*
- Promoting Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations
  - *"Beyond a duty of compliance with our equality scheme, we aim to mainstream the promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations throughout the organisation, actively seeking out ways in which to enhance those opportunities and to build positive relations between and among the diverse communities across Mid Ulster."*

- Working in partnership our Good Relations and Community Development Teams to further promote shared spaces across Mid Ulster in all our towns and villages to seek to bring people together and maximise resources.

- Continuously improving our services
  - *"Whether through our formal Corporate Improvement Objectives and service-specific Performance Improvement Plans or the small, regular, routine changes which we make to services through feedback, we are committed to continuously improving what we do and how we do it."*
  - *Working in partnership with our outreach sports and leisure teams, Health and Wellbeing teams to promote active and health lifestyles for all.*

- Designing and delivering our services sustainably
- *"From large-scale investment projects to new or changing service models, we place a value on ensuring that what we do not only meets current needs, but is designed and delivered to be sustainable in the longer-term, ensuring the needs of future generations are uncompromised."*

- Working collaboratively across the public, private, community and voluntary sector to achieve shared objectives
- *"Collaborative working is key to delivering successful outcomes for local people. The Council is committed to embracing the opportunities to work with a range of other organisations on issues, projects and plans as they relate to every theme, priority and aspect of our work."*

Aims and Objectives of the Stratgey Development

(1) it is estimated that it should take 6-8 months to complete this initial work with an anticipated presentation of initial recommendations for Members consideration by October/November 2021.

(2) An equality screening and rural needs impact assessment should completed at the outset of each part and then be included for the final report and Strategy recommendations in order to identify any potential differential impacts and possible mitigating actions.

(3) Through local consultations with various stakeholders, the strategy should seek to understand in detail the current Council owned pitch assets, their accompanying infrastructure (including changing provision) and their condition.

(4) The Pitches (and associated changing provision) Strategy should set out a 5 year plan (with outline recommendations to 10 years) with an indicative budget and make area specific recommendations and provide cost estimates in relation to a range of options

Requirement Details (Part 1):
Audit the design, distribution, demand/supply information and condition of each Mid Ulster District Council site that hosts Council owned and leased outdoor 'pitches' and associated changing facilities in the District. This audit is to include all natural turf, synthetic 'pitches' (ATP) and multi-use games areas/small sided games/kick about areas for: ➢ Association football ➢ Gaelic games ➢ Hockey ➢ Rugby
Make recommendations and provide indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates to any identified remedial/improvement works or further technical investigations necessary on the Council owned and leased pitches, multi-use games areas, small sided games/kick about areas and associated changing facilities.

Requirement Details (Part 2):
Review and provide an update report on the current provision data and previous strategy work available (Mid Ulster District Council Sports Facility Strategy 2018) and evaluate against: ➢ Current best practice guidance on the scale and distribution of pitch provision from Fields in Trust, Edinburgh University, and elsewhere (as appropriate), ➢ Condition assessments (from Part 1) based on visual inspections and/or maintenance records/observations ➢ The changing needs/expectations of many outdoor sports ➢ Demand/supply/poor condition closure information, ➢ Existing information for relevant non-Council facilities, ➢ An assessment of current changing provision at each venue; and ➢ Local consultation responses
To make recommendations for a prioritised 'pitch' (and associated changing provision) investment strategy for the District and provide indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates. Research should also be carried out on potential current and future known funding bids/mechanisms that may be available to support the investment strategy.
The Pitches / recreational space (and associated changing provision) Strategy should set out a 5 year plan on a priority basis (with outline recommendations to 10 years) and make area specific recommendations and provide indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates in relation to a range of options including: ➢ Refurbishments to assets ➢ New provision based on need ➢ Obsolete pitch provision and new identified shared space community need ➢ Extensions to facilities ➢ Rationalisation into outdoor sports hubs ➢ Partnership provision/shared ➢ Opportunities for long term leases ➢ Facility types, sporting codes, scale and playing surface ➢ High level specifications to accommodate the likely use pattern, sporting code and standard of competition ➢ Opportunities for multi-use of facilities including formalised sports and informal recreational use to support community engagement and health and wellbeing

The strategy should consider the best mix and distribution of natural turf, synthetic 'pitches' (ATP) and multi-use games areas/small sided games/kick about areas on current and future need (including unmet need) and provide analysis on the projected demand pattern, participation levels, data on current booking levels and the distribution and scale of sports clubs and sporting codes in the area.
Consideration should be given to how effective partnerships with the private, education, public or third sector organisations could bring benefits to the pitch provision in the District in a way that is open and accessible while at the same time maximises sustainability, efficiency and community benefit. This may include developing it further as a pitch or it becoming open informal play space for general use.
The strategy should give consideration to areas where there is under supply of pitches, taking account of Council and community provision and make recommendations of how to provide for demand.
The strategy should give consideration to areas where there is oversupply of pitches and how these could be developed as usable assets for the wider benefit of the community as shared space provision.
The Strategy recommendations should take account of levels of deprivation and barriers to access such as disability or rurality, shared space in our towns and villages etc. This should include some areas of recommendation with regard to levels of pitch provision usage across the District and then more localised usage; and flexible models to accommodate more formalised sport and more targeting of groups that are not in sports including young people not playing recognised sports and older people engagement
Extensive consultation will be an essential element of the successful completion of the contract. The successful provider will be required to consult with: ➢ local communities, ➢ sports groups/clubs, ➢ maintenance staff ➢ bookings staff ➢ schools/colleges ➢ local leagues; and ➢ governing bodies of sport / Regional development bodies / Development officers, ➢ Council officers ➢ Any others that are deemed necessary and relevant to this project

Requirement Details (General for both Part 1 & 2):
The successful contractor will be expected to provide an evidence base for their audit findings and Strategy recommendations through reference to identified key national and local strategies, policies and practices.
The review findings conclusions and recommendations for Part 1 and Part 2 must be collated into separate final reports. It is envisaged that the final reports, when combined with a Pitch Implementation Plan, will provide a practical working tool to which Council and its officers can refer to whenever decisions relating to pitch provision are made in the future and this should reference indicative capital and ongoing annual revenue cost estimates.

Report on	Parks Service Improvement Plan 2021 - 22
Date of Meeting	Thursday 13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Head of Parks
Contact Officer	Nigel Hill

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

1.0	**Purpose of Report**
1.1	To seek Member approval for the Parks Service Improvement Plan for 2021-22.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The Parks Services Improvement Plan sets out a clear path of delivery in relation to services ensuring that we are accountable and that performance and improvement are key elements of service delivery in conjunction with Council's mission and strategic outcomes set out in Council's Corporate Plan.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	The Parks Service will continue to develop and deliver quality experiences to local communities and visitors to the district through commitment to seeking achievable improvements that generate exceptional experiences to our end customer and promoting health and wellbeing through physical and recreational activities. Park Service users provide continuous feedback that permits us adopt and shape our services to meet customer expectations were possible and to deliver services to an optimum level within budget and staff resource capacities. The Parks Service delivers across the listed functions, is part of the Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Department and is made up of the following service areas: • Parks and Play • Davagh Dark Skies Park • Forest Recreation • Water Recreation and Angling • Access to the Countryside • Camping & caravanning
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Service improvement plans projected delivery within allocated budgets, or subject to available alternative funding streams. Budgets subject to variations/amendments due to Covid-19 budget reallocations.

	Human: Current staff structure sufficient to deliver on Service Improvement Plan outcomes
	Risk Management: Noted with in the Service Improvement Plan Section 3.3
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: In conjunction with Council Policy and procedures
	Rural Needs Implications: In conjunction with Council Policy and procedures
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	The Parks Service Improvement Plan for 2021-22 is presented for members information.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix Parks Service Improvement Plan for 2021-22.

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Parks Service Leisure & Outdoor Recreation

SERVICE PLAN - 2021 / 22

	Date
Consulted within staff team	23/ 03/2021
Discussed & signed off by Director	24/03/2021

CONTENT

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1.0 OVERALL PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE SERVICE

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Service

The scope, diversity and potential developmental capacity accessible to Mid Ulster District Council Parks Service is both tremendously exciting and challenging. The greatest importance is sustaining a welcoming, safe environment and raising quality standards for parks and open spaces, together with the provision of facilities that are sufficient to meet the varied recreational demands of a growing residential population. This needs to be achieved in the context of increasing pressure on public expenditure, alongside encouraging greater community ownership and involvement.

The Parks Service is committed to the achievement of quality standards across parks and open spaces in line with the Green Flag status through the attainment of additional Green Flag Awards for suitable sites. The Parks Service will support achievement of sustainable development in line with approved management and maintenance plans delivering on the protection and enhancement of the natural qualities of parks and open spaces, embracing positive biodiversity for the benefit of future generations.

The Parks Service will endeavour to actively support volunteering opportunities within parks and open spaces and encourage greater community involvement and additional partnership working between agencies, groups and organisations, exploring opportunities (where compatible with corporate priorities) to provide high quality parks and open spaces that are enjoyed by all who visit or live within our shared community.

The Parks Service is part of the Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Directorate, and is made up of the following service areas:

1. Public Parks and Open Spaces
2. Davagh Dark Skies Park
3. Play Areas
4. Countryside Access
5. Forest Recreation
6. Water Recreation
7. Camping & Caravanning

1.2 Responsibilities

PUBLIC PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

Mid Ulster District Council manage sixteen public parks of varying sizes and facilities the largest of which are Dungannon Park and Ballyronan Marina. Some one hundred and twelve play park/playground amenities are provided and maintained across the towns, villages and hamlets of the district.

- Public parks provide our local communities with the opportunity to be physically active
- Parks with the capacity to attract day visits have true economic benefit to surrounding towns and villages
- Parks provide vital green space in urban landscapes
- Parks preserve wildlife habitat
- Parks and recreation facilitate social interactions
- Leisure activities in parks improve moods, reduce stress and enhance a sense of wellness
- Playing outside helps children to develop their learning abilities.

Outdoor play encourages children's creativity and provides numerous health benefits as opposed to indoor environments.

DAVGH DARK SKIES PARK

Davagh has one of the 'darkest skies' in Ireland, which means there is so little light pollution that there are crystal clear views of star constellations.
The new centre will give visitors a unique opportunity to experience the night sky as it is rarely viewed – and as it would have been seen centuries ago by our ancestors. Combining the latest tech, from holographic installations to virtual reality headsets with colourful, accessible interpretation panels and hands-on activities, visitors to the centre will be able to explore our solar system from our sun and moon to our stars and the planets.

The centre piece of the space will be a star-gazing telescope, opening up the opportunities to view the night sky without light pollution and establishing Davagh as the only official 'dark sky' reserve here and establishing Davagh as the only official 'dark sky' reserve in Northern Ireland.

FOREST RECREATION

Mid Ulster District Council are engaged with Forest Service Northern Ireland through the development of Licence Agreements to increase quality recreational access to forest lands in the district. The council currently hold five licence agreements with Forest Service for recreational use. The contribution of forest recreation province wide was measured in a recent survey completed by Forest Service in 2019.

An estimated 8.97 million visits were taken to forests on the Forest Service Forest Estate in 2019. An average of £24.60 (including accommodation) was spent during

visits taken to the surveyed forests, of this total an average of around £3.98 was spent within the forest, 78% of visitors are adults (aged 16 or older)

The estimated total annual spend during trips that involve visiting a publicly accessible Forest Service location (including any amounts spent on accommodation) is £172 million. The most popular activities on visits to the surveyed forests were walking (65% of visits) and dog walking (41% of visits).

COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS AND WATER RECREATION

Mid Ulster District Council manages one significant water recreation facility at Ballyronan Marina, almost 150 kilometres of cycle and walking trails along with 22 kilometres of designated canoe trail and nine angling facilities (two game and seven coarse) across the district. These include amenities such as the Coalisland Canal Trail, Clogher Valley/Carleton Trial, riverside walks at Dunamore, Augher and Cots Lane and Ardtrea. Angling facilities at coarse waters Creeve, Enagh and Carrick Lough and Game fishing at Dungannon Park and Bradley lake and mountain bike activity centres at Davagh Forest and Blessingbourne Estate offering over 41 kilometers of trails for riding and walking enthusiasts.

In addition to this the Council has a statutory responsibility to manage Access to the Countryside under the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983, district councils have a duty "to assert, protect and keep open and free from obstruction or encroachment, any public right of way....". They are also given discretionary powers to repair and maintain rights of way, to create, divert or close public paths and to make access agreements or orders to open land.

The socio-economic and wider health benefits attached to access to outdoor activities and recreation is widely known that sport helps to reduce incidents of heart disease and obesity. According to 'Sport Matters: The Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland, 2019', sport and recreation is one of the best investments that can be made in preventive medicine. Significantly the strategy adds: "Outdoor recreation is widely recognised as a positive force. It can build lasting relationships between people and often people from different social and religious backgrounds." There are many UK studies that highlight that outdoor recreation has a positive impact on:

- Health and fitness;
- Quality of life;
- Work ethic and productivity;
- Inward investment; and
- Reduction in crime.

In May 2020 Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) conducted an online survey in response to the new social distancing measures encouraging the public stay at home, and only leave their homes once a day to exercise in their local area.

Nearly half (47%) the population of Northern Ireland are spending more of their free time outdoors now, than they did this time last year and 51% expect to do more after lockdown. A recent survey* conducted by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland, has highlighted an unprecedented rise in the use of the outdoors during the COVID 19 lockdown. The survey of 1,487 people, undertaken earlier this month, highlights the importance of outdoor recreation for people's health and wellbeing during this time.

CAMPING AND CARAVANNING

Visitors to Mid Ulster can choose from three council managed campsite facilities, Dungannon Park, Ballyronan Marina and Round Lake, Fivemiletown.

Forty-four serviced caravan pitches are available for hire throughout the thirty week season. Larger groups can be accommodated such as caravan clubs at Dungannon Park with capacity to welcome in excess of eighty units. Covid-19 restrictions throughout 2020-21 required camp sites to close for the most of the season. This had a significant impact on figures at Dungannon Park, Ballyronan Marina and Round Lake. Records for 2020-21 indicate 1163 caravanning units for the season a decrease of 2,414 on 2019-20. The potential to increase visitor footfall through campsite development is an option being considered with Forest Service The following list of contacts illustrates the nature and range of stakeholder relationships that exist between the Parks Service and other Council functions, public and private sector organisations, the community and voluntary sectors and is not inexhaustible given that new situations and opportunities arise throughout the

The section is specifically responsible for the following functions:

1.3 Customers & Stakeholders

Customers & Stakeholders
• CHIEF EXECUTIVE
• ELECTED MEMBERS
• STAFF
• ENVIRONMENT & PROPERTY SERVICES
• ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
• TOURISM & EVENTS
• FINANCE
• TECHNICAL SERVICES
• COMMUNITY SERVICES • HUMAN RESOURCES
• LEISURE SERVICES
• ARTS & CULTURE
• LEGAL SERVICES
• PLANNING SERVICES

• ICT
• HEALTH & SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT
• POLICING & COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP
• MARKETING & COMMUNICATION
• VISITORS/TOURISTS
• GENERAL PUBLIC
• FOREST SERVICE NI
• OUTDOOR RECREATION NI
• PSNI
• COMMUNITY GROUPS
• DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE
• SPORTS CLUBS/ANGLING, CYCLING, RUNNER AND WALKERS
• TOURISM NI
• SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES (NI) INTER-ANGENCY FORUM
• DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMRNT & RURAL AFFAIRS
• WATERWAYS IRELAND

1.4 Performance Overview in 2020/21

The following table provides a progress summary and the impact made by last years' Service Plan (2019-2020). It also details key successes, a summary of the end of year progress, remaining challenges for the Service and how it made a difference.

The following table provides a progress summary and the impact made by last years' Service Plan (2019-20120). It also details key successes, a summary of the end of year progress, remaining challenges for the Service and how it made a difference.

2020/21 Performance Overview	End of Year Progress Status: Completed/Commenced/Other
• Completion of Five Year Parks and Play Strategy 2020 – 2025 which was an objective on the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan	Council approved Five Year Strategic Plan in December 2019. Year one play development projects were on hold due to Covid-19
• Completion of Five Year Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020 – 2025 which was an objective on Council's Corporate Improvement Plan	Council approved Five Year Strategic Plan in March 2019. Year one access development projects were on hold due to Covid-19.
• Establish an extension of Licence Agreements with Forest Service NI	Completed Amended Lease Agreements with FSNI completed for Pomeroy Forest development Project.

• Access to the Countryside development via long distance trails	Completed Landowner and stakeholder Lease Agreement completed for Davagh Solar Walks. Permissive Path agreements for Moy Riverside Walk.
• Deliver event and activity programmes at the core MUDC venues • Deliver Parks Marketing Plan in conjunction with MUDC Marketing & Communications	Council Events as part of Parks Service calendar were cancelled and marketing plan placed on hold due to Covid-19.
• Davagh Forest Dark Skies Project	Due to Covid-19 Pandemic restrictions Official Opening was postponed.
• Clogher Valley and Ulster Canal Greenway proposals	No further development, subject to funding.
• Reservoirs Management	Commenced Conformity to The Reservoir Act (NI) 2015 Water Regulations requirements commenced, ongoing programme of works.
• Play Parks Improvements Programme	Completed Eighteen play park enhancements in conjunction with Village renewal RDP Programme.

2.0 IMPROVING OUR SERVICE AND MANAGING PERFORMANCE - 2021/22

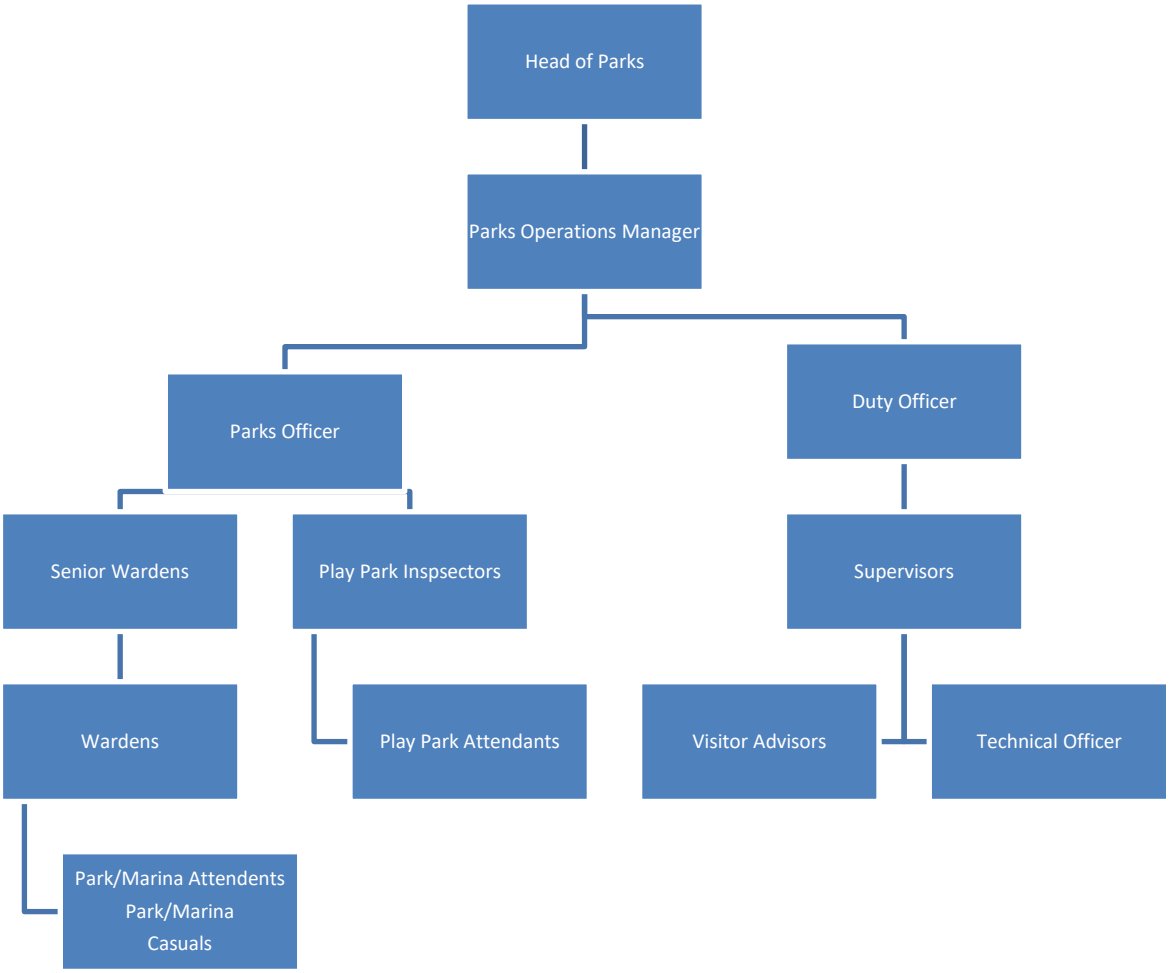
The following tables confirm the resources, financial and people, which the Service has access to throughout 2021-22 to deliver its actions, activities and core business.

2.1 Budget 2021/22*

Service Budget Headings	£
Salaries and Wages	915,868.00
Parks Service Operational Budget	237,228.00
Gross Budget	1,152,914.00
Income	(168,795.00)
Net Budget for 2021-22	984,119.00

**** Final 2021/22 budget not yet circulated – above figures represent 2020/2021 pre-Covid budget and this is anticipated to be reflective in the 2021/22 year as a result of recent rates process. Budget is subject to review and in year service savings that may be required to reflect the financial pressures identified.***

2.2 Staffing Complement - 2021/22



Staffing	No. of Staff
Head of Service	1
Managers	1
Officers	2
Receptionists 2PT/2Casual	4
Senior Wardens	2
Supervisor	2
Play Park Inspectors	3
Technical Officer	1
Park Wardens	2
Visitor Advisor	4
Park/Marina Attendants	11
Play Park Attendants	14
Park Attendants (Casual)	7
Total	**54**

2.3 Service Work Plan - 2021/22

This plan confirms the core activities and actions, which will form your Service Work Plan for 2021-22. This is a high-level capture of the Service activities as well as some improvement undertakings which the Parks Service will focus on throughout 2021-22, mindful of the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Plan links to the Council's new 2020-2024 Corporate Plan priorities, Annual Corporate Improvement Plan Objectives, Corporate Indicators and Mid Ulster Sustainable Community Plan themes & outcomes:

SERVICE WORK PLAN 2021/22

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	**e.g. Write service objective here**			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	**Align to Corporate Plan Theme**			
CMP 4.1 Health & Wellbeing - We are better enabled to live longer healthier & more active lives	*Communities: 5.2 We will continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests & green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking cycling trails & water recreation.*			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Delivery of year one objectives of Council's 5 Year Parks and Play Strategic Plans	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Creation of new and inclusive play opportunities for children across the council district. Improvement to parks and open spaces environments Improved Quality Standards for Council managed Parks and Open Spaces	Upgrade existing play locations Enhancement programme on existing play locations Capital Parks development programme at three identified public park locations

What **Service Development/Improvement** will we undertake in **2021/22 (actions):**	**By When (Date)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Parks and Play Improvements Programme	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Complete upgrades and refurbishment of children's play parks as part of an annual MUDC rolling works programme Increasing inclusive play equipment provision across MUDC	Upgrade 4 existing play locations Enhance 7 low scoring children's play parks Tender/procurement of schemes within budget allocation Installation of items of new inclusive play equipment to achieve an increase of 5%
Davagh Forest Dark Skies Project	Completed by October 2022	P Bailie A Reid K Gordon	Creation of a Visitor Centre and Dark Sky Observatory including a range of interpretation linking the heritage of the area with the night sky. Development of the visitor hub/trail head area i.e. ancillary facilities/services and car parking.	Contribute to long-term economic growth through the development of the economy of the Council area, offering a distinct and complementary sustainable outdoor recreation product to that already being offered within the Council area. EA Targets Income £30,000 Visitor Footfall 30,000
Reservoirs Management	Completed by October 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Conformity to The Reservoir Act (NI) 2015 Water Regulations	Appointment of Panel Engineers and review of Dungannon Park Lake and Ballysaggart Lough Section 10 Survey reports Introduce monitoring system, staff training and emergency plan for MUDC Reservoirs Submission of action plan reports to DfI Rivers

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	e.g. write service objective here			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	**Align to Corporate Plan Theme**			
CMP 2.2 Infrastructure - We increasingly value our environment & enhance it for our children	*Communities: 5.2 We will continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests & green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking cycling trails & water recreation.*			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Delivery of year one objectives of Council's 5 Year Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Creation of new and improved access to the Countryside opportunities for multi discipline users groups across the council district. Improvements to visitor facilities in council managed Forest Parks Improved access to water recreation for paddle craft, angling and sailing activities	Undertake Master Planning and Feasibility Studies for selected Regional and Local Forest Recreation projects Establish three additional Forest partnership Agreements with FSNI Capital development programme for two Forest Recreation projects Moydamlaght and Iniscran Forests

What **Service Development/Improvement** will we undertake in **2021/22 (actions):**	**By When (Date)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Establish an extension of Licence Agreements with Forest Service NI	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Projects in partnership with local community groups with a proposal of three new agreements at Altmore, Dunmolye and Drumcairne Forests	Significant increase for public access to quality outdoor recreation opportunities and the countryside (%)
Undertake Master Planning and feasibility studies for selected MUDC Regional and Local Multi-Activity Hubs	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Significant increase for public access to quality play, outdoor recreation opportunities and the access to the countryside	Completion of Master Plan for Traad Point and one selected Regional Forest Hub project.
Access to the Countryside development via long distance trails	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Creation of a Blueway Trail on the Lower Bann from Portglenone to Newferry in partnership with Waterways Ireland (WI), Forest Service (NI) and community stakeholders	Creation of seven kilometres of off-road public path. Provision and refurbishment of 180 angling stands. **Projects to progress on the basis of Council approval and subject to landowner agreements and sourcing available funding**
Progress Active Travel Projects and Greenway/Blueway proposals for long distance walking/cycling routes	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid	Contribution to making our communities more liveable improving the economy through tourism and civic improvement preservation and restoration of open space and provision of opportunity for physical activities to improve fitness and mental wellbeing across our communities	Investigate landowner issues, concept design and cost options appraisal for potential projects **Projects to progress on the basis of Council approval and subject to sourcing available funding**

Service Objective (What do we want to achieve?):	e.g. write service objective here			
Link to Community Plan Theme:	**Align to Corporate Plan Theme**			
CMP 4.1 Health & Wellbeing - We are better enabled to live longer healthier & more active lives	*Communities: 5.2 We will continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests & green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking cycling trails & water recreation.*			
What are the key 'Business as Usual' activities we will deliver (actions):	**By When (Date?)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Audit of planned outdoor recreation events and programmes	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid K Gordon AMcGuckin	Inclusion of Davagh OM Dark Skies Park in to visitor and event programming Develop and deliver health and wellbeing programmes at specific locations Review facility activity programme and promotions at specific locations Implement an online customer survey for users of parks and outdoor recreation facilities Maintain 'Green Flag' status Standard across Parks	Monitor data of facility visitor numbers/ footfall fluctuated during lock-down but recorded a marginal increase of 1.9% on 2019/20. Increase parks footfall by 5% to 811,727 Develop role of Parks in the health agenda through enhanced partnership with the Health Trusts No events delivered in 2020/21 due to Covid-19. A significantly revised (reduced) summer programme will deliver 12 events Visitor satisfaction percentage (%) Mystery visit indicator feedback (%) Increase by 3% to 85% Retain 4 'Green Flag' status at designated Park Locations

What **Service Development/Improvement** will we undertake in **2021/22 (actions):**	**By When (Date)**	**Lead Officers(s)**	**What difference will it make? (Outcomes/outputs)**	**How Will we Know? (Measures)**
Deliver event and activity programmes at the core MUDC venues Support event and activity programmes in Forest & Countryside venues managed by Mid Ulster District Council	Completed by March 2022	P Bailie A Reid K Gordon AMcGuckin	Programme of varied events and activities across Parks Service / MUDC venues throughout the spring/summer/autumn period seeking to engage a broad spectrum of participant and spectator audience	Facilitate 80 Council/Public Events as part of Parks Service calendar (reduced from 190) Establish Parks identity and increased Parks Service profile through seasonal specific event campaigns

Performance Measures: *Should include any measures as outlined in work above and relevant measures from Community, Corporate, Performance Improvement Plan, Statutory, Corporate Health Indicators etc.*	Is the Measure, Statutory, Corporate, Existing, or New?	2018/19	2019/20	2019/20	2022/22 Target/Standard
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes **Visitor footfall across MUDC Parks and Outdoor Recreation facilities**	**Existing Measure**	**576,660**	**766,019**	**773,074**	**811,727**
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes **Annual Mystery Visitor Survey**	**Existing Measure**	**77%**	**82%**	**No data due to Covid-19**	**85%**
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes **Internal Programmes and Events**	**Existing Measure**	**26**	**83**	**No data due to Covid-19**	**12**
CIP4/A002 (b) Audit of Planned Outdoor Recreation Events and Programmes **Green Flag/Blue Flag Standard Accredited Awards**	**Existing Measure**	**3**	**4**	**4**	**4**

3.0 OUR STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

In carrying out our responsibilities, the Service is cognisant of the statutory duties placed upon the council in the delivery of its services. Whilst the Service operates, under various obligations it is however mindful of the changing context in which it operates and endeavours to mainstream the equality and rural needs duties in the design and delivery of our functions.

3.1 EQUALITY DUTY

The council and by consequence our Service is committed to contributing towards its part in working towards fulfilling obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure adequate time, staff and resources to fulfil our duties.

The Service will also work towards adherence to the council's Equality Scheme ensuring equality duties, together with promoting positive attitudes towards persons with a disability and the participation of people with a disability in public life when carrying out our functions.

3.2 RURAL NEEDS DUTY

The Service will be mindful of the rural needs of its customers when carrying out its functions and subsequent responsibilities, particularly in developing any new policies, plans or strategies throughout the year. In line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 we will give due regard to rurality in terms of needs in carrying out the activities within our Service.

3.3 RISK MANAGEMENT OF SERVICE

The purpose of risk management is to manage the barriers which prevents the Council from achieving its objectives. This section of the service plan includes space for the Service to input their key risks (in summary form), which have been identified during the business planning process. The Council uses risk management to maximize opportunities and minimize risks. This improves its ability to deliver priorities and improve outcomes. This is why the Council deems it important to link business planning and risk management. Risk Management aims to:

- Help the Council achieve its overall aims and objectives
- Manage the significant risks the Council faces to an acceptable level
- Assist with the decision making process
- Implement the most effective measures to avoid, reduce and control those risks
- Balance risk with opportunity
- Manage risk and internal controls in the most effective way.

This table illustrates the risks identified to deliver the Services business in 2021-22.

Risk Ref Number	Description of Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation Activity
1.	A lack of, or untimely, maintenance of Parks and Open spaces with the possibility of creating an unsafe environment for public users with potential for injury claims.	6 (3x2)	Currently managed through Property Services. This function of the Council has an extensive remit, responsible for the maintenance of all council lands and property.
2.	Accident occurs on play area	8 (4x2)	Majority of playgrounds are inspected weekly by council staff. Independent annual inspections by ROSPA or RPII Inspectorate. Significant number playgrounds have been replaced or upgraded in recent years and evidence of current good and safe practices reflect in low claim levels. Comprehensive Audit has been completed Play Strategy being developed by Parks Service. Council approval pending
3.	Parks budget under pressure – includes impact of COVID on income	6 (3x2)	Monthly Budget Management Reports. Networking with potential partner organisations to advise on funding environment. Selection based on greatest need or H&S assessment and annual resource availability. Continue to manage and monitor monthly reports throughout financial year.
4.	Play area equipment etc. is inadequate/outdated	6 (3x2)	A designated officer is responsible for ensuring and monitoring the use and condition of safety materials, particularly around play equipment. Parks service has developed a detailed strategy to ensure that adequate leisure facilities are provided. Programmed internal and external inspections of parks and open spaces are carried out to ensure that standards of maintenance are maintained and the facilities available are up to the required standards. There are documented consultation procedures to ensure that public expectations are identified. There is a planned maintenance programme that is documented and

			communicated to maintenance staff. There is compliance with industry health and safety standards to ensure the latest materials are used/introduced on a timely basis.
5.	Fraud, theft or bribery occurring within Parks service.	6 (2x3)	All Ballyronan financial transactions managed by Council staff. Approx 70% of bookings - Marina and Caravan Park dealt with as online bookings by World Pay. Cash & Cheque Handling @ Dungannon Park • Segregation of duties takes place. • Financial procedures followed • Checks and audits take place at random intervals IT solution that centralises bookings introduced. Review of Service Level agreement at Ballyronan Marina allowed the transfer of all cashier duties from community group to council staff.
6.	Water Safety general. Risk to general public/visitors and council employees in relation to water recreation facilities owned and managed by MUDC	8 (4x2)	MUDC Water Safety Policy in place. Water Safety Equipment deployed on designed sites. Programmed Site Inspections. Audited Inspection software records. Damaged or Missing safety Equipment replaced Immediately from stock.

Rating	Descriptor
16 - 25	**Extreme Risk (immediate action required)**
10 - 15	**High Risk (urgent action required)**
7 - 9	**Moderate Risk (action required)**
1 – 6	**Low Risk (keep under review)**

Report on	Mid South West (MSW) Region Growth Deal Update
Date of Meeting	13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Chief Executive
Contact Officer	Head of Economic Development

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	To note progress on the ongoing work in relation to the Mid South West (MSW) Region Growth Deal.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The most recent MSW Region Growth Deal Update was presented to the Development Committee for information on 15 October 2020.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	<u>Rotation of Governance Steering Group Chair & Vice Chair</u> In accordance with the agreed governance arrangements for the Governance Steering Group, the positions of Chair and Vice Chair rotate on a six monthly basis. At the February 2021 meeting, the outgoing Vice Chair, Councillor Thomas O'Hanlon (who replaced former Councillor Joe Nelson) became the incoming Chair for the period to September 2021 taking over the role from Councillor Irvine. The new Vice Chair for the period to September 2021 is Councillor Paul McLean.
3.2	<u>MSW Region Growth Deal and NI Executive Complementary Fund Interventions: Development of Proposition Papers</u> Following the completion of an exercise to identify and prioritise interventions under the four intervention areas detailed in the RES, the Governance Steering Group has overseen the development of proposition papers for interventions that will be pursued through the MSW Region Growth Deal and the Northern Ireland (NI) Executive Complementary Fund. MSW was encouraged to develop proposition papers and to share these with relevant NI and UK Governments Departments for feedback in advance of commencing the formal business planning and justification process. Throughout this process, the MSW Programme Team has been working to build relationships with key personnel in the Government Departments including the

	Department of Finance (DoF), Department for the Economy (DfE), Department for Infrastructure (DfI), Department for Communities (DfC) in Northern Ireland and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in Westminster. Proposition papers were developed for the suite of proposed interventions that will be pursued through the MSW Region Growth Deal and the NI Executive Complementary Fund and are attached on Appendices 1A and 1B for information. The papers have also been shared with Invest NI to enable them to identify appropriate points of contact within their Team who will link with the MSW Programme Team and provide support in terms of the business planning and justification process. At the time of writing feedback on the proposition papers is pending.
3.3	<u>NI Executive Complementary Fund</u> At the time of the last report presented to the Committee in October 2020, detailed information on the Complementary Fund was not available however Officers from across the three Councils continued to develop interventions that could potentially be pursued through this Fund. Guidance on the Complementary Fund, which is complementary to NI City and Growth Deals, was issued to Councils by DoF in early March 2021. By this date proposition papers for a number of interventions had already been developed. With the support of the Governance Steering Group, an exercise was undertaken to determine alignment of the proposed interventions with the criteria for the Fund following which the proposition papers were submitted to the relevant NI Government Departments. In accordance with the guidance for the Fund, the papers were submitted seeking Departmental agreement in principle to support a formal application to the Fund. At the time of writing feedback on the proposition papers is pending.
3.4	<u>Five Case Model Business Case Framework</u> The technical support and expertise required to assist the Councils to develop business cases in adherence to HM Treasury's Five Case Model requirements has been put in place. A Five Case Model Business Case Framework structured around the four intervention areas detailed in the RES has been established effective from 1 January 2021. It is worth noting that the Framework does not apply to interventions being led by external Partners or road interventions. The preparation and associated cost of business cases for these interventions is the responsibility of external Partners and DfI respectively.

3.5	Influencing the Policy Landscape Forward UK and NI policy has an increasing focus on 'levelling-up' and 'regional balance'. By responding to a number of recent public consultations including the Union Connectivity Review and the Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework (copies attached on Appendix 2), and with the intention to respond to the Infrastructure Strategy for Northern Ireland, MSW is arguing for the investment needed in the Region to achieve the policy imperatives of 'levelling-up' and 'regional balance'.
3.6	Meeting with Conor Murphy, MLA - Minister of Finance Together with the Chief Executives, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governance Steering Group met with Minister Murphy and Departmental Officials in December 2020. The meeting was a positive engagement during which the Minister acknowledged the scale and size of the MSW Region and its contribution to the NI economy. He recognised the particular physical and digital infrastructure challenges as well as the gaps in terms of the roll out of Project Stratum and the work that needed to be done to redress regional imbalances. An action arising from the meeting was the development of a paper to articulate and capture the infrastructural deficits that exist in the Region in order to help make the argument for a bespoke Growth Deal in terms of the financial profile of the investment from the UK Government.
3.7	Engagement with Business Reference Group The Governance Steering Group facilitated a positive and constructive engagement with the Business Reference Group in November 2020. As well as providing the Group with an update on progress since the launch of the Regional Economic Strategy in September 2020, it provided an opportunity to present the Forward Work Plan. The Group was keen to understand their role and involvement in the process going forward and to be kept informed of progress.
3.8	Promotion of the Mid South West Region Opportunities to promote the Mid South West Region continue and in recent months have included editorials in Ambition, Business Eye, Agenda NI and Ulster Business. Copies are attached at Appendix 3. Presentations were also made to over 100 attendees from Invest NI's International Teams (Trade Development and Foreign Direct Investment) in December 2020. The role of the Governance Steering Group including the recent rotation of the Chair and Vice Chair has been highlighted through local press and social media. Forward Work Plan

3.9	Industrial Investment Challenge Fund One of the interventions under the 'Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity' pillar aimed at tackling the productivity challenge in MSW, is the establishment of an Industrial Investment Challenge Fund – a capital investment fund to support businesses with in-house innovation and/or to enable them to introduce new equipment following the conclusion of R&D – including that stimulated through the proposed Innovation and Skills Academy to be delivered by the South West College (SWC). Following a procurement exercise, Food For Thought has been working with the Governance Steering Group and the Programme Team to develop a Programme Framework for the Fund. Feedback from industry engagement and stakeholder consultations undertaken at the outset of the commission, has been used to inform the development of the Programme Framework and to shape a Business Innovation Pathway. A further update will be presented to Committee once the work has been concluded.
3.10	Commencing SOCs The proposition papers will be used to inform the development of procurement documentation required to facilitate the running of mini-competitions against the Five Case Model Business Case Framework. At the point at which commentary and or feedback from Government Departments has been received, duly considered and where necessary responded to, mini-competitions will be held to appoint consultants to work alongside the Councils and begin the process of developing SOCs.
3.11	Managing Expectations – MSW Region Growth Deal Members are reminded that the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) is a medium to long-term strategy and the importance of managing expectations cannot be underestimated particularly with regards to the focus of the next two to three years in terms of the development of business cases to support the securing of a Heads of Terms (HoT) Agreement for the Growth Deal. Based on the learning from colleagues in the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) and the Derry City and Strabane City Deal, it is anticipated that the development of SOCs could take between 18 and 24 months.
3.12	Development of a Paper Articulating the Infrastructure & Connectivity Deficits in MSW Following the meeting with the Minister of Finance, a paper has been developed articulating the infrastructure deficits and priorities for the Region in order to help make the argument for a bespoke Growth Deal in terms of the financial profile of the investment from the UK Government. The paper also responds directly to the policy imperatives of 'levelling-up' and 'regional balance' and sets out five key 'asks' of Government: ASK No 1: Flexibility in the Financial Construct of the MSW Growth Deal

	Funding; ASK No 2: Action to Redress Infrastructural and Connectivity Deficits in MSW in the Forward Programme for Investment in Public Infrastructure; ASK No 3: Broadband Infrastructure Improvements / Partnership Working on Project Stratum Roll-Out in MSW; ASK No 4: Targeting of Policy Levers and Investment Approaches to Underpin Growth of World-Leading Sectors; and ASK No 5: Single Point of Contact / Lead for Regional Balance and Levelling-Up Policy Agenda A powerpoint presentation which provides an overview of the content of the paper is attached at Appendix 4. The Governance Steering Group has requested that the 'ask' in terms of broadband be strengthened as well as for the development of an engagement strategy to support the paper which is currently being developed.
3.13	<u>Governance Arrangements – Resourcing</u> The governance arrangements required to support the delivery of the RES, which includes the development phase of the Growth Deal, are currently being mapped for consideration by the Governance Steering Group and will be reported to the Committee at a future meeting.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Financial contributions from the three respective Councils have been allocated to develop the growth deal proposition. It is highly likely that additional financial resources will be required to support the delivery of the RES. The extent of the requirement will become clearer following the conclusion of the mapping exercise that is underway.
	Human: Officer Time
	Risk Management:
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: The RES was equality screened and it has been screened out. The Equality Impact Assessment was presented to the Committee previously.
	Rural Needs Implications: The Rural Needs Impact Assessment was also presented to the Committee previously.

5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	It is recommended that Members **note**: 1. Ongoing work in relation to the Mid South West Region Growth Deal. 2. The update on the NI Executive Complementary Fund and the MSW Region Growth Deal including the submission of proposition papers to NI and UK Government Departments; and plans to commence the business planning and justification process.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendices 1A & 1B – MSW Combined Proposition Papers (Growth Deal & Complementary Fund) Appendix 2 – MSW Consultation Responses Appendix 3 – MSW Editorials Appendix 4 – MSW Infrastructure & Connectivity – Key Asks & Messages

Appendix 1A

GROWTH DEAL & COMPLEMENTARY FUND

Proposition Papers

COMPLEMENTARY FUND	PAGE
Industrial Investment Challenge Fund - Part 1	**4**
High Street Challenge Fund - Part 1 (Physical Infrastructure)	**5 - 10**
Digital Channels and Enhancement of Visitor Experiences - Part 1 - Development of the O'Neill Tourism Proposition - Armagh City Reinvigoration	 **11 - 20** **21 - 24**
Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark Part 1 (Redevelopment of MA Visitors Centre, Cuilcagh Boardwalk , Smugglers Way - Marble Arch to Killykeegan)	**25 - 34**
Denny Site, Portadown	**35 - 36**
Desertcreat	**37 - 40**

ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE	PAGE
A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass	**42 - 47**
A28 Armagh East Link	**42 - 47**
A29 Cookstown Bypass	**42 - 47**
Rural Broadband	**48**
Industrial Land - Omagh	**49 - 54**
Industrial Land - Banbridge	**55 - 59**
Transformation of M12 Carn and Seagoe Industrial Zone	**60 - 64**
Armagh Goal - Site Development	**65 - 67**

BOOSTING INNOVATION & DIGITAL CAPACITY	PAGE
Engineering and Skills Innovation & Skills Academy SWC	**69**
Industrial Investment Challenge Fund – Parts 2	**70**
NI Agri-Food Robotics Centre - CAFRE	**71 - 75**
Incubation Space - Food Development (concepts requiring further development)	**76 – 78**
Agri-Tech Facility	**79**
Network of Digi-Hubs	**80 - 84**
High Street Challenge Fund - Part 2 (Digital)	**85 - 90**
Digital Channels and Enhancement of Visitors Experiences - Part 2 - Development of the O'Neill Tourism Proposition - Armagh City Reinvigoration	 **91 - 100** **101 - 104**
Cookstown Health & Care Hub	**105 - 111**

BUILDING A HIGH-PERFORMING TOURISM ECONOMY	PAGE
Sperrins Tourism Development - Sperrins Future Search - Ulster America Folk Park - Gortin Glens	 **113 - 122** **123 - 126** **127 - 133**
Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark Part 2 (Smugglers Way - Killykeegan to Cavan Burren, Development of Greenway from Belleek to Ballyshannon)	**134 -143**

SKILLS	
MSW Skills Action Plan	

COMPLEMENTARY FUND

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT CHALLENGE FUND – PART 1

Paper to be provided by AMcK end March 2021

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

TRANSFORMING OUR HIGH STREETS – Part 1 (Physical)

The purpose of this paper is to set out the case for much needed investment into Mid South West (MSW) Regional High Streets to enable a process of reinvention and transformation, reshaping our town centres by implementing ambitious, innovative and fresh interventions.

The term 'high street' is used throughout the paper to describe the principal shopping area of our regional town centres.

BACKGROUND – THE CHALLENGES FOR MSW HIGH STREETS

The role and presence of our high streets has shifted dramatically in recent decades as a result of the inexorable rise of online shopping, change in global trends and national issues like austerity. The need to live more sustainably combined with addressing changing customer behaviours has resulted in high streets needing to be reinvented, repurposed and attract a mix of uses beyond the buying and selling of goods. Furthermore, the physical configuration of our high streets has shifted since the 1980's giving way to a more mixed picture to where people shop, with an increasing bias towards prime out-of-town locations and retail parks. Whilst it is acknowledged that this shift has brought many benefits to consumers and overall retail performance, we recognise the significant impact on our declining town centres creating longer term sustainability challenges.

MSW region high streets are facing significant challenges as a consequence of lack of competitiveness due to higher operating costs than online competitors (eg property costs), underperformance, evolving economies, developing capability and changing technologies, advancements in artificial intelligence and automation, and the impact of coronavirus. These challenges have been further amplified with the implementation of mitigation measures to ensure customer safety, more precautionary consumer actions and subdued confidence levels leading to further decline in footfall and customer spending.

During lockdown multiple aspects of our shopping habits changed, resulting in people rediscovering their local areas and rethinking what they want from villages, towns and high streets, not just in relation to consumables. The reality of this 'new normal' has brought customer expectations into sharp focus with the demands for a different high street experience, one which embraces culture, community and everyday economies, digitally smart technologies and infrastructures, provides access to services, gateways to recreational and greenspaces, promotes active travel and considers accessibility for all users.

MSW high streets are facing the following common challenges and trends (in no particular order):-

- Dramatic impact of Covid-19 and social distancing/capacity requirements as a direct consequence of the pandemic and adjusting to the “new normal”;
- Building consumer confidence to visit high streets;
- Accelerated trend towards online shopping
- Changing shopping habits/patterns e.g. more people shopping during the week and/or on an ‘as needed’ basis;
- Declining footfall and spend across high streets;
- Rising vacancy and dereliction levels;
- Contracting retail sector/retail declining as a dominant occupier in town centres;
- Decline in traditional outdoor markets;
- Protecting the current business base;
- Falling market demand/low level of investor confidence;
- Rising costs of doing business and the need for rates reform;
- Changing work patterns, with more people working flexibly and remotely;
- Rising unemployment affecting disposable income;
- Constrained areas for transport modes, pedestrian, cycle and vehicular;
- Increasing traffic congestion, air pollution and climate emergency (green agenda);
- Achieving sustainability and inclusive economic growth;
- Need for functional shared spaces for the community to reconnect with each other e.g. pop-up parks;
- Uncertainty of Brexit impacts;
- Changing demographics including a growing elderly population.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MSW HIGH STREETS

Notwithstanding the coronavirus crisis an opportunity exists for MSW to reimagine, regenerate and transform its high streets for the future, and indeed shape the ‘new normal’. It is an opportunity to recognise uniqueness and how local assets can be best developed and used to create safer, more attractive, accessible and vibrant places. MSW high streets must adapt and diversify into ‘multi-functional places’, which no longer rely on retail but offer wide ranging uses which contribute to the economic performance of the area as a whole.

MSW high street interventions must ultimately create the conditions that will attract greater numbers of people to live, visit, shop, work, walk and play, which collectively will increase spending in the region. As retail, society, technology and consumer behaviours continue to change, this transformation is essential not only to survive but to thrive. Interventions must therefore be significant in scale, scope and ambition in order to derive maximum benefit.

Multifunctional high streets will concentrate retail uses in primary cores with a wider range of commercial, cultural, community and residential uses encouraged to locate and revitalise secondary and tertiary areas. Success can be measured in

harmonising a broad mix of uses such as enterprise, residential, civic and cultural buildings, green spaces, offices etc.

The following opportunities have been identified to support the transformation of MSW high streets:-

- **Reimagining the physical and digital infrastructure** of Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown, Enniskillen, Omagh, Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt;
- **Reviewing land uses** with a view to delivering viable multi-functional centres e.g. community, retail, office, hospitality, entertainment, housing, leisure etc;
- **Delivering smart technology** solutions and provide for inclusive digital connectivity – consideration of the revolutionary impact of digital technologies to create smart towns/city;
- **Wider place shaping** and urban regeneration through which high street rejuvenation will be embedded;
- **Identity** branding our high streets and town centres to show how the destination is unique and differentiates (and the experience they offer) from competitors'. The heritage and natural assets of our urban centres are often lost or hidden away due to a focus on historic uses that no longer occur or are considered irrelevant to the day-to-day functioning of the centre;
- **Quality of public realm** – transforming our high streets to be more accessible, for instance: rethinking parking provision, making wayfinding easier, provision of sustainable transport solutions etc.

An opportunity exists for MSW to introduce high street initiatives and interventions that will meet the needs of communities and customers now and into the future by investing in the right offering, facilities and experiences which will ultimately drive economies and footfall. MSW councils do not underestimate the challenges ahead and recognise that a place shaping approach, one which requires collaboration, collective action and decision making in the planning and delivery of targeted interventions is needed. Focus will be placed on shifting mind-sets from the traditional high street offering to more vibrant centres capitalising on natural assets and everyday economies, opportunities for increased social interaction and dwell time, access to services and maximising benefit for a broad mix of users.

A VISION FOR MID SOUTH WEST HIGH STREETS / TOWN CENTRES – POWER TO CHANGE

High streets are at the heart of our communities and are in a good position to reinvent and transform themselves. It is important to be bold in setting a vision which focuses on our high streets becoming more attractive, vibrant, diverse, inclusive, healthy and safe places to invest, work, live, meet, shop and visit.

MSW will create modern, vibrant and economically thriving urban centres taking advantage of the existing natural assets, heritage, cultures, neighbourhoods, and requirements of our residents and visitors to drive prosperity.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

MSW will deliver both a targeted and trial programme of interventions that will transform the economic, environmental, physical and digital infrastructure of our urban centres. Interventions will be test beds for new opportunities and will facilitate the delivery of creatively designed residential, leisure, retail, enterprise and infrastructure to connect people, places and spaces.

MSW aims to deliver targeted initiatives that will be:

- **Transformative** addressing under investment in our high street destinations to deliver exemplar places that will showcase and provide for current, emerging, and future priorities.
- **Vibrant** building an ecosystem of trade for the future with returning day and evening activity and footfall to key areas.
- **Unique** focusing on the natural, historic and cultural assets within our high streets/town centres to create a complementary smart and high tech identity.
- **Liveable** delivering residential living within our urban centres which will provide a range of social, cultural and economic opportunities.
- **Diverse** reflecting how people wish to live, work, enjoy their free time and support their local economy through a wider range of viable uses which are complementary to a more concentrated retail core.

The overall thrust and vision for our high streets will be based on the principles of determining change, promoting inclusive economies, design for mixed uses, managing assets innovatively, trialling new approaches and digitally transforming. Focus will be placed on experimental, strategic and pivotal initiatives which address transformation, underinvestment and underperformance through the targeting of key properties, historic and culture assets, long term vacancy and opportunity sites. This will involve investing in a combination of strategic capital and marketing projects.

The 'Transforming our High Street' intervention would incorporate the following **two** component parts-

1. **Creating Spaces and Places for the Future**

   A capital financial support package to enable physical transformation through the acquisition, demolition, reconfiguration, rebuilding, revitalisation and/or redevelopment of properties/assets/sites/public spaces in order to unlock their economic potential. Unlocking their economic potential will act as a catalyst for high street revival, showcase new opportunities and an intense mix of uses, provide connectivity and infrastructure that will undergird transformation and

redevelopment, and improve the visual amenity, identity and connectivity of an area. This component part will also provide challenge funds to incentivise property owners to invest in the reuse and repurposing of their derelict/empty premises to create modern, lettable and digitally connected commercial and/or residential spaces. A wrap-around service to assist property owners to test innovative approaches and management when securing tenants for disused/underutilised commercial premises will be introduced.

2. Connected for the Future

This component part will deliver major digital and eco-friendly initiatives to reinvigorate MSW high streets. Focus will be placed on the development and implementation of adaptive, connected technologies and sustainable interventions to create 'smart towns' and provide a 'digital springboard' for businesses to maximise the benefits of the digital economy. Interventions will include provision of high speed connectivity including 5G technology integration, smart and enabling technologies, big data capability, green transport systems and building innovative construction solutions to deliver high tech infrastructural improvements/advancements. Carbon emission reduction, adoption of green building practices and green growth will also be key in delivery of interventions. In addition, interventions will look to showcase and promote the latest available technologies and digital applications/tools that will help grow the region's urban centres as unique, modern, connected, healthy and sustainable places to live and work.

Both component parts will support the viability and vitality of our rapidly evolving high streets by unlocking economic potential and leveraging private sector investment.

CONCLUSION

MSW Region high streets have reached a turning point. Lessons learned in recent years show that greater innovation, collaboration, collective action and decision making, and significant financial investment are all necessary to support a process of transformation in order to meet the evolving needs of consumers, businesses, investors and communities.

MSW councils recognise that reinvention and transformation of the Region's high streets will require substantial commitment and investment from the Northern Ireland Executive, UK Government and other funding sources. Such investment will enable our high streets to be convenient, connected, enterprising, offer certainty of product availability, provide experiences that cannot be replicated online, and an intense mix of uses to become places of choice for communities to live, visit, shop, work, walk and play.

The interventions to be delivered in achieving the ambitions for our High Streets are significant, but appropriate in light of the challenges faced. It is anticipated that the NI

Executive will invest in Part 1 ‘Creating Spaces and Places for the Future’; and the UK Government in Part 2 ‘Connected for the Future’. Although we are seeking investment for the component parts from the two separate sources, we anticipate that both parts will be delivered in parallel.

DEVELOPMENT OF 'THE O'NEILL' TOURISM PROPOSITION

The Mid South West (MSW) Region encompasses two of the most important historic sites in Ireland; Hill of the O Neill and Tullaghoge Fort. Both attractions are of major historical and cultural significance within Irish history and have an exceptional ability to drive footfall to Co Tyrone and the wider Northern Ireland region. This paper will document the much needed interventions that are required to elevate Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort in providing a significant proposition and competitive advantage to position MSW region within the 'all island' visitor economy. These ambitious interventions will take a three pronged approach with focus on the creation of exceptionally high quality product development, the implementation of state of the art digital solutions and the enhancement of the tourism infrastructure. The innovative, ground breaking interventions proposed will uplift these visitor attractions and in addition the town of Dungannon onto the world stage, competing with internationally renowned immersive visitor experiences.

Above map shows the location of Hill of The O'Neill, Dungannon and Tullaghoge Fort near Cookstown

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the late 16th Century, Dungannon was the powerbase of Gaelic Ireland and the centre of world affairs as Hugh O Neill, Earl of Tyrone challenged English rule in Ireland. The Nine Year's War, often referred to as Tyrone's rebellion, was the climax of English attempts to conquer Ireland dating back to the Norman invasion in the 12th century. With Spanish military assistance, the powerful military alliance led by Hugh

O'Neill of Tír Eoghain and Red Hugh O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, threatened to defeat the English at the Battle of Kinsale on December 24, 1601.

The Gaelic chieftains were defeated at the Battle of Kinsale and Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell were eventually forced to leave Ireland, in what is now known as the "Flight of the Earls," in 1607. The two Irish chieftains accompanied by over ninety of their followers, set sail from Donegal, bound for Spain. This period in Irish History effectively ended the Gaelic order in Ireland and paved the way for the "Plantation of Ulster".

The Flight of The Earls in 1607 is unquestionably one of the most pivotal events in Irish history, during which the Earls of Ulster fled from Ireland to Europe to avoid being captured and imprisoned by the English. This signified the end of an era in Irish history, of Ireland being ruled by Gaelic chieftains. While the English had been present in parts of Ireland since the 11th century, it was only after the *Flight of The Earls* that the English took control of the entire country. In the period that followed, major changes occurred as the English seized the opportunity to complete their plans for the Plantation of Ulster. The events that happened during this historical period helps to explain the complexion of the Northern Ireland in which we live today.

Tullaghoge Fort and Hill of The O'Neill fall within the Mid Ulster District Council area. Tullaghoge Fort, Cookstown was the historical O'Neill seat of power and inauguration site from the 11th century. While the O'Neill's later moved to the strategic hilltop in Dungannon in the late 13th century, Tullaghoge Fort remained as the site where generations of future O'Neill's would be inaugurated as the Chieftain of Tír Eoghain, high king of Ulster. Both locations are impressive with commanding views over the vast swathes of lands controlled by The O'Neill's for nearly 400 years, reflecting their dominance over a significant period in Ireland's history.

The story of the Gaelic chieftains notably spans across the MSW region and indeed throughout Ireland. The collective history within the region provides us with significant competitive advantage over other areas. Capitalising on this historical narrative will not only benefit the Mid Ulster region but also has potential for the entire MSW area and will act as a catalyst for partnership projects encouraging working as a collective to elevate the tourism offering within the region.

English cartographer, Richard Bartlett's historic depiction (circa 1602) of Hill of the O Neill Dungannon (centre) and Tullaghoge Fort, the crowning site of The O'Neill's (bottom) depicting the Leac na Rí (seat of kings).

Historically referred to as "Bartlett's map" this image clearly demonstrates the significant connection between both Tullaghoge Fort and Hill of the O Neill in this period of Irish History, a connection that has continued to the modern day.

BACKGROUND

These two cultural heritage locations have major significance within the context of Irish, British and European history and should be matched with investment that positions them amongst the leading Cultural Heritage attractions within Ireland that appeal to national and international visitors.

Currently both locations and, by association Dungannon town, struggle to compete within the tourism market due to a number of interdependent factors. Firstly, an over reliance on traditional methods of interpreting this intriguing and central story in our shared history. There is an increasing requirement for strong experiential tourism. Investment is required to fully realise the economic, cultural and social potential that exists to transform and re-imagine the heritage offering and to capitalise on the story of the O Neill's and the history of Ireland's Gaelic chieftains.

Tourists/visitors to cultural heritage sites now demand "info-cultural-tainment" experiences combining leisure, entertainment, culture, education and sociability. As a result, Cultural Heritage and tourist attractions are using modern technologies, such as Augmented Reality (AR), to enhance visitor attractions with, and perceptions of their real-world environment. AR is widely regarded as one of the most promising and cutting edge technologies of modern times and its development and implementation in a cultural heritage setting provides opportunities for increasing competitiveness; to create new value at cultural heritage sites where visitors can

explore the unfamiliar surroundings in an enjoyable and unique way; contributing significantly to an enhanced and enriched cultural heritage experience; and providing greater scope to reach wider audiences than ever before.

Secondly, Dungannon town centre, despite its rich heritage and central position in Irish history, faces significant challenges. Like many high streets and town centres across the UK, it too is encountering a steep decline in footfall. Given its historic town status, Dungannon is largely dependent upon the travel tourist to attract footfall into the town centre.

Lack of accommodation and hotel provision presents challenges in attracting visitors, with the majority of beds available centered in Belfast. Dungannon, despite its central location, has no hotel provision. Notwithstanding the historic challenges of no overnight stay provision, now there is an opportunity to replicate the successes of projects undertaken elsewhere in NI in the acquisition, restoration and redevelopment of key historical assets as boutique style accommodation and other complimentary facilities. Unlocking this economic potential will act as a catalyst for leveraging private sector investment into Dungannon town centre together with enhancing the visual aesthetics of the heritage townscape.

CHALLENGES

The emergence of new adaptive and interactive technologies has transformed the Tourism sector. These technologies have revolutionised travel behaviours, such as decision making and information searching, radically transforming traditional business channels and value networks. To be competitive and financially viable within the rapidly developing Cultural Tourism sector it is necessary to pursue new ways of providing enhanced, enriched and unique visitor experiences, while also offering value added services at Hill of The O'Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and the development of Dungannon as a historic visitor destination.

The MSW region faces the challenge of attracting visitors inland. Visitors continue to be drawn to the world renowned Causeway coastal route. In 2019 Tourism Northern Ireland launched the 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' brand. A significant objective of this initiative, was to ensure greater dispersal of the tourism offering across Northern Ireland. The growth of the industry increased more rapidly than anticipated with NI "welcoming 5.3 million visitors in 2019 who spent an unprecedented £1 billion".

In addition, there has also been a greater demand from tour operators for new experiences and attractions in Northern Ireland. Mid Ulster and the wider MSW region is rich in archaeological, heritage and cultural tourism. Through closer collaborative working investment in the growth and development of these prestigious historical assets, and the implementation of immersive digital technologies will create a world class visitor destination. This transformation will deliver a competitive heritage offering and become a critical economic driver in rejuvenating Hill of The O'Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and Dungannon town.

OPPORTUNITIES

A key strand within the Mid Ulster District Council Tourism Strategy is archaeological sites, history and heritage. The strategy highlights that "*Mid Ulster is the only place to appreciate the history and importance of the O'Neill's and the Flight of the Earls, while also being at the centre of the C17th plantation movement*". The strategy recognises the uniqueness of the district to exploit the history of the O'Neill's, the Flight of the Earls, and the development of the plantations offering a significant and compelling tourism proposition, exploitation of which will give not only Mid Ulster but the entire MSW region significant competitive advantage.

In 2016 there were 7.3 million visits to heritage attractions in Northern Ireland, including historic properties, museums and art galleries, visitor and heritage centres, workplaces and places of worship (Source: NISRA). When we invest in heritage we support business growth, increase tourism, attract new business and create jobs. UK studies show that the historic environment offers a high return on investment. Each £1 invested generates up to £1.60 of additional economic activity over a ten-year period.

Since 2017, both Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort have witnessed limited growth in visitor numbers (see below). Significant investment in the heritage sites proposed, through the use of immersive and innovative digital technologies, has the ability to radically transform the potential of the unique heritage offering within the region, increase visitor numbers and spend, and establish the region as a national and international heritage and cultural tourism destination.

Visitor numbers to Tullaghoge Fort

2017 (Jan-Dec)	12,000
2018 (Jan –Dec)	11,213
2019 (Jan –Dec)	10,778
2020 (Jan-Dec)	13,989

Paying Visitor Numbers to Hill of The O Neill

2016/17 (April-March)	49,546
2017/18 (April-March)	84,645
2018/19 (April-March)	55,861
2019/20 (April-March)	52,954

The proposed interventions at the sites will contribute significantly to both profit generation and economic growth for the MSW region heritage tourism sector. Studies have shown that if "visitors have a better experience using AR, they are likely to stay longer which would increase their likelihood of spending more money in the region. In turn, this would create a better reputation, broadening the target market, while attracting more visitors, increasing ticket sales and use of local infrastructure, as well as creating more tourism spend to invest back into the area".

Key Economic Benefits of Heritage Tourism

- Heritage tourism is a vital part of the UK economy. In 2015, domestic and international tourists made 192 million trips to visit the UK's cultural, historic and natural assets. They spent £17.5 billion while doing so.

- The heritage tourism sector itself generated an £8.8 billion gross value added contribution to UK GDP and 191,000 jobs.
- In Northern Ireland heritage tourism supported gross value added contributions to GDP of up to £1 billion.
- In terms of share, natural and non-natural heritage attractions made similar contributions to the UK economy, although average spend is slightly higher for non-natural attractions.
- Heritage tourism is high-value. Relative to all tourists on holiday and visiting friends and relatives, those visiting heritage attractions are more likely to be overseas visitors, who spend on average £560 per trip, or domestic overnight visitors, who spend on average £210 per trip, rather than domestic day visitors who spend circa £35 per trip.
- The heritage tourism sector also supports jobs throughout its supply chain by purchasing inputs of goods and services.
- Wage payments made by the heritage tourism sector and its suppliers support additional economic activity and jobs.

THE VISION

Our vision is to create a strong unique heritage proposition within the sector that will elevate the historic townscape of Dungannon and two of the most strategically important sites in Ireland; Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort, into an unrivalled world class tourism attraction and destination. This will be achieved through:

- introduction of interactive sculptural pieces;
- location specific innovative and interactive lighting solutions to connect the visitor to Hill of The O'Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and the town of Dungannon;
- enhanced product development to include for example innovative technologically driven public events and performances;
- creation of a strong infrastructure, and technologically advanced and connected day and evening visitor experiences;
- providing visitors with the full panoptic experiences across the vast swathes of surrounding lands;
- provision of new, improved and repurposed enabling infrastructure to realise the full potential of the historic locations including for example roads, public transport, utilities, parking, active travel and signage;
- an array of immersive and social experiences tailored to suit a broad range of groupings and ages.

Through these interdependent interventions we will extensively enhance the tourism offering within the MSW region which will appeal to the culturally curious market including visitors from: Northern Ireland, Ireland and beyond. In addition, these developments will act as substantial economic drivers of growth, increase competitiveness, market share and significantly grow GVA. It is anticipated that the interventions proposed will increase current visitor numbers and spend in the region tenfold over the first five-year period.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

1. Implementation of state of the art digital solutions

Installation and further extension of innovative and digitised exhibition offering at Hill of the O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort.

Development of AV filming with cutting edge special effects at Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort, transporting the visitor back to a time when Chieftains ruled Ireland.

Development of AR immersive technologies - Deep frame technology, including AR APP technology that signposts visitors to areas throughout the MSW region, including AR enhanced fixed binocular stations that spans across the lands ruled by the O Neill dynasty.

We seek to create state of the art attractions that combine a suite of immersive soundscapes and lightscapes to link Dungannon Town to the Hill of The O'Neill. Multi-screen projections, physical props and structures, 360 degree projections and Augmented Reality (AR) portals will enable visitors to delve into our complex history through an innovative, imaginative, inspiring, engaging and fully immersive experience. An experience that connects the heritage sites of Tullaghoge Fort, Hill of The O'Neill and the town of Dungannon to encourage the visitor to explore the townscape, the architecture and the history associated with the buildings. These interventions will take visitors through a journey; one that is unique to the region and pushes the boundaries of traditional heritage attraction experiences, immersing them in this significant period of Irish history. This proposition can equally be expanded to benefit the entire MSW region with various linkages to notable connected sites to the story of The O'Neill's and the Clans of Ulster, notably the site of the Battle of The Yellow Ford in Armagh, Enniskillen Castle and the ancient O'Neill crowning site at Dun Ruadh which lies on the border between Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

2. Product Development

Removal of telecommunications mast located at Hill of The O'Neill

During the Troubles, the site of Hill of the O Neill was used as an Army base under the control of the Ministry of Defence, at which time a telecommunications mast was erected on the historic site. Despite the fact that the site is no longer used as a military installation, the telecommunications mast has remained and continues to be used by telecomms providers and as a transmitter for local emergency services. The mast is an imposing structure that dominates both the heritage site and the wider landscape of Dungannon Town Centre and significantly

detracts from the visitor experience (as can be seen from attached image). The intervention proposed will require the mast and the metal walkways onsite to be removed, thus ensuring that the aesthetics and visitor experience of this location is greatly enhanced. A significant proposition for development will be the replacement of the mast with a site specific interactive sculptural piece and viewing platform that will connect the site to the town centre of Dungannon and provide visitors with a focal point in its own right, but also provide visitors with unrivalled views of seven counties that was once ruled by the O Neill dynasty at the height of their reign as Chieftains of Tír Eoghain and High Kings of Ulster.

Unearthing the 16th century tower house remains

The Channel 4 *Time Team* television programme visited the site in 2007, during which time a large area of the site was excavated and which uncovered the walls of O'Neill's medieval tower house, surrounded by a section of wall belonging to the military fort that was constructed by Arthur Chichester after he gained possession of the hill fort in the early 17th century. This important historical feature will be re-exposed and covered with a transparent walking surface allowing visitors to view these significant archaeological structure underfoot feet. The feature will also be enhanced through the use of AR technology to enhance the presentation of the archaeology that has remained unseen for in excess of 400 years.

Art sculptures at Tullaghoge Fort and Hill of The O'Neill

The creation of two interactive sculptural art pieces developed to reflect the historical significance of both sites. These sculptural pieces will be further enhanced through the use of augmented reality solutions and will connect the story of each site location as well as linking to the heritage town of Dungannon.

Creation of C16th Gaelic Irish Wattle and Daub dwelling

There is growing emphasis and demand to create authentic tourism experiences where the visitor can take part and feel fully immersed in history. The creation of a native Irish dwelling provides an imaginative and compelling experience, allowing us to expand our appeal and market share to include Aspiring Families (TNI). This will be augmented through the use of living history digital solutions to recreate the sight, sounds and smells of a 16th Century dwelling, contributing to a unique and memorable visitor experience. As the domestic market will be a key component for the success of the tourism sector in Northern Ireland moving forward, by extending our target market into this core segment will present additional opportunities to drive continued and sustained growth. This will also support and enhance existing education programme provision making it more attractive to schools throughout Ireland to visit The Hill of The O Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and Dungannon Town.

Creation of Educational Resource Area at Tullaghoge Fort

This resource will create the capacity to offer a year round educational programme as well as enhanced visitor experience through the use of innovative and immersive digital technologies to convey the history of the site in an engaging and fully immersive manner and connect Tullaghoge Fort to the Hill of The O'Neill and Dungannon town.

Development of heritage townscape

The cumulative interventions will stimulate and support the wider economic regeneration of Dungannon by enhancing its distinctive historic character. Through the use of new innovative technologies such as smart, sustainable lighting systems and innovative digital solutions we will connect the historic hill to the town centre to increase awareness of the rich built and cultural heritage of Dungannon. Thus depicting how the Ulster Planation impacted upon the architecture and creation of Dungannon town as we know it today.

3. <u>Enhancement of tourism infrastructure</u>

Refurbishment of the events space at Hill of The O'Neill

The Events Space is located on Hill of The O'Neill and has capacity for 1200 people. Unique in its architecture, it includes a 360 degree viewing tower, meeting room and large outdoor auditorium. It does however have seasonal restrictions, as it is primarily an outdoor venue, and many of the events delivered are largely dependent on weather conditions.

The enhancement of this space, through the creation of immersive interactive LED touch screen walls that will relay the history of the O'Neill dynasty, the Flight of the Earls and the plantation of Ulster period to the visitor, will also enable large scale indoor events to be staged. Thereby acting as a key economic driver and catalyst for the regeneration of the area, creating jobs, boosting both the daytime and night time economy and escalating the tourism infrastructure and offering to an international level.

Restoration of historic buildings connected to Dungannon Heritage (Longer Term Ambition)

As a part of our longer term ambitions we will seek to acquire and/or partner with private sector to reimagine key historic buildings located in Dungannon centre to further enhance the historic prominence of the town which could be developed to create boutique style accommodation and/or other complimentary facilities. The benefits from the restoration and repurposing of other historic buildings within Northern Ireland is demonstrated by examples such as Titanic Drawing rooms (Titanic Hotel)

and Northern Counties building (Bishops Gate Hotel). This intervention would act as a significant catalyst for the future development of the area, creating long term benefits in terms of confidence building, economic development, and stimulation of private sector investment, job creation, and regeneration of Dungannon.

CONCLUSION

The O'Neill story is at the centre of Irish and European history. It has been included in the Tourism NI brand for Northern Ireland 'Embrace A Giant Spirit' as a unique authentic, experience. The MSW region has significant competitive advantage in terms of heritage and the ability to exploit the story of The O'Neill's, the Flight of the Earls and the Plantation of Ulster. This strong proposition enhances the competitiveness of the area as it allows the visitor to understand this significant period in Irish history.

Significant investment is required to improve the infrastructure, innovate and enhance the visitor experience to compete in a highly, competitive market place. Through the development of this innovative and exciting proposition MSW will foster greater partnerships across the region and further build upon the story and the historic heritage offering at Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort through digital and immersive technologies, product development and enhanced infrastructure. Delivering on this ambitious proposition will require partnership working at all levels including Mid Ulster District Council, DFC Historic Environment Division, NI Environment Agency, Dungannon Town Centre Forum, businesses etc.

ARMAGH CITY REINVIGORATION

This intervention focuses on the need to significantly invest in MSW physical and digital infrastructure, with targeted investment in tourism hubs, to improve the region's competitiveness, increasing market share and growing GVA.

The City of Armagh is set within a picturesque landscape of drumlins, characteristic of county Armagh. Armagh is Ireland's oldest city, with evidence of human settlement dating back 6,500 years. In early history, Navan Fort, on the west of the City, was seat to the kings of Ulster. Arguably, Armagh's defining moment occurred when St. Patrick arrived in 445 AD, establishing a principal church on a hilltop.

Due to the importance of place, Armagh became an academic centre with educational institutions including the Public Library in 1771, the Armagh Observatory in 1790 and much later the Planetarium in 1968.

For these reasons, Armagh City is recognised as one of the key tourism hubs in Northern Ireland, and a Tier 1 priority in the Council's Tourism Strategy 2017-2022. With a wealth of heritage buildings, two magnificent cathedrals, museums and libraries, an observatory and planetarium and beautiful green spaces, there is much to admire about this ancient city.

Armagh has previously benefited from investment in public realm schemes and a number of heritage protection and preservation projects, including the current Townscape Heritage programme. Recent investments in the Southern Regional College and Market Place Theatre & Arts Centre provides state of the art facilities which will boost the arts, educational and evening economy sectors.

Much work remains to be done to maximise the tourism potential of Armagh City as a result of a growing tourism economy in Northern Ireland, and there is much economic benefit that can be derived. The time is right to invest in projects of scale in order to provide more coherent and welcoming tourism destinations for visitors leading to further investment by the private sector and a growth in GVA from a relatively low base.

This project centres on the reinvigoration of Armagh City through a number of interventions including investment in new digital technologies as well as enabling infrastructure. Cognisance will be taken of complementary interventions proposed for inclusion in the Mid South West Region Growth Deal including the 'Transforming our High Streets' proposal, delivery of the A28 Armagh East Link and the development of the Armagh Gaol.

BACKGROUND

The MSW Strategy clearly articulates the challenges faced by the MSW region in terms of a declining share of overnight visitors to NI; though the converse to that is tourism to NI had increased significantly between 2013 and 2018 so the market to Northern Ireland does exist. Northern Ireland has experienced significantly less growth in GVA than the Republic of Ireland. A key part of Tourism NI's strategy to overcome this is to grow tourism in the regions across Northern Ireland. Armagh has been identified by Tourism NI as a City with significant growth potential. Attracting a greater share of tourism to NI is about providing attractive, inspiring, safe, welcoming, interesting, authentic places to visit, stay and enjoy. The core of that is in Armagh – it is now about shaping and honing that offer to become a viable longer term proposition.

As per above, there has been significant investment in the attractions, hotel and wider accommodation product in other regions in Northern Ireland. Similar levels of investment intervention in MSW have not taken place or not to the same degree with private sector investment more prevalent in larger urban areas compared with the MSW region.

Armagh City is also off the key tourism route in Ireland which tends to focus on the coast, which has made attracting visitors inland more difficult.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The opportunity exists to focus investment in Armagh City through a series of direct interventions and joint working with the private sector. These interventions will act as a pump-prime and a catalyst to leverage additional investment from the private sector and other stakeholders across health, leisure, hospitality and the evening economy sectors all of which will be complemented by an animation programme to draw visitors to the city. This integrated programme of investment will demonstrate the regional significance of Armagh City as a destination for both visitors and its citizens and will be fundamental to its future vibrancy and longer term sustainability.

THE VISION

The Armagh Masterplan sets out the following vision;

"The historic City of Armagh will flourish as a lively and attractive place in which to live, work and visit. Known far and wide as the cultural and religious capital of the island, the city's cherished buildings, streets and spaces will provide the fine backdrop to a forward-thinking European destination. Excellent amenities for residents, businesses and visitors, strengthened by improved environment and connectivity will underpin the success of a creative, friendly and people orientated City Centre."

In more recent times the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Tourism Strategy articulated the following vision:

'*"to be a market leading cultural tourism destination in Ireland by 2022".*

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We are going to develop and deliver a series of interventions, including through private sector partnerships, to reinvigorate Armagh City as a destination for visitors and residents to enjoy, and as a place for businesses to invest in.

Some of the key interventions include:

- Investment in the city's vacant building stock to create quality accommodation in line with other MSW pillars and priorities;
- Undertake restoration works at the majestic Mall, a fabulous green space located right in the heart of the city;
- Improve navigation and orientation in the city through investment in welcome, signage and digital infrastructures and in the creation of interesting linkages between places of leisure, living, recreation and working;
- Implement a city wide innovate lighting scheme which will literally shine a light on the city's beautiful streetscapes, landmark buildings and spaces many of which are Listed to illuminate the city's Conservation Area and enhance the most surprising and delightful of views;
- Implement the city cycling strategy to encourage active travel by providing sustainable means of connecting neighbourhoods, moving residents and visitors across the city and beyond to the Greenways on the outskirts of the urban area;
- Implement a pedestrianisation scheme in Market Street to create a safe and welcome environment for all, opening up traditional alleyways thus enhancing visitor flows;
- Invest in key heritage buildings across the city in order to attract new health, recreation and business tenants;
- Initiatives which tell the story of the City and move people across the City, this could include a reimagined museum offering and evening economy initiatives;
- Infrastructure projects including, for example, a Coach Park for Armagh and improved car parking as well as opportunities for Park & Share provision; and
- Investment in the Navan Centre, working alongside Historic Environment Division to create an attractive complementary visitor proposition for the city.

Bringing forward the A28 Armagh East Link will alleviate traffic congestion and pollution greatly enhancing the impact of the interventions outlined above.

CONCLUSION

Armagh is Ireland's oldest City, with a unique history and heritage that has been acknowledged by Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland as a place of significance with considerable tourism potential.

However, from a tourism perspective there are infrastructure challenges and significant investment is required to fully realise the City's potential and its ability to

compete on an international stage as a tourism destination. Investment on the scale required will give the private sector confidence to invest in the City and ultimately have an enduring impact on GVA.

CUILCAGH LAKELANDS GEOPARK

This proposition is targeted at MSW RES Intervention Pillar "Building a High Performing Tourist Economy – Cross-Border Tourism Product Development" and is intended to enhance the visitor experience and the carrying capacity of Geopark sites, building on current rising levels of demand for natural resource tourism and access to outdoor recreation and the opportunities presented through Tourism NI's (TNI) *Embrace the Giant Spirit* and Failte Ireland's *Hidden Heartlands*.

Sustainable tourism is at the heart of this proposal; alongside the undoubted potential economic benefits and returns of increasing the number of visitors, their dwell time and their dispersal across the area. All component parts of this intervention have core values of environmental sustainability and adding social value through enhancing quality of life and wellbeing for residents in the Geopark and the wider area.

BACKGROUND

The **Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark (MACUGG)**; a cross-border designation that recognises the quality of the geomorphology and landscape around the Cuilcagh Mountain Park and the wider surrounding countryside comprises an area of approximately 18,000 hectares. Initially located exclusively in Fermanagh, it became the first area in the UK to be awarded European Geopark status by UNESCO in 2004. In 2008 and following a formal partnership agreement with Cavan County Council, it became the world's first cross-border Geopark. In 2020, Fermanagh and Omagh District and Cavan County Councils adopted a ten-year development plan for the Geopark. This integrated and ambitious plan embeds UNESCO's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and details initiatives and actions intended "to nurture and protect our unique heritage so that our place can restore and revitalise those that live and visit here, and can enable connections between people, heritage and nature." The current Geopark and its sites is attached as Appendix 1.

Following extensive market research and community consultation in 2020, 2021 will see MACUGG deliver against a new brand. This includes a new boundary (Appendix 2), a new name – ***Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark*** and a new proposition – ***Experiences, It's in Our Nature.***

The **Marble Arch Caves** is the gateway to exploring the wider Geopark and is a unique visitor attraction in its own right. It is a key driver and contributor to the long-term growth of tourism for the area and for Northern Ireland. As well as servicing visitors for tours of the show cave, it is the hub from which visitors can explore the immediate

surrounding landscape, including the near-by Cuilcagh Boardwalk - known as “the Stairway to Heaven”. It is also acts as visitor information centre and first port of call for visitors to sites across the Geopark.

Marble Arch Caves is located in **Marlbank** (Appendix 3), an area on the northern, lower slopes of Cuilcagh Mountain offering some of the most picturesque and evocative landscapes in the region and, as well as the Cuilcagh Boardwalk and the show-cave, offering a range of outdoor leisure and recreation opportunities including access to Crossmurrin and Killykeegan National Nature Reserves, Hanging Rock, Gortmaconnell, the stunning Claddagh Glen and “rough caving” opportunities. In recent years, Marble Arch Caves has extended its range of visitor experiences to take full advantage of this unique landscape through expanding its offer to include above ground and seasonal experiences.

In 2019, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council commissioned an Economic Appraisal study on the Marble Arch Caves Visitors Centre. It found a dated facility not fit for the increasing number of visitors and not matching the extraordinary quality of the visitor experiences available and recommended the design and build of a new visitor centre as the most economically advantageous course of action. The below ground experience in the show cave is currently being enhanced through TNI funding of £400k to upgrade elements of the lighting and to create a pilot virtual reality experience. Further investment in the cave and AR/VR can turn this into a world class visitor attraction and international draw.

The **CANN** project is a multi-partner, cross-border environment project involving Cuilcagh Mountain and the Boardwalk which aims to improve the condition of protected habitats and to support priority species, ensuring the future of this internationally important habitat and species and create best-practice in sustainable visitor management. Drawing from the knowledge and experience of international experts in sustainable uplands management, a number of recommendations have been made with respect to Cuilcagh and the boardwalk in order to negate adverse environmental impacts and improve the visitor experience. Key amongst these is the redesign of the final stretches of the Boardwalk and the viewing platform

Amongst the key infrastructural developments across the Geopark in-train that inform but are separate to this proposition are, within the Marlbank area, the further development of the Cavan Burren Park and Shannon Pot, a €6.6 million capital and experience development project. Due for completion in 2024, it is anticipated that this project will double the current 24, 000 plus visitors a year to these sites. Development in the Marlbank area is complemented and enhanced by further developments across the Geopark that will increase and diversify the outdoor recreation offer for both visitors and residents. These include the Scarplands Cycle Trail (Ireland’s longest off-road cycle trail, to be launched April 2021), and heritage driven development at **Tully Castle** (2018 – 2022) and an inter-agency masterplan to develop the untapped potential at **Castle Caldwell** (2022 – 2025). The **Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Greenway** will pass through the Marlbank area and the key settlements of Belcoo and Blacklion before going on to Enniskillen. This will

provide an added dimension to the **Beara-Breifne Way -** Ireland's longest waymarked trail that ends in Blacklion.

In 2020, the Council took on the lease for Killykeegan Nature Reserve and secured £445,000 to upgrade car parking, toilets, interpretation and the visitor amenity; works will be completed by Spring 2021. Killykeegan will provide facilities for visitors to the Cuilcagh Boardwalk and provides an additional reason to visit Marlbank and the Marble Arch Caves. The next phase of development can link Killykeegan to the MAC visitor's centre by an off-road trail and then on to the Cavan Burren Park (Blacklion) by the Smuggler's Way" trail.

Included in this proposition is the realisation of The **Lough Navar Masterplan** 2021 – 2024. Lough Navar Forest is in the scenic, mountainous uplands of West Fermanagh approximately 4 miles from the village of Derrygonnelly and 14 miles from Enniskillen town. It comprises 2,600 hectares of mature working forest with a mixture of coniferous trees, open habitat areas, rock outcrops, lakes and streams. In 2020 FODC commissioned a development plan for Lough Navar to ensure an integrated approach to further development that would allow this site to fully meet its visitor potential. Proposed within this plan are enhanced car parking, visitor amenities, rough/wild camping, enhanced walking trails, cycling and angling facilities. The Lough Navar Development Plan, whilst commissioned by FODC has been informed by a steering group made up of residents, community groups and businesses and its implementation will be managed in a similar way. This will ensure that benefits to communities and to businesses continue to be central to the thinking for this project.

The **Ballyshannon – Belleek Greenway** is, once again gaining traction; a partnership project between FODC, Donegal County Council and Waterways Ireland, this €4Million project will join to the North West Greenway and provide a sustainable transport and leisure cycling/walking opportunity linking the North of the Geopark and the settlement of Belleek to the Wild Atlantic Way. In 2019, a feasibility study estimated the cost of extending this Greenway to the key Geopark hub of Castle Caldwell at a cost of **£1million**. As well as connecting the Geopark, there is significant potential for this greenway to act as a driver for tourism in its own right; in 2019 Failte Ireland stated "Greenways are one of the biggest success stories of Irish tourism that have brought transformative benefits to local communities" The number of tourists coming to Ireland on walking and cycling holidays has grown exponentially in recent years, from 371,000 in 2012 to 1.8million in 2017. In 2019 46% of all overseas holidaymakers to Ireland engaged in walking and cycling as part of their holiday experience.

THE CHALLENGES

The key challenge facing The Geopark, Marble Arch Caves and the Marlbank area is **growing tourism <u>sustainably</u>** to **maximise the social and economic benefits** of these key tourism drivers whilst minimising and adverse environmental impacts.

Recent years have seen a high growth in visitor numbers. Between 2015 and 2019, visits to Marble Arch Caves have increased from 57,000 to 72,000 with users of the visitors' centre increasing from 111,000 to 180,000. Use of the Cuilcagh Boardwalk has increased over the same period from 2,500 per annum to 122,000. This growth in numbers has put a strain on the existing infrastructure and has not been without adverse environmental impact and impact on the local community. Cuilcagh and the wider Geopark is a unique landscape. It is vital that visitors are managed to ensure this landscape and its eco-system are not damaged and degraded. In addition to managing the visitor experience at Cuilcagh and Marlbank, expanding and extending the natural resource tourism offer across the Geopark can disperse visitors as well as bring increased visitor numbers and consequent economic benefit to other locales.

THE OPPORTUNITY

To address the challenges, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is working collaboratively with neighbouring Councils and stakeholders from the private, public and voluntary sectors on three lynchpin solutions/opportunities:

1. The Marlbank Masterplan

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has a Masterplan for the Marlbank area; a plan that can build on the current growing visitor numbers driven by the Marble Arch Caves and Cuilcagh Boardwalk whilst encouraging "dwell time" in the area bringing associated additional visitor spend and benefit to the villages of Belcoo and Blacklion whilst minimising any adverse environmental impacts. The Masterplan has key infrastructure developments; a new Visitor's Centre for Marble Arch, enhancing the visitor experience in the Show cave; connecting MAC to Killykeegan, Cuilcagh on to the Cavan Burren and enhancing the Boardwalk.

2. Green Connections To The Geopark

Alongside the Marlbank Masterplan, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and its Geopark partner, Cavan County Council, has an aspiration to raise the connectivity of the Geopark and enhance its "green" connections to neighbouring areas and attractions. In train is the ambitious Sligo – Enniskillen Greenway, passing through the heart of the Geopark and Marlbank. At a more advanced stage of development, The Belleek – Ballyshannon Greenway will connect the north of the Geopark to Donegal and the Wild Atlantic Way. Through this intervention it is proposed to extend this Greenway linking Belleek as a key tourism site to the unique and expansive Geopark site at Castle Caldwell.

3. Opportunities Across The Geopark

Essential for the Geopark to reach its full potential as a world class destination for sustainable outdoor recreation tourism is the dispersal of visitors across the area. This can increase dwell time and the length of stay, bring economic and social benefits to settlements and communities across the Geopark and ensure that the risks of over-tourism at honey pot sites are managed and mitigated. Through the realisation of its development plan, Lough Navar has the potential to significantly enhance the Geopark offer and disperse visitors bringing benefits to businesses and communities in the neighbouring villages of Derrygonnelly, Belleek and Garrison. It will complement the well developed Geopark facilities at Castle Archdale and the nascent development plan for Castle Caldwell.

The time is right for the proposed interventions. 2020 saw a growth in the use of the Geoparks outdoor recreation sites. Despite restrictions on international travel and in a challenging trading environment, Marble Arch Caves tours were fully booked between its reopening in July and the mid-September. The appetite for sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation has grown year on year for twenty years and Covid-19 has accelerated this trend.

The significant year on year growth in visitor footfall to the Marlbank area has brought many benefits but also highlighted the need for an integrated approach to visitor experience development and management. This proposition can enable Marlbank to sustainably manage further growth, ensure that negative environmental impacts are limited and encourage dwell time, bringing benefits to the settlements of Belcoo/Blacklion and wider Fermanagh.

With the current focus on the staycation market and the tourism propositions of TourismNI and Failte Ireland 'Irelands Hidden Heartland' and 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' now is an ideal time to harness opportunities together with partners to connect people with the outdoors, nature and the stories of this stunning landscape. The key to maximising the potential benefits of the growth in Natural Resource Tourism in the Marlbank area and the broader Geopark is taking an integrated and planned approach underpinned by the three pillars of sustainability and increasing the "green" connectivity.

THE VISION

The vision for this project is simple and achievable; to create a world class visitor destination that benefits businesses, communities and the environment; bringing economic return to the area. A vision is meaningless without values and the values for this, once again, are simple:

- **Sustainable Development**; Development is underpinned by the three pillars of Sustainable Development and by the 17 UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals
- **Universal Accessibility**: whilst not always possible in natural resource sites, all developments will aspire to the principle of universal accessibility.

- **Carbon Neutral and Climate Change:** all developments must aspire to being carbon neutral; no development can have an adverse impact on the natural environment.
- **Community Tourism:** we want to create an infrastructure with year-round use, servicing both the tourist and the "local" and see the benefits of an expanded visitor economy shared with businesses and residents. To borrow from *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* "Our brand is centred around rural communities and their lifestyles, as well as the many spaces for adventure and relaxation". Key to this is management groups, management agreements and steering groups made up of residents, communities and businesses

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We are going to….create a world class visitor destination through:

- Building a nearly zero energy visitor centre at Marble Arch Caves as a gateway to the Geopark with a new visitor centre
- Link this visitor centre to the significant developments at Killykeegan Nature Reserve and on to the Cavan Burren and, potentially, the Shannon Pot by the "Smugglers Trail"
- Enhance and extend the Boardwalk Experience
- Create a Greenway linking Castle Caldwell to Belleek; providing green infrastructure between two key tourism assets.
- Create a "national park" experience at Lough Navar

Through these interventions we can over 5 years…

- **Create a 5* Tourism NI Visitor Attraction at Marble Arch Caves**
- **Increase Marble Arch Caves tour visitor numbers by 33% to 93k**
- **Sustainably increasing visitors to the Cuilcagh Boardwalk by 60k**
- **Increase visits to the Marble Arch Caves Visitors Centre by 50% to 200k**
- **Increase visitors to Lough Navar by 33% to 75k**
- **Attract 50k visitors a year to the Belleek – Castle Caldwell Greenway**

These are initial SMART targets drawn from the Lough Navar Development Plan and the Economic Appraisal of Marble Arch Caves Visitors' Centre. The potential for a Greenway to drive growth has not been quantified but with the Waterford Greenway attracting 250,000 users a year, a target of 50,000 is achievable

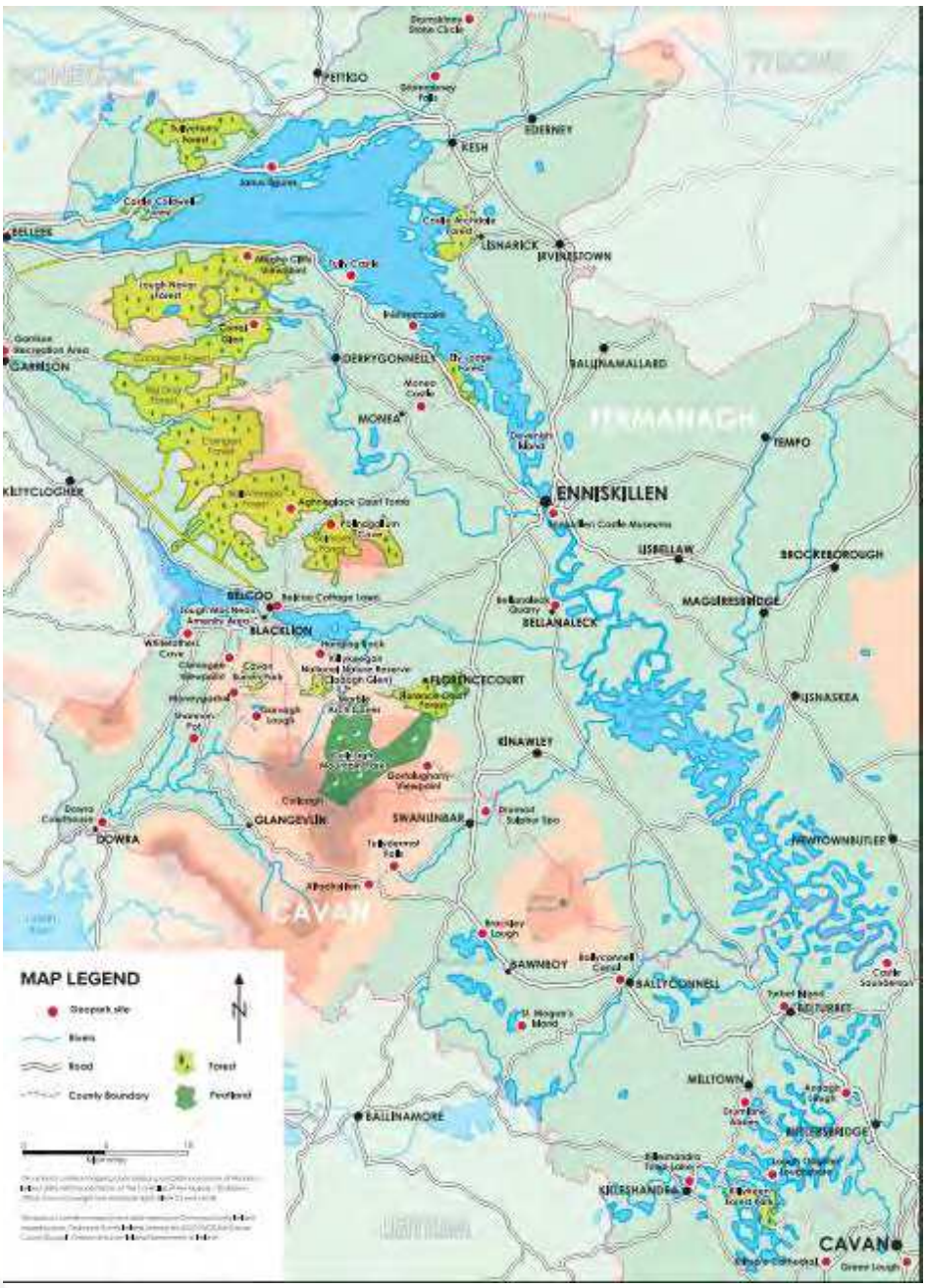
The goal is an additional 250,000 visitors a year to the Geopark with 10% of these staying overnight. Using £18 Additional Visitor Spend for overnight stays and £18 for day trippers/staycation this gives a potential economic benefit to the area of £5.425million.

CONCLUSION

This is a multi-faceted, integrated proposal that builds on established success and rising demand. It is a proposition of scale that can change the shape of the area's and the region's tourism offer, driving visits and visitor spend whilst ensuring the three pillars of sustainability are pursued and delivered.

We have the opportunity to develop and create a world-class stand-out tourism offer that will benefit businesses, communities and the environment. With the unprecedented growth in outdoor recreation tourism, staycations and the rise of "wellbeing" as a policy priority the time is right and the opportunity is obvious.

Appendix 1 – MACUGG Map

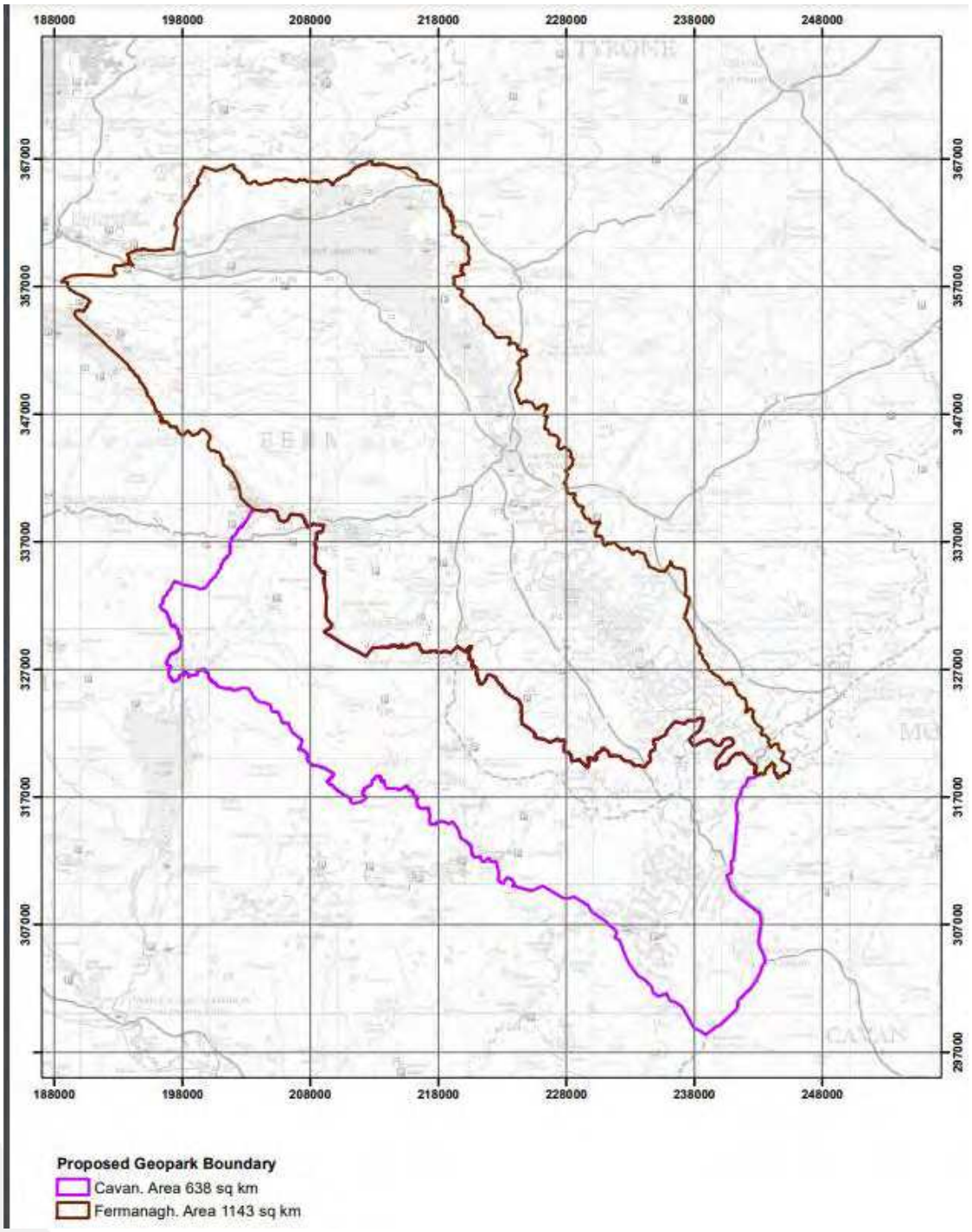


Appendix 2 – Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark

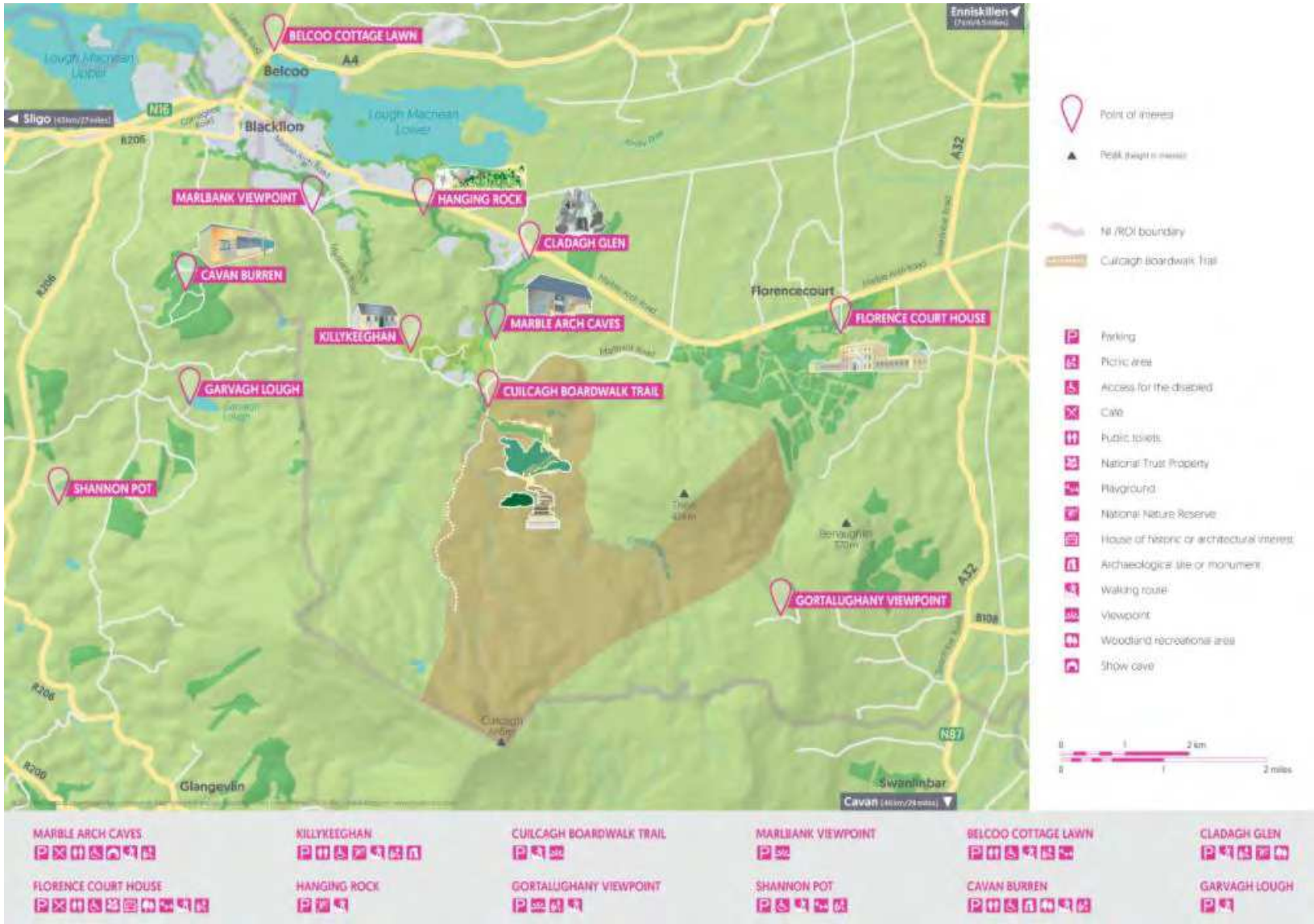
CUILCAGH LAKELANDS GEOPARK

EXPERIENCES, IT'S IN OUR NATURE

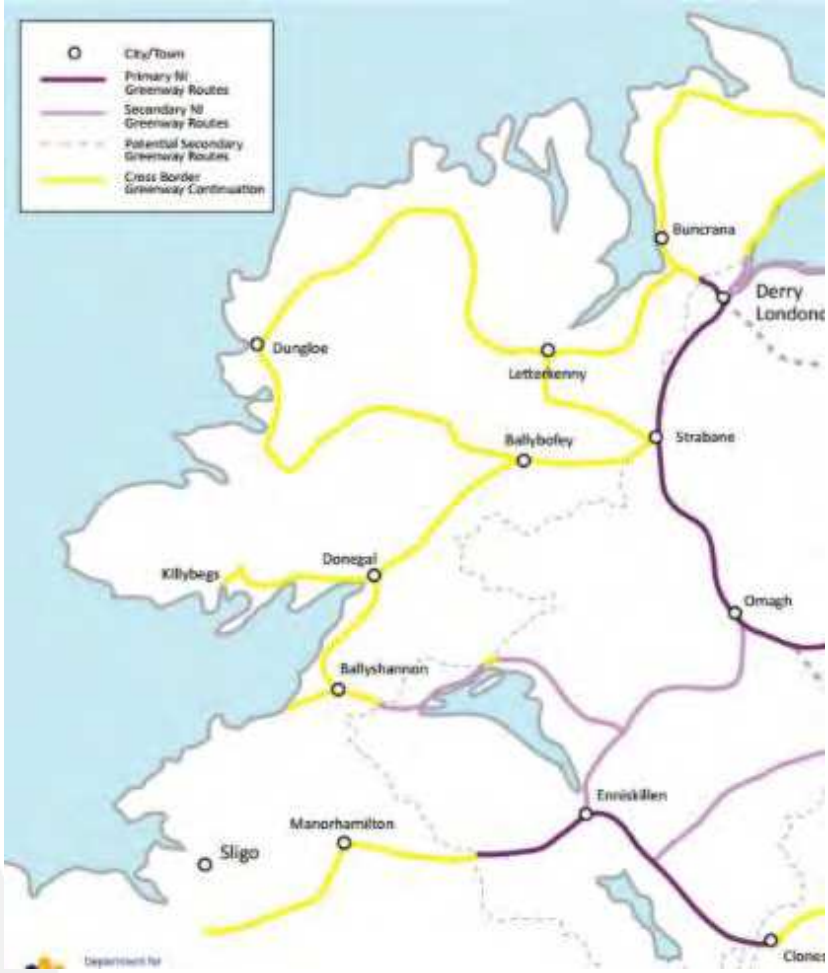
www.cuilcaghlakelandsgeopark.com



Appendix 3 - Marlbank



Appendix 4 – Belleek – Castle Caldwell Greenway



MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

REGENERATION OF DENNY SITE, PORTADOWN

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABCBC) is the largest Council area outside of Belfast. It has a population of 212,000 across 78,000 households. Economically ACBCBC is the location of 8,000 businesses contributing almost £4 billion in GVA to the economy prior to the Covid pandemic.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the strategic opportunities which could be generated from the former Denny site, Portadown. The site has the potential to be a catalytic and flagship investment location for the ABC area attracting investment, jobs and wealth.

BACKGROUND

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council as the largest council outside of Belfast has a strong and well established role as an economic driver supporting and contributing to the regional competitiveness of Northern Ireland as a whole. The ABCBC sectoral strengths including Agri-Food, Health and Life Sciences and Advanced Manufacturing are well evidenced by leading global employers in these sectors, as well as the contribution made by the area to the overall economic impact of the sectors at an NI level.

The former Denny site is strategically located close to Portadown town centre between Northway and Obins Street and in close proximity to the Railway station, which in recent years has undergone a capital investment. Since the former processing factory has ceased operation, the site has remained derelict. The council acquired this site in 2016, with a view to stimulating investment, in employment and regeneration in Portadown.

THE OPPORTUNITY

There is a unique opportunity to develop a clear strategic vision for the Denny Site which is aligned to the sectoral strengths of the region and will propel the areas growth trajectory and competitiveness.

THE VISION

As stated above, the ABCBC area has a strong economic base, with key sectoral strengths in Agri-Food, Health and Life Sciences, and Advanced Manufacturing. Looking to the future and as part of the development of Council's Medium Term Recovery Plan there is an opportunity to create an enabling infrastructure to support future markets and advancement of SMEs in these areas. The vision for this site is to be an Innovation / Centre of Excellence supporting the future growth trajectory of companies in ABCBCs sectoral strength areas.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

In advancing the strategic vision for the Denny Site a number of sectoral concept themes will be developed, which will be progressed to Strategic Outline Business Case and be supported by a technical spatial plan to outline the physical regeneration and development of the site. Collectively this will outline a compelling vision and delivery plan for the site, which will bring investment and growth to the area. There is also potential to acquire adjacent lands and put in place some early enabling infrastructure to support the future vision. ABCBC has committed funds to scoping of potential options for development, and demolition and clearance of this site is progressing.

CONCLUSION

The development of the Denny site as a Centre for Excellence and Innovation aligned to and supporting the ABC areas economic sectoral pillars will propel the competitiveness of local businesses in the market place, regionally and globally. This project is aligned strategically to ABC Councils Medium Term Recovery Plan and longer terms aspirations for the Mid South West Region as a whole.

MSW
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Economic Engine

INDUSTRIAL LANDS AT DESERTCREAT, COOKSTOWN

The acute need for development land has been identified as the single most important development constraint for medium/large sized companies in the Mid Ulster area. The issue continues to stifle economic growth in Mid Ulster and indeed threaten the region's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND

Mid Ulster's economy is private sector driven, boasting the largest business base outside Belfast with over 9,000 VAT registered businesses. The region has higher productivity per head compared to the Northern Ireland average and a GVA of £2.3bn (producing 7.3% of NI's economic output). Our businesses are the most export-intensive, producing 12% of NI's exports. Mid Ulster is appropriately recognised as the centre of manufacturing and engineering in Northern Ireland, where it accounts for 21% of the local economy (approx. 10,740 jobs), compared to 9% in NI. The sector is estimated to deliver c£1.67bn GVA contribution to the local economy and over £710m in local wages, directly and indirectly. The area boasts a world class High Growth Cluster which manufactures more than 40% of the world's mobile crushing and screening equipment.

However, Mid Ulster has consistently been predicted to be one of the hardest hit regions as a result of the pandemic. A report by the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) identified that the estimated percentage decline in GVA 2020 is -16.3% which is the highest of all the 11 Council areas. This figure exceeds the huge fall in GVA seen in Mid Ulster (-15.6%) at the height of the last recession in 2008-09. Moreover, a study by the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) reported that Mid Ulster will endure the greatest economic impact of Covid19 in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the report highlighted Mid Ulster as the only area locally to feature in the top 10 worst-impacted places within the UK's 382 local authority regions. CPP estimates that GVA could temporarily fall by a staggering 45% in the short term, which presents an immense challenge for local companies and jobs.

Despite being a highly entrepreneurial economy, underinvestment in the provision of industrial land is a contributing factor to the fact that too many of our indigenous businesses fail to grow. Restrictions in accessing land significantly impacts on the ability of operating businesses in Mid Ulster's key sectors to expand and deliver investment and job creation in the local area.

Mid Ulster presently has no industrial land available for development. Industrial estates in Granville, Dungannon and Cookstown are at full capacity with no room to expand.

As a consequence, the area has lost out on significant investment and businesses have been forced to look at alternative sites outside the district which is totally unacceptable.

Indeed, the lack of supply of industrial land has pushed prices up to £125k for a one acre serviced site in Dungannon (the price of a comparable serviced site in Craigavon owned by Invest NI is in the region of £80k). In recognition of the shortage of economic development land in Dungannon an additional interim supply has been identified at Dungannon and Granville within the Council's Local Development Plan 2030 (Draft Plan Strategy).

It is the view of local enterprise agencies that the turnover of tenants moving out of their property should be higher, however, one of the problems facing growing businesses in the Dungannon area is the availability of industrial zoned land or "move on space" to buy. Consequently, start-up businesses are not expanding out of enterprise centres / business parks into their own built premises.

There is a sound policy basis for the proposal, at local and regional level, including Council's Community Plan, Local Development Plan and Economic Development Strategy. The Council's draft Local Development Plan Strategy aims to facilitate the creation of at least 8,500 new jobs by 2030, which will only be achieved through the provision of at least 170 hectares of economic development land economic land.

In addition, the project supports Invest NI's Strategy, which identifies the need to build on strengths and core competencies in Northern Ireland's main exporting sectors and drive sectoral development in advanced manufacturing, materials, and engineering, agri-food, digital and creative technologies, construction and materials handling.

According to Invest NI figures for land holding and site sales, Mid Ulster had the highest number of site sales over the period 2009-19 as identified in Table 1 on the next page: -

	Landholding (Acres) as at 31/03/20	**Land Availability (Acres) at 31/03/20**	**Number of site sales 2009/2019 to INI Clients**	**Number of acres sold 2009/2019 to INI Clients**
Antrim & Newtownabbey	392	93	6	18
Ards & Down	92	21	2	3
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	377	143	15	34
Belfast City	213	30	3	0
Causeway Costs & Glen	144	63	3	4
Derry City & Strabane	486	101	13	17
Fermanagh & Omagh	170	34	5	11

Lisburn & Castlereagh City	247	0	6	15
Mid & East Antrim	229	25	9	13
Mid Ulster	**202**	**3***	**20 (21%)**	**63 (31%)**
Newry, Mourne & Down	278	40	13	25
TOTAL	**2830**	**553**	**95**	**203**

* comprises 1 x 2 acres' site at Creagh Industrial Estate which is in the process of being sold to an Invest NI client company. The remaining 1 acre includes land remnants which are not developable. Therefore, Invest NI have exhausted their supply of industrial land in Mid Ulster.

THE OPPORTUNITY

There is a golden opportunity to secure a significant landholding of approximately 180 acres for industrial / economic use at Desertcreat, outside Cookstown, which is currently in public ownership. The purchase of these surplus lands would be critical in addressing industrial land constraints and helping indigenous businesses to grow and deliver investment and job creation in the local area.
The acquisition of these lands would facilitate the growth of our world class advanced manufacturing, materials handling and engineering sector; and complement the proposed South West College Innovation and Skills Academy Centre which will focus on driving innovation and securing a future talent pipeline for this critical sector.
The supply of affordable and suitable industrial land in Mid Ulster will increase its capacity and potential to attract external investment in other key growth sectors.

THE VISION

To create the conditions for economic growth and prosperity through the provision of suitable and affordable serviced industrial lands in Mid Ulster.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We intend to acquire lands at Desertcreat, outside Cookstown for industrial use. This will enable Council to develop the site to deliver enabling works / infrastructure in the form of road access and utilities leaving the site in a state of readiness for lease or purchase by businesses.

CONCLUSION

The development of serviced land will help address the acute shortage of available industrial land in the district and play an integral role in attracting new firms into the area and retaining the high concentration of indigenously grown companies, many of which are now multi-national operations, that have reported to Council that there are extremely limited opportunities to increase their scale of production which is hampering their ability to fulfil orders and compete in new global markets. However, similar to Invest NI, Council understands that development of serviced sites represents a long-term strategic approach, which recognises the need to provide the appropriate infrastructure in the longer term. This project is of immense importance, not only to Mid Ulster but to the Northern Ireland economy. The provision of additional industrial lands in Mid Ulster will act as an 'enabler' to unlock increased levels of private sector investment and productivity in the most enterprising and entrepreneurial region of NI.

ENABLING INFRASTRUCURE

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

'PHYSICAL CONNECTIVITY - ROADS'

The purpose of this paper is to set out the case for much needed investment into Mid South West (MSW) Region connectivity networks to enable greater access to regional, national and global linkages (roads, rail, seaports and airports) along with high quality connections to facilitate faster movement of products to market, and strengthen our competitive advantage in becoming more progressive in global, complex and strategic supply chain ecosystems.

MSW Key Information and Data

- **Mid South West Region** (a collaboration between Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council) has a global vision to supercharge the economic growth of our region. The economy is driven by a thriving private sector that includes many world-leading companies which are major innovators and global exporters;
- The MSW region makes up almost **half** of Northern Ireland's **land mass**;
- MSW's geographical position is hugely significant as it **spans five of the six** counties in Northern Ireland: Down, Armagh, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry/Londonderry, and has the longest proportion of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Corridor.
- Geography and proximity to the border means that MSW is contiguous to counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland. The region forms a **central part of the North/South border corridor** with much higher levels of cross-border trade, commuting, access to services (including health and education) and recreational use than would be found in other parts of the island of Ireland.
- MSW represents **one quarter of NI population** - combined population of over 470,000 people and a working age population of 300,000 which is forecast to grow.

- MSW created its **own sophisticated and unique ecosystem** for business to thrive, and is home to a third of Northern Ireland businesses and **214,000** workplace-based jobs;

- Generated **£7.7Billion** GVA in 2018 (1/5 of the overall NI Economy). This figure does not consider contribution from **supply chains**;
- MSW is home to many world leading businesses and as such is a globalised, outward and forward looking region which accounts for **27%** of NI **exports**;
- **Leading the Way** in: Manufacturing, Engineering, Agri-Food, Health and Life Sciences, Tourism and Construction. Our regional specialisms are even more pronounced when compared to the UK average;

BACKGROUND

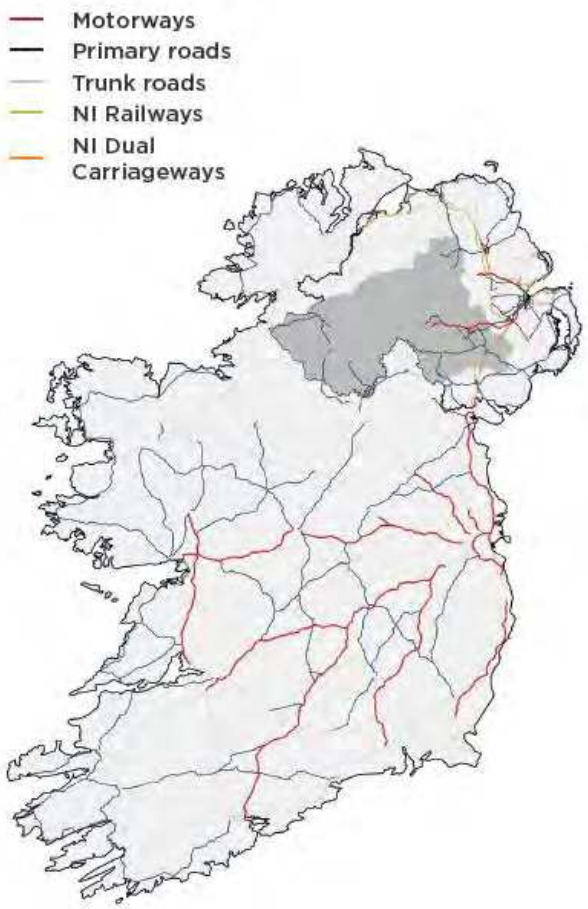
The economic geography of the MSW region is shaped by the presence of Northern Ireland strategic corridor routes - the M1, A1 Dublin/Belfast, A4 Ballygawley/Border, A5 (N2) Derry/Dublin, A6 Derry/Belfast and A29 Coleraine/Armagh - all run through the region. MSW's positioning is at the centre of important wider connections and markets, particularly at this critical time when the UK has recently departed from the EU.

With diverse people and economically competitive businesses, our region has grown faster than all others in Northern Ireland (NI). In NI terms, the region accounts for over a quarter of its population, almost half of its land mass, and has the longest proportion of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Corridor. Many of NI's world leading companies were born here and it continues to be home to headquarters of their globalised operations.

As home to a third of NI businesses, MSW industry has been forced to operate with substandard infrastructure networks and connectivity for decades, with consequent constraints on the efficiency of their operations and associated productivity. Despite significant historical underinvestment in enabling infrastructure, communication networks including broadband and mobile coverage, and utilities such as wastewater and sewerage systems, our extraordinary people have created a sophisticated and unique ecosystem for businesses to thrive. Entrepreneurial spirit is a distinctive characteristic of the region. Our business mentality, reputation and dynamism has given us a critical edge over other regions demonstrated by the export of more goods and services than all other areas of NI.

Whilst MSW accounts for half of the land mass in NI, data shows that motorway and A roads account for only 8% of our network. The map below provides a stark illustration of this. It shows the coverage of motorways, dual carriageways and primary roads on the island of Ireland, with an evident gap in coverage out to the West:

- There is almost no dual carriageway in Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area (0.6km);
- Dungannon and Cookstown have no bypass networks and as a consequence these major towns in our region, and the roads that surround them are regularly congested;
- Need for bypass networks in Armagh City and Enniskillen, through the East Link in Armagh and the Southern Relief Road in Enniskillen.



We are told that in order to address economic growth and competitiveness, or to embed new ways of working and technologies, that the enabling infrastructure must be fit for purpose. MSW is significantly disadvantaged and challenged in this way as can be seen on the map shown on the previous page.

MSW Regional Economic Strategy identifies significant challenges to be addressed – amongst them: productivity levels which are almost 10% lower than the rest of NI, and 15% lower than the UK average; providing more and better jobs and the ability to keep our economy open to all levels of international talent in the face of a weaker outlook for population growth, and changing migration policy. The substantial infrastructure deficit in the MSW region is identified throughout the strategy. This

ranks highly as a key area in need of substantial investment, and if addressed, could catalyse significant GVA and productivity growth.

THE CONNECTIVITY OPPORTUNITY

As the 'economic engine' of NI, and with our evidenced strengths in Manufacturing, Engineering, Agri-Food, Health and Life Sciences, Tourism and Construction, MSW in a prime position to drive wealth creation, exports and innovation. The critical mass of our global economic activity to date has been achieved in spite of underinvestment in basic economic infrastructure and connectivity, demonstrating the resilience and determination of our indigenous businesses in the region to succeed.

Facilitating transport, greater access to road, rail, sea ports and airports, advanced cross-border connectivity, progressive digital communication capability, access to industrial land, energy and water are considered by MSW as the bedrock to our prosperity and well-being for our regional economy.

In order to address regional imbalances and achieve levelling up of NI and UK economies, MSW believe it is essential in the first instance, to install the basic enabling infrastructure that will undergird the structure of our economy and take advantage of our distinctive positioning along the north/south and east/west border corridors. In the absence of redressing the fundamental economic problem (infrastructure gap), increasing productivity and achieving virtuous economic effects will only remain a distant possibility for the MSW region. Based on the financial contribution that the MSW Region makes to the NI and UK Economies, this is an unacceptable position.

To achieve geographical cohesion across the border regions, MSW connectivity must be prioritised. Greater access to regional, national and global linkages are essential. Strengthening the region's strategic and unique geographic location through enhanced infrastructure and digital connectivity will advance north/south and east/west cross border interactions and global transactions. Future investment in our cross border connectivity will significantly influence the functioning of trade, access to labour markets, business productivity and competitiveness. Such investment is essential and will ultimately lead to improvements in NI and UK economic output and the geographical distribution of trade.

The following basic enabling infrastructure must be prioritised for MSW by NI and UK governments to realise inclusive growth ambitions and achieve a regionally balanced economy (level playing field):

- **Physical Infrastructure** – new road networks, rail to the West;
- **Connectivity** – improved cross border connections, greater access to rail, seaports and air ports, increased digital connectivity, technologies and capability to facilitate 'Freeport' economic zone, broadband and mobile coverage;
- **Access to Industrial Land**;

- **Investment in Utilities** – electricity, sewerage and wastewater systems;
- **Regeneration and Place Shaping of our Towns and High Streets.**

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO – ROAD NETWORKS

The following road networks have been prioritised for development and delivery through the MSW Growth Deal as a first step in redressing the fundamental connectivity gap in the region:

- **A4 Southern Relief Road, Enniskillen** – At a regional level completion of the A5 Western Transport Corridor is critical to connectivity within MSW. In addition, it will provide a transport link along the A4 from the Dublin Road to the Sligo Road. Other benefits include facilitation of a more efficient movement of traffic in and around Enniskillen which will relieve congestion, reduction in noise and air pollution in Enniskillen town.

- **A28 Armagh East Link** – This road network will improve road safety and journey time for both strategic and local traffic in and around the historic city centre, so relieving congestion and improving the environment. The scheme will also improve the road network between the north and south of the Province and relieve congestion on a key route to the east of the city, facilitating future development in this area.

- **A29 Cookstown Bypass** – This bypass will relieve traffic congestion, remove strategic traffic from the town centre and surrounding road networks and increase road safety for all. The current adverse effects of severance, noise, air quality and the impact on townscape will be reduced. The new network will improve the quality of life for users of the town centre and attract more visitors and shoppers to the historic wide street.

In addition to the above stated networks, the following roads have been prioritised for progression through the key DFI Roads development stages:

- A3 Armagh North and West Link;
- A29 Dungannon Bypass;
- A32 Cortnamuck & Kilgortnaleague.

CONCLUSION

Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy affirms that connectivity drives the regional economy. The Strategy recognises that the single largest impediment to MSW Region's economic growth and prosperity is the absence of the basic economic infrastructure that other regions of the UK take for granted. Our Region's

ability to move people and goods is vital to the success of our businesses and the growth of our economy.

If the UK and NI Governments are serious about its commitment to levelling up and addressing regional imbalances, then they can no longer continue to direct investment in such a way that only serves to exacerbate these imbalances and inequalities. Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy confirms the need and evidence base for such investment. As a first step in addressing levelling up of our regional economy, MSW request that both the UK and NI governments prioritise investment into the regions physical connectivity and in particular: A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass, A28 Armagh East Link, A29 Cookstown Bypass, A3 Armagh North and West Link, A29 Dungannon Bypass and A32 Cornamuck & Kilgortnaleague.

RURAL BROADBAND

NOTE: *Rural broadband provision to be kept under review to ensure left behind areas from Project Stratum have an identified solution (approximately 3000 properties).*

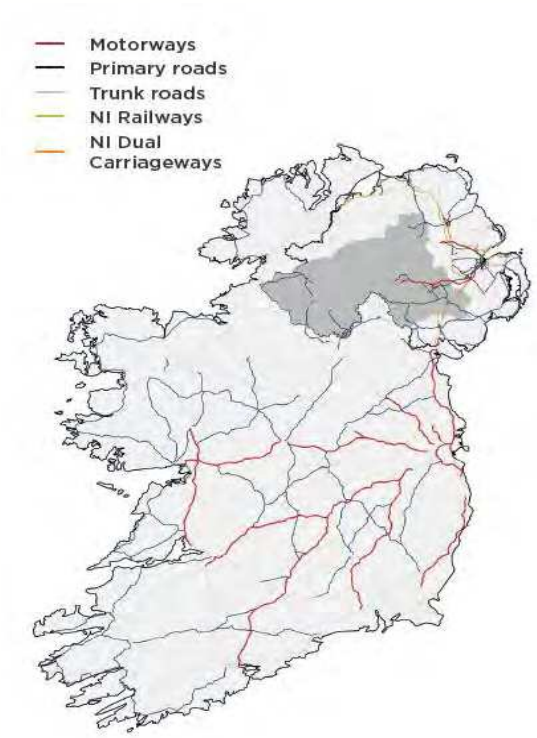
INDUSTRIAL LANDS AT OMAGH

The fact that there are currently 0 acres of available, serviced sites/land for industrial development in Omagh, the largest centre of population in the Fermanagh and Omagh district and one of the three largest in the Mid South West region, is recognised as a key constraint to local economic growth in the Fermanagh and Omagh district and, consequently, the Mid South West region. All of the existing Invest NI serviced sites in Omagh have been sold/leased. It is essential that this issue is addressed in order to enable the realisation of the Mid South West Vision and the delivery of the levelling up agenda promoting balanced and inclusive regional development and contributing towards addressing historic levels of under-investment in this region.

It should be noted that there are expected to be opportunity sites arising beyond 2025 in Omagh town centre, subject to the completion of the Strule Shared Education Campus. However, these are not suitable sites for the purposes of industrial development and thus are not considered in this paper.

BACKGROUND

Omagh is the largest town in the Fermanagh and Omagh district in terms of population and household numbers. It provides an extensive range of services to the wider region and is a location for significant numbers of businesses and levels of employment. Omagh is strategically located on the Western Economic Corridor that connects Omagh northwards to Derry/Londonderry, eastwards to Belfast and southwards to Dublin. The proposed dualling of the A5 will provide a step change in terms of connectivity (see map on next page), however, the significant economic opportunities and benefits of this major roads investment will be diminished by the lack of availability of industrial land for those companies who may wish to become established in the area or for local companies who wish to expand. As home to a third of NI businesses and, amongst them, many world leading export businesses, MSW industry has been forced to operate with substandard infrastructure networks and connections for decades, with consequent constraints on the efficiency of their operations and associated productivity. Facilitating transport, advanced cross-border connectivity, greater access to road, rail, sea ports and airports, advanced digital communication capability, **access to industrial land**, energy and water are considered by MSW as the bedrock to our prosperity and well-being for the regional economy.



The emerging Local Development Plan for the Fermanagh and Omagh district identifies that take up of industrial land has tended to be greater on zonings where Invest NI has intervened to provide serviced sites which are more attractive to investors because they are closest to the main transport corridors. The delivery of sites on privately owned land is dependent upon the landowner's willingness to sell at a reasonable price. Currently approximately 34 hectares of developable zoned industrial land is currently available in Omagh (ie not affected by flood risk), however, none of this is in Invest NI ownership or is serviced. The draft Plan Strategy anticipates increasing the overall zoned allocation in Omagh to approximately 42 hectares. Fully utilised, this could provide space for 7,000 jobs in Omagh (assuming broad industrial employment densities, no displacement and not including construction 'job years').

Omagh Area Plan – Existing Industry Zonings			
Settlement	Location	Area Zoned (hectares)	Area Remaining Undeveloped (hectares)
Omagh	Strathroy West	12.61	12.61
	Strathroy East	6.20	2.24
	Arvalee	11.28	11.18
	Doogary	19.52	5.95
	Tamlaght Road	3.20	0.17
	Leckpatrick	1.94	1.04
	Gortrush	4.03	0.84
	Drumquin/Derry Road	24.53	12.83
Omagh Total		83.31	46.86*

*Estimated that only 34 Ha remains as developable lands due primarily to flood risk.

The table on the next page sets out Invest NI's land holding and site sales by Council Area. It can be seen that there are 34 acres of land available in the Invest NI landholding in the Fermanagh and Omagh district, however, all of this is located around Enniskillen in County Fermanagh. This is not a sustainable model for local or regional economic growth given the significant population/workforce based around the Omagh area and the limited transport links between both main towns.

Table 1 - Invest NI - Land Holding and Site Sales by Council Area

	Landholding (Acres) as at 31/03/20	Land Availability (Acres) at 31/03/20	Number of site sales 2009/2019 to INI Clients	Number of acres sold 2009/2019 to INI Clients
Antrim & Newtownabbey	392	93	6	18
Ards & Down	92	21	2	3
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	377	143	15	34
Belfast City	213	30	3	0
Causeway Costs & Glen	144	63	3	4
Derry City & Strabane	486	101	13	17
Fermanagh & Omagh	170	*34	5	11
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	247	0	6	15
Mid & East Antrim	229	25	9	13
Mid Ulster	202	3	20	63
Newry, Mourne & Down	278	40	13	25
TOTAL	**2830**	**553**	**95**	**203**

*** all available land located at Enniskillen.**

The Fermanagh and Omagh economy is entrepreneurial in nature with almost 11% of NI's VAT registered businesses compared to 6% of the NI population. It is home to many significant employers including Terex, Kerry Foods, Naturelle alongside a significant SME and micro business base with huge potential for growth. The manufacturing sector (which includes advanced engineering) accounts for 12% of total employment in the FODC area. The construction sector accounts for 8% and agri-food accounts for 10%, all of which depend on availability of industrial land.

Engagement with our local enterprise agencies identifies that the turnover of tenants from their properties should be higher, however, there is a lack of opportunity through the availability of industrial zoned land or "move on space" to buy or lease. This, in turn, limits the availability of space for start-up businesses in our enterprise centres.

Indeed, the business birth rate, 8.8% in 2019, remains below long-term trends, which tend to be closer to 10%.

In addition, the project supports Invest NI's Strategy, which identifies the need to build on strengths and core competencies in Northern Ireland's main exporting sectors and drive sectoral development in advanced manufacturing, materials, and engineering, agri-food, digital and creative technologies, construction and materials handling.

THE OPPORTUNITY

There is currently land zoned in Omagh for industrial development at a number of sites and a commitment through the LDP draft Plan Strategy for the identification of additional zoned lands. Recent investment in the now completed Strathroy Link Road has improved connectivity to zoned lands at Strathroy and there is greater connectivity to a potential site in the Drumnakilly area as a result of a link road from the A5 serving the Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Centre. Both the NI Executive and the Irish Government have committed to the delivery of the A5 strategic roads project. There is an opportunity now to ensure that the area is positioned to fully benefit from this improved connectivity and the associated increased attractiveness this will create for the area as a place to do business, by investing in securing and servicing a significant landholding for industrial / economic use.

Much has also been made of the potential opportunities arising from EU Exit and the arrangements under the NI Protocol to attract business to NI and, again, in order to ensure that the existing imbalance in our economy is not further exacerbated, there is a need to ensure that opportunities exist for such investment to benefit the region as a whole. The availability of accessible and serviced industrial sites at key regional centres and hubs is a key consideration. As noted earlier, the realisation of all the land zoned for industry in Omagh could create space for 7,000 jobs.

The acquisition of suitable lands is also essential to facilitate the growth of our indigenous businesses. It would also mitigate against the significant risk of further loss of our existing business base as evidenced by the recent loss of KES, a high growth, innovative company, from Omagh to the DCSDC area due to the lack of available sites for expansion in the Omagh locality.

THE VISION

To create the conditions for inclusive economic growth through the provision of appropriate serviced industrial lands in Omagh, one of the most significant population and economic centres in the region, which will support the delivery of the MSW RES and capitalise on the opportunity provided by investment through the Growth Deal and in the A5 strategic road network

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

Identify and secure land for industrial development in Omagh with good connectivity links to the proposed A5 dual carriageway route. Deliver site enabling works/infrastructure to develop the site to a state of readiness for lease or purchase by the private sector.

CONCLUSION

In order to address regional imbalances and achieve levelling up of NI and UK economies, it is essential in the first instance, to install the basic infrastructure systems in MSW that will underpin the structure of the economy and take advantage of our distinctive positioning along the north/south and east/west border corridors. In the absence of redressing the fundamental economic problem (infrastructure gap), increasing productivity and achieving virtuous economic effects will only remain a distant possibility for the MSW region. Based on the financial contribution of MSW to the NI, UK, and EU economies, this is an unacceptable position.

This proposal is crucial to the future economic growth of the MSW economy and that of the Fermanagh and Omagh district. The lack of available serviced industrial land at a key strategic location within the region is a crippling barrier to economic growth which must be addressed if our innovative and successful indigenous companies are to have the opportunity to grow and to ensure that we do not continue to lose our local successful companies to areas outside the MSW region, simply because they cannot access local suitable industrial sites.

MSW
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INDUSTRIAL LAND ON THE A1 ECONOMIC CORRIDOR, BANBRIDGE

The purpose of this paper is to set out the urgent need for the provision of available and serviced economic development land along the A1 Economic Corridor at Banbridge.

There is unmet and strong demand for employment land with direct access off the A1 in Banbridge evidenced by a lack of available and serviced land which is preventing businesses from locating in the region and along this key transport corridor. This is leading to the loss of critical private sector investment along this economic corridor during a pivotal time which is key to the future of the area.

BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES

The economic output of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council is second only to Belfast with over 8,500 vat registered businesses and a GVA (gross value added) of £3.6 billion per annum.

Banbridge sits at a key location on the A1/M1 transport corridor between Belfast and Dublin and is considered an attractive location to live with a strong retail and leisure base. However it is estimated that over 40% of working people living in Banbridge commute out of the area to work.

Attracting new and retaining existing investment is a key challenge for the area and region and the ability to attract investment is constrained from many decades of underinvestment.

There is also significant untapped economic potential. The Local Development Plan Preferred Options Paper (March 2018) for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council areas estimated that approximately 12,233 new jobs are needed to match the projected increase in the Borough's working age population by 2030. This need for 12,233 new jobs is estimated as equating to 245 ha of economic development lands at a density of 50 jobs per hectare.

For Banbridge this equates to the need for 59 hectares across the proposed plan period under the preferred option, or up to 82 hectares under the alternative options. At present there is only 49 hectares of allocated land available within Banbridge, of which the majority is not currently available for development due to landowners being either unwilling to develop or dispose of the land at a market rate. Further, even if this unavailable land was to come onto the market, the undeveloped and

most accessible portion of it comprises green field land which is not serviced and would require significant investment to make it attractive and viable for potential occupiers.

In keeping with the Regional Development Strategy, the Preferred Options Paper concludes there is a need to assess the 'fitness for purpose' including environmental implications of existing employment land provision, location and availability. However it is clear from market supply research that there is very limited land fit for purpose in Banbridge. This lack of availability of suitable sites is already causing a loss of opportunity and investment with a number of businesses who wish to locate along the A1 around Banbridge being forced to look elsewhere.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The provision of serviced economic development land in Banbridge has a number of major opportunities for growth which make it a prime location for investment prioritisation.

Banbridge's location within Northern Ireland on the Belfast to Dublin Economic Corridor means it is best placed to deliver the economic land needed for investment looking to capitalise on the benefits of the economic corridor and also on the dual market access opportunities brought about by the UK's exit from the European Union.

The A1 corridor provides excellent access for the sale of goods and services to Great Britain and the European Union, two of the world's largest markets, and its location enables companies to easily capitalise on NI's position as the only place where businesses can operate free from customs declarations, rules of origin certificates and non-tariff barriers on the sale of goods to both GB and the EU.

This is a unique proposition for manufacturers based in Northern Ireland and Banbridge's location provides for those seeking a pivotal location from which to service GB and EU markets, recalibrate supply chains, or design, develop and sell products across key industries such as life & health sciences, aerospace, electronics & machinery, chemicals, consumer and agri-food goods. It is critical that available and development ready land is available in this highly accessible location to capitalise on the opportunity.

A significant quantum of the unallocated need for economic development land in Banbridge can be provided by reallocating undeveloped land situated off existing A1 junctions in Banbridge. The level of economic benefits which will be generated from making this land available will be significant and will help achieve many targets linked to jobs, enterprise growth and economic diversification. Improving the area will therefore help achieve many of the objectives associated with increasing the economic competitiveness of the MSW Region.

Developing the right environment to stimulate private sector investment along the A1 Economic Corridor will be key to the future of the region

THE NEW VISION

Our vision is to supply the land needed to capture and enable growth along the key strategic A1 Economic Corridor and to provide for opportunities arising out of Northern Ireland's dual market access. This will allow the area capture opportunities for growth for the benefit of local people, business and the environment.

This will be achieved through the following aims:

1. **Providing highly accessible sites** - Land brought forward will be located beside and visible from the A1 and have direct access to it via an existing grade separated junction.

2. **Reducing uncertainty and development risk** - Land will be taken through the Local Development Plan process and allocated or outline planning permission will be sought for a range of parameters to reduce risk and uncertainty for occupiers or developers.

3. **Serviced and ready to develop -** Land will be brought to a standard which will encourage occupation through the provision of infrastructure including utility provision, key service and estate roads, branding and environmental mitigations and enhancements.

4. **Holistic regeneration** - ensuring that new economic development land is delivered in an economic, as well as physical sense, so that the business community is strengthened in addition to ensuring a high quality physical environment. Our vision therefore encompasses economic development as well as physical improvement.

5. **Positioning the supply to take advantage of real opportunities for economic growth** - interventions will be aware of the needs, requirements and environments of recognised growth sectors.

6. **Developing a programme for improvement rather than a shopping list of projects** - interventions will be interlinked and complement one another as opposed to a list of disparate and unconnected activities.

7. **Ensuring that new economic development land along the A1 plays a key role in increasing the competitiveness of the MSW Region and Northern Ireland economy** – interventions will be at a level which will ensure that they can play a vital part in the economic growth of the MSW Region as well as the wider Northern Ireland economy. Our vision therefore understands that interventions are not just important for ACBCBC.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

The proposed interventions will acquire, de-risk and bring forward serviced economic development land and/or sites with excellent connectivity to the A1 Economic Corridor

We propose that a number of interventions will be required to lever in private sector investment including the following:

1. **Assembling a large quantum of highly accessible land to help supply the identified economic development land requirement over the Local Development Plan period.**

2. **Obtaining an allocation for the Land in the Local Development Plan in order to minimise the planning risk for potential occupiers or developers.** Alternatively if the Local Development Plan is delayed, seeking an outline planning permission for parameters that reduce risk for potential developers or occupiers.

3. **Providing utilities and infrastructure to help viability and encourage occupation of the site.** Including energy, water, environmental mitigations and enhancements, internet, key estate roads and other key services.

4. **Branding and marketing**. Develop and deliver a high quality brand for the area in order to ensure it has a strong profile and is recognised as an important economic area in order to make it easier to market to potential occupiers. This would include comprehensive signage at gateways and corridors within the area.

5. **Public transport provision and pedestrian and cycle routes.** Projects to facilitate green travel routes (cycling/ walking routes) and increase connectivity to encourage recreation and sustainable movement within the area, into Banbridge Town Centre and to the wider transport network.

CONCLUSION

In order to realise the potential for growth, and achieve levelling up of the NI and UK economies, it is essential that a supply of available and developable economic land is provided in the most accessible and desirable areas of our region. These available sites need to supported by infrastructure that enables modern business to occupy them.

There is currently a very large undersupply over the emerging plan period of available and developable economic development land along the A1 Economic

Corridor. This can be addressed through investment which would deliver serviced and highly accessible land in Banbridge.

Provision of this land will address regional imbalances and achieve levelling up of NI and UK economies. It is clear that a failure to provide economic areas that enable easy decisions to be made on the optimum location to locate and reflect the necessary brand qualities and place requirements that today's businesses expect will result in lost investment and the relocation of existing businesses to other regions and countries.

Providing available and serviced land to stimulate private sector investment along this critical economic corridor at this pivotal time is key to the future of the area. The public sector alone will not be able to create the levels of change that are required. Because of the scale of demonstrated need for land in the Banbridge area, the level of economic benefits which will be generated from making this available and development viable will be significant and will help achieve many targets linked to jobs, enterprise growth and economic diversification. Improving the area will therefore help achieve many of the objectives associated with increasing the economic competitiveness of the MSW Region.

MSW
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TRANSFORMATION OF M12 CARN AND SEAGOE INDUSTRIAL ZONE

The purpose of this paper is to set out the case for much needed investment into one of the region's largest industrial zones to capitalise upon and better reflect the area's existing and potential significant economic contribution. Transformative, place shaping interventions will stimulate private sector investment to bring about further economic and physical improvements and ultimately the utilisation of highly accessible economic development land within the region.

BACKGROUND

The economic output of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council is second only to Belfast with over 8,500 vat registered businesses and a GVA (gross value added) of £3.6 billion per annum.

The business base within the economic area of Carn and Seagoe is diverse and contains a large number of major Northern Ireland businesses, including Northern Ireland's largest employer Moy Park. The area contributes £2.7 billion of the GVA of the Borough and approximately 12,000 people are employed by over 160 businesses including global brands in life sciences, agri-food and advanced manufacturing. There are also extensive supply chains supporting these sectors and a dynamic transport and logistics sector which allow businesses to connect on global platforms.

Attracting new and retaining existing investment is however a key challenge for the area and region. Industrial areas have suffered from many decades of underinvestment and this is particularly evident in Carn and Seagoe. Issues such as the quality of road, energy and telecommunications infrastructure, legibility, environment and limited public transport are creating difficulties for the operation of many businesses and limiting the ability to attract new investment.

There is also significant untapped economic potential. Within Carn and Seagoe there exists a large bank of available economic development land which could be utilised to deliver significant economic growth. This land is allocated in adopted planning policy, benefits from direct access to the motorway network and is in a key position beside the Belfast to Dublin railway line.

OPPORTUNITY

Carn and Seagoe has a number of major opportunities for growth which make it a prime location for investment prioritisation including:

- **Uniqueness:** The Carn and Seagoe Area is not just another industrial area in Northern Ireland. It has a number of positive attributes that make it an important asset for the MSW Region and Northern Ireland. These assets include, its central geographical location within Northern Ireland, its direct access to the Motorway Network via the M12 and M1, its large land bank of undeveloped allocated land and its location between two major stations on the Belfast to Dublin Railway Line.

- **Size and scale:** Carn and Seagoe is one of the largest commercial areas in the MSW Region with over 12,000 people currently working within its boundaries. Its scale means Carn and Seaoge is not just another industrial estate in Northern Ireland and any improvements to it in terms of physical and economic development would benefit a large number of businesses. Carn and Seagoe is also home to some of Northern Ireland's largest and most important employers including Moy Park and Almac. In order to ensure that these types of companies remain (and grow) within Northern Ireland it is important for the Carn and Seagoe area to be as competitive as possible and for its offer to companies to be as strong as it can possibly be.

- **Expansion Ready**: The level of vacant and underutilised land in parts of the Carn and Seagoe area presents an opportunity for significant expansion and investment. The existing major transport infrastructure in the area, combined with the large catchment workforce and the strength of existing businesses means the area is well positioned to accommodate this growth if investment is made.

- **Strong Growth Sectors:** There is also recognised growth in sectors that are looking for the types of location and premises that Carn and Seagoe can provide. Predicted growth sectors associated with the life sciences, agri-food and advanced manufacturing over the next decade provide huge opportunities for the region if improvements can be made that will ensure the area's offer is right.

Because of the scale of Carn and Seagoe, the level of economic benefits which will be generated from improving the area will be significant and will help achieve many targets linked to jobs, enterprise growth, economic diversification and brownfield land. Improving the area will therefore help achieve many of the objectives associated with increasing the economic competitiveness of the MSW Region.

Developing the right environment to stimulate private sector investment in Carn and Seagoe will be key to the future of the area. The public sector alone will not be able to create (and finance) the levels of change that are required.

A key opportunity to bring about a significant step change in the environment, and set a precedent for further investment, is to significantly improve the gateway M12

route which passes through the economic heart of Carn and Seagoe area and provides primary access to it.

The current route does not reflect the significance of the area, and appears as an 'anonymous' stretch of dual carriageway lined on either side by vegetation and trees of variable maturity and quality. There is currently no sense of place or legibility. A step change in the quality of this gateway environment along the M12, and to the vehicle, pedestrian and cycle environment leading from it and through the area, would provide major benefits to the environment and signify the economic importance of the area as a centre of excellence for entrepreneurship, innovation and investment and thereby increase the desire to locate within it.

THE VISION

Our vision for the future of the Carn and Seagoe area is for it to become a driver of success for the region, ensuring the area captures opportunities for growth for the benefit of local people, business and the environment.

This will be achieved through the following aims:

- **Developing the right environment to stimulate private sector investment in Carn and Seagoe -** interventions related to physical regeneration will recognise that stimulating investors and developers from the private sector will be key to the future of the area.

- **Holistic regeneration** - ensuring that Carn and Seagoe area is revitalised in an economic, as well as physical sense, so that the business community is strengthened in addition to ensuring a higher quality physical environment. Our vision therefore encompasses economic development as well as physical improvement.

- **Positioning Carn and Seagoe to take advantage of real opportunities for economic growth** - interventions will be aware of the needs, requirements and environments of recognised growth sectors, in particular positioning itself to become a location for the growing life sciences, agri-food and advanced manufacturing sectors.

- **Developing a programme for improvement rather than a shopping list of projects** - interventions will be interlinked and complement one another as opposed to a list of disparate and unconnected activities.

- **Ensuring Carn and Seagoe plays a key role in increasing the competitiveness of the MSW Region and Northern Ireland economy** – interventions will reflect the scale of the opportunities available in Carn and Seagoe and be at a level which will ensure that it can play a vital part in the economic growth of the MSW Region as well as the wider Northern Ireland

economy. Our vision therefore understands that improving Carn and Seagoe is not just important for ACBCBC.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

The proposed interventions will include a programme of environmental and infrastructure works that aim to enhance the aesthetics, visibility, branding, connectivity and ease of movement within the Carn and Seagoe area, unlock new sites for private sector development and enhance the setting and accessibility of existing businesses and properties in order to encourage additional trade and attract / stimulate business growth and inward investment.

We propose carefully considered, high quality interventions in infrastructure, landscaping and public realm provision, which have the potential to lever in significant private sector investment. The interventions put forward include:

1. **Place shaping through landscaping and infrastructure provision:** Projects to improve landscaping, legibility and arrival points on the M12 gateway route are considered a key and critical intervention. This could be achieved through landmarks and elements that provide some visual/physical structure. Projects would also include environmental improvements to estate roads and street lighting infrastructure plus landscaping and public realm interventions to address key areas and gateways which are currently not attractive or welcoming.

2. **Carn and Seagoe Branding**: Undertake a quality branding exercise for the whole of the economic area in order to ensure it has a higher profile and is recognised as an important business district in order to make it easier to market the economic area to potential investors. The project will also introduce a number of physical improvements including comprehensive signage at key gateways and corridors within and through the Carn and Seagoe area to aid navigation and enhance visibility of the area as a distinct business location.

3. **Upgrade and extend the Pedestrian and Cycle Route network:** Projects to improve existing green travel routes (cycling/ walking routes) to increase connectivity and to create additional routes to provide further opportunities for safe and sustainable access, recreation and movement within the Seagoe and Carn area, between major occupiers and to the public transport nodes including the M12 and the two major railway stations at Portadown and Lurgan.

4. **Green Buffers:** Projects to ensure clear and attractive screens between uses where conflict might arise and projects to screen instances of untidy and unattractive uses and sites that detract from the aesthetics and overall 'quality' of the area and undermine key vistas.

5. **Access to infrastructure such as energy, water and broadband:** Projects to understand and prevent a lack of infrastructure from becoming a limiting factor which hinders intensification and growth at Carn and Seagoe and to ensure that other interventions look to accommodate or facilitate improvements.

CONCLUSION

Industrial areas have suffered from many decades of underinvestment. Attracting new and retaining existing investment is a key challenge for the area and region. As the needs and uses being undertaken in these areas has evolved the environment and quality of place has not kept pace. It is clear that a failure to provide economic areas that reflect the necessary brand qualities and place requirements that today's businesses expect will result in lost investment and the relocation of existing businesses to other countries.

Developing the right environment to stimulate private sector investment in Carn and Seagoe is key to the future of the area. The public sector alone will not be able to create the levels of change that are required. Because of the scale of Carn and Seagoe, the level of economic benefits which will be generated from improving the area will be significant and will help achieve many targets linked to jobs, enterprise growth, economic diversification and brownfield land. Improving the area will therefore help achieve many of the objectives associated with increasing the economic competitiveness of the MSW Region.

To deliver the environmental and place improvements required to stimulate this investment it is recognised that transformation will need to include a significant programme of environmental and infrastructure works with a current estimated cost of £11,500,000. Such investment will enable transformational improvements to the aesthetics, visibility, branding, connectivity and ease of movement within the Carn and Seagoe area, unlocking new sites for private sector development and enhancing the setting and accessibility of existing businesses and properties in order to encourage additional trade and attract / stimulate business growth and inward investment.

REGENERATION OF ARMAGH GAOL

Armagh City and District Council acquired Armagh Gaol in the late 1980s and for many years has been striving to preserve its unique heritage, to slow down further deterioration of its fabric and to deliver best value from the asset for the community. As an outcome of a formal expression of interest process, The Trevor Osborne Property Group (TOPG), was appointed as preferred development partner to lead on the regeneration of this "iconic" site. TOPG is a long-standing, highly experienced developer who has completed many regeneration schemes, notable examples including Oxford Gaol; and the Buxton Crescent scheme scheduled to complete during 2020 to name a few.

BACKGROUND

Since Armagh Gaol ceased to operate, there has been an ongoing focus to seek to identity a new regeneration vision for this strategically located site in Armagh. The Council acquired this asset from a place shaping perspective so as to ensure the regeneration of this historic heritage asset would bring maximum benefit to overall growth and investment of Armagh City as a whole. With heritage assets such as this, there is a heritage premium in the redevelopment of such sites, in that the costs to rejuvenate are significantly greater than any brownfield alternative site. This has been a challenge for the overall funding envelope, private and public, for the project.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The aim of the project is to regenerate the Armagh Gaol site as a new iconic destination, supporting the future economic growth of Armagh city. The project will deliver a mixed-use development, which will generate sustainable economic and social benefits for the community, as well as providing a focal point for new community shared civic space.

The "Vision" for the project is to create a sustainable shared space within the walls of the Gaol, to benefit the local community and economy, through the development of a "destination", to attract visitors locally, nationally and internationally and to deliver a positive experience for all users.

Armagh Gaol, one of Northern Ireland's most important historic buildings, is a landmark building within the city. It is B+ Listed and is on the "Buildings at Risk" Register (Northern Ireland). The current project proposal is assessed to be the optimum solution for the Gaol in terms of viability and sustainability and if it does not

proceed, it is likely that the Gaol will continue to deteriorate physically to a point at which regeneration is no longer viable.

The proposed regeneration of the site seeks, to change how the physical environment of the area is perceived by creating new opportunities for economic development, interacting with the local community, attracting visitors, not just locally, but from across the island and internationally and encouraging consolidation and further development of community and social cohesion. This will benefit the local community, by turning on its head, the previous perceptions of the space by creating a focus for public participation and enjoyment. Specifically, the project will deliver economic, social and urban regeneration through a mixed-use development, incorporating a high-quality hotel, spa, limited retail and leisure, "enabling" residential development, a Heritage centre and the creation of major new shared public spaces. A simple descriptor could be – creating a "Cathedral Quarter" type area and destination, within the walls of the historic Gaol. The projects accords well with the new Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC) Tourism Strategy which aims to develop the tourism potential of the ABC area. The delivery of the Gaol scheme will be transformative in its ability to provide much needed high quality bedspaces in the area and to thereby grow visitor trips, spend and returns for the entire ABC area. This is particularly important in the context of other significant Tourism product development investments planned within the area such as the development of signature Game of Thrones visitor attraction.

THE VISION

To regenerate and restore Armagh Gaol to create a destination focus attraction regionally, and on an island basis by developing on the site;

- A 4-star hotel with 80 rooms, including serviced apartments
- 22 residential apartments
- 10,000 sq. ft. of retail/ commercial space (including restaurants)
- An interactive heritage facility
- New shared public realm and public space

There are a number of project differentiators which set this project and includes the fact that:-

- The project has already secured a private sector delivery partner and an investment commitment of £11 million to deliver the scheme.
- The project has secured planning and listed building approvals
- The project can immediately offer an opportunity for the injection of approximately £20m+ during the construction phase into the local (and NI) economy and the creation 200 jobs during construction and of 150 permanent jobs on completion. The project is forecast to generate a GVA of approximately £2.4m per annum to the local economy and the

overall economic impact is estimated to be approximately £4m per annum.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

The Council has been exploring external funding services for this project, however since there is a heritage premium related to regeneration of this historic asset, a funding deficit remains. The intention would be to access funding to enable the project to proceed.

CONCLUSION

The Armagh Gaol Project is a significant project with the potential to a destination attractor and deliver real benefits for Armagh and Northern Ireland as a whole. The project will create much needed economic growth and jobs for the local economy. It will also create new shared public space to consolidate further building community relations.

The project is at a state of readiness, with a committed private sector investment, partner, statutory permissions in place but now requires a joined-up partnership approach by other key funders to enable delivery.

The Gaol and Armagh City is an area of significant heritage value. Many of the important pieces of architecture in the city are in public ownership and it is critical that a holistic and strategic view of the uniqueness and heritage value is taken by those who are custodians of it. Support is sought to finalise the funding gap so that the project may proceed.

BOOSTING INNOVATION AND DIGITAL CAPACITY

SWC ENGINEERING AND SKILLS INNOVATION CENTRE

See attached proposition paper

INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT CHALLENGE FUND – PART 2

Paper to be provided by AMcK end March 2021

ROBOTICS & AUTOMATION INNOVATION CENTRE AT CAFRE LOUGHRY CAMPUS

The proposed intervention is a collaboration between the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and the Northern Ireland Technology Centre (NITC) at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) to deliver a Robotics and Automation Innovation Centre (RAIC) as a joint collaborative facility of the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) in the Mid-South West (MSW) region, focused on the Food and Drinks Manufacturing Sector. CAFRE is a public land-based college which is an integral part of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The centre will be based at CAFRE's Loughry Campus, a recognised centre of excellence for food with world-class facilities already used to develop sector skills and competitiveness through education, training, and technology transfer programmes, to meet the needs of Northern Ireland's food industry. The intervention will aspire to provide the sector with fully functional and customised robotics and automation solutions in order to improve productivity, sustainability and resilience through optimising yield, minimising waste, increasing food safety, maximising operator safety and reducing operational costs.

The RAIC will provide access for companies to continue to learn, test and embed enabling technologies and automation, develop skills and expedite process improvements.

Ideally placed to facilitate the knowledge and technology transfer and practical application/demonstration of such technology, CAFRE's association with NITC will ensure extensive robotic modelling expertise from other manufacturing sectors (including automotive and aerospace) is brought to the food manufacturing environment.

BACKGROUND

The Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing Sector is a £5.2 billion industry with over 24,000 employees, accounting for 35% of total manufacturing sales, 77% of which are outside Northern Ireland[1].

(NISRA) 1 Department for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (2020) Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing Report 2018.

Northern Ireland food and drinks companies are facing economic pressures due to a combination of issues:

- Labour is becoming more expensive as a result of commitments to the National Living Wage, exacerbated by a reliance on non-UK national/migrant labour.
- Raw material costs are increasing with the imports subject to Brexit-related currency fluctuations.
- The current state of food retail has seen significant margin pressures in the food supply chain.
- Increasingly stringent national and international standards of ensure quality, safety, and sustainability need to be met.
- Social distancing caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is causing many food and drink businesses to adjust factory layouts and remove labour intensive production systems.

The NI Food Industry is actively considering the innovative use of robotics and automation as a means to mitigate these challenges. The absence of a centre in Northern Ireland only serves to compound the existing challenges already being faced by food and drinks companies. Northern Ireland has been the lowest or next to lowest in the UK regions innovation rankings for many years with many barriers to innovation cited[3] including availability and cost of finance, lack of leadership, technological, research & development, creative thinking skills, risk aversion and lack of understanding of innovation. Northern Ireland is currently the least innovation active region of the UK.

These challenges are not unique to Northern Ireland. According to the International Federation of Robotics (IFR) many manufacturing companies are responding to issues, including the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, by increasing investment in robotics (+65% in 2020)[2]. It is anticipated that automation will be one of the biggest changes in manufacturing, as countries emerge from “lockdown”.

Currently, the UK is not following this trend. IFR reported that whilst sales of robots in the EU increased by 12% in 2019, they fell in the UK by 3%. The UK has not been a large market for robots, only ranking 22nd worldwide in 2019. Among these installations only 4% are food related.

Northern Ireland is preparing indirectly for automation through a number of strategies: The NI Innovation Strategy 2014-25 aims for NI to be an innovation hub, with plans to spend £1.2bn per year on research and development.

The Outcome Delivery Plan for 2018-19 contained several objectives and commitments that supported automation:

Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong, competitive regionally balanced economy; Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society where people can fulfil their potential; and

2 International Federation of Robotics (2020). Post Covid-19 Economy: “Robots Create Jobs”. Press Release, issued 14/4/20
3 Northern Ireland Executive (2014). NI Innovation Strategy 2014-2025, issued 9/9/14.

Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has a draft Innovation Strategy 2020-25 which derives from the Science Strategy Framework and is integral to its implementation. The strategy aims to create an enabling environment within DAERA to support innovation and the implementation of innovative actions within the Department as well as the establishment of an enabling, external environment to encourage and support innovation within the sectors for which DAERA has responsibility.

DAERA is also committed to a "Green Growth" future for Northern Ireland with the ambition of boosting business productivity and profitability while also benefiting the environment. Robotics will go some way to addressing these ambitions by reducing carbon, enhancing profitability, lowering waste and increasing efficiency.

OPPORTUNITY

The majority of food manufacturing companies, particularly the smaller businesses, have very limited resources and neither have the specialist expertise to examine their own productivity, nor develop and test new technology that may improve it. There is, however, evidence of the deployment of such technology in our local food industry. The current levels of automation in local food manufacturing largely mirror those experienced across the UK. End-of-line processes have benefited from the learning which has originated in other manufacturing sectors. Research and development into automation of primary and secondary food manufacturing processes is an obvious opportunity.

It is anticipated that introduction of automation and robotics will have a net positive economic and social impact once costs and benefits are calculated. A recent report by [4]Barclay's estimated that a UK investment of £1.2bn in robotics, would yield a net benefit of £60bn. Focusing specifically on food processing, this investment would see increases in productivity of 25% by 2025, whilst maintaining employment levels (through upskilling operators into new roles).

Undoubtedly the significant capital outlay required for such technology has been a barrier to adoption. The financial stakes for embracing new technology may be high, but the rewards could be transformative.

This intervention will help businesses understand the complexities of automation, and reduce the risk of wasted capital investment by seeing a demonstration of the technology and calculating the return on investment in advance of procurement.

Consultation with the industry to date has flagged the requirement for this intervention as "immediate".

4 Barclays Bank 2015, "Investment in manufacturing robotics could boost British economy". First accessed 20/5/20.

CAFRE has also engaged with, and drawn on the experience of other centres to maximise the impact of such an intervention in the MSW region. CAFRE has previously established links with both the University of Lincoln and Sheffield Hallam University, both of which have made considerable investments in food automation projects. They have attracted national R&D funding from a number of government interventions. Whilst Lincoln are further on their "automation journey", they cite the same rationale for the need for intervention and identify the same challenges. The university is, like CAFRE, keen to see robotics embedded in the curriculum as they have identified a shortage of future employees with the correct skills and knowledge.

A DAERA funded pilot project between CAFRE and NITC (scheduled to commence April 2021) will attempt to demonstrate this need and endorse this proposed intervention. CAFRE will adopt a formal programme and project management approach, supported by a Robotics and Automation Oversight Board (RAOB). The broad remit of the Board will provide overall direction and management for the project and to take key decisions including the commitment of resources.

THE VISION

This intervention will strive to:

- Establish a new Robotics & Automation Innovation Centre of Excellence at CAFRE's Loughry Campus, in the MSW region.
- Be the NI springboard for manufacturing innovation for the Food and Drinks Industry
- Provide the industry with access to the very latest manufacturing technology and Industry 4.0 smart automation, supported by experienced, professional engineers working with CAFRE Food Technologists
- Accelerate new technologies through the innovation phase by solving real-world industrial challenges through research and development.
- Create a unique environment where companies can develop prototypes, demonstrate scale-up, and experiment with new processes, materials and smart technologies before implementing in their own factories.
- Provide an innovation landscape which encourages technology pull-through from university laboratories to a pre-commercialisation scale, in collaboration with industry.
- Foster and support a collaborative manufacturing innovation ecosystem in NI that brings coherence and greater impact to the NI advanced manufacturing sector and greater national partnership and funding opportunities.
- Immerse future generations of food & drink learners in the latest new innovative technologies for the sector.
- Add to the value proposition of CAFRE's existing offer and footprint in the MSW region to support the growing food & drink sector through the co-location of services/resources on one site which will achieve significant economies of scale.
- Promote opportunities for other manufacturing and knowledge sectors to engage collaboratively with food businesses.

- As a similar requirement for all major CAFRE capital projects the RIAC will built to contemporary environmental standards to minimise the environmental footprint – being more effective in the use of resources in order to make large reductions in use of natural resources, carbon emissions and waste production.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We will

- Ensure the partnership between AMIC and CAFRE (through the RAIC) is delivered in collaboration with key industry stakeholders.
- Define how the RAIC, as part of the AMIC network in MSW, will ensure investment coordination between CAFRE and BRCD minimising duplication and waste
- Provide the Food Industry with a 'single front door' for accessing innovation support, skills development, state of the art equipment and specialist knowhow.
- Support industry collaboration with Universities and the Further Education sector who have expertise in the digital skills and knowledge associated with Industry 4.0.
- Provide the industry with access into advanced R&D and investment networks across the UK and Ireland - participate in major national innovation programmes and attract indigenous and foreign direct investment.
- Centre will share and disseminate best practice with other regions, establishing links with other similar centres.
- Act as the focal point for the development of higher value-added skills curriculum and related apprenticeships for advanced manufacturing and the industrial economy of the Food Industry.

CONCLUSION

It is anticipated that this intervention will bring substantial innovation, research and development, skills and workforce development benefits to one of our key manufacturing industries.

The project will aim to and deliver a close, collaborative relationship between the Robotics and Automation Innovation Centre and the proposed Engineering Innovation and Skills Centre, through South West College.

AGRI FOOD INCUBATION AND INNOVATION SECTOR SUPPORT

INTRODUCTION

The 'Going for Growth' strategy prepared by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) provides the policy context for the support and development of the agri food sector in Northern Ireland.
Evidence and data prepared by UUEPC and Morrow Gilchrist to inform the development of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy (RES) indicates the significance of the contribution of the agri food sector to the Mid South West Region and Northern Ireland economies.
Across the region there are a number of major food producers including Moypark, Irwins, Whites, Wilson Country, Strathroy Dairies, Dale Farm and Linden Foods. Many of the food producers have developed from small to medium enterprises up to major companies. The agri food sector is complex and is reliant upon an ecosystem that involves agricultural producers, growers, supplies, hospitality and logistics. As a result, the sector has a number of interdependencies.
The Year of Food and Drink in 2015 raised the importance of agri food from growers to chefs. However, the sector does not receive the profile to reflect its economic significance within Government and particularly in the Department for the Economy and Invest NI strategies and plans. The recently announced Economic Recovery Plan highlighted that a strategic review of agri food would take place between government departments and it is imperative that this review acknowledges the prominence of the sector and its economic contribution.

BACKGROUND

Information and support to agri food companies in Northern Ireland is provided by CAFRE, Southern Regional College (SRC), South West College (SWC) and the enterprise centres. Representatives from Queens University, Ulster University and groups including Manufacturing NI, Food NI and the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association provide advocacy and lobbying on behalf of their membership.
Anecdotal demand and queries highlighted the need to prioritisepre-enterprise, innovation and incubation space to support the further development of the sector.

THE OPPORTUNITY

A feasibility study undertaken by Williamson Consulting (attached) indicated the need for incubation facilities in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ACBCBC) area.
Proposals for new facilities within the Southern Regional College include two comprehensively equipped training/development kitchens which will be used for education and hire by businesses.
However, there is a requirement for manufacturing production facilities in a separate venue to encourage start-up businesses that have the ability to scale to move on to larger premises freeing up smaller facilities to accommodate new food businesses on an ongoing cyclical basis.
A new partnership structure will be set up to progress plans and facilitate the development of the food incubation and innovation project. Discussions have commenced with Invest NI, SRC, CAFRE and ACBCBC to more fully scope out and identify the needs of the sector.
Depending on the site and nature of the facility, it will need to be in an appropriately zoned site or one for which planning applications for change of use are likely to be favourable e.g. Denny's site, Portadown.

THE VISION

Food incubation facilities can include one or more of the following elements:

- Food grade small scale business incubation units- hese can be fully serviced and supported with add-on facilities or stand-alone
- Shared use production kitchen
- Shared use development kitchen
- Product test facilities
- Laboratory facilities
- Business Support Services
- Packaging and labelling support
- Advanced and specialist food technology and development support, advice and training facilities
- Technology sharing/transfer through partnership
- Food standard best practice support

It is evident from the feasibility study that there is ongoing demand for suitable start-up premises for agri food companies. In order to facilitate the wide ranging requirements of a variety of businesses, the following considerations apply:

- A site large enough to allow for parking and delivery vehicle access to all units
- Sufficient car parking
- Units with a very flexible layout, with the potential to incorporate:
    - Access for staff into changing area, with clothes hanging facilities and washing provision
    - Toilets accessible to changing area but not manufacturing or storage areas
    - External good access into an intake/dispatch area

- Goods storage area off intake/dispatch area with room for separate storage of finished goods and raw materials (possibly chilled/frozen although not included at this stage)
- Separate storage off the production/manufacturing space for packaging, cleaning materials (could be with the changing facilities) and food items
- Own door access and independent security arrangements
- Individual 3 phase electricity supply
- Individual water supply
- Drainage to food standards including individual grease traps for each unit
- Individual air handling/ventilation to generic food standards.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

ACBCBC commissioned KPMG to undertake a Recovery and Growth framework. An immediate action is to determine the needs and level of demand for pre incubation and innovation support.
In addition, Alan McKeown of Food for Thought has undertaken analysis relating to the development of an industrial challenge fund which identified the future research and development needs of businesses.
An agriculture strategy for ACBCBC will establish the need for access to future research for the agriculture and farming sector in the Mid South West Region. It is intended that this will be a separate but complementary innovation proposal developed in partnership with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).
As each of these pieces of research conclude, the evidence and data will shape an agri food incubation and innovation proposal and a proposal that will meet the future research needs of the agriculture and farming sector.

AGRI-TECH INNOVATION FACILITY - AFBI

Scope of intervention to be informed by ABCBC Agricultural Strategy

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIGI-HUB NETWORK IN MSW

The Mid South West (MSW) Regional Economic Strategy (RES) identified that, given the region's ageing population and expected slowdown in population growth, increasing productivity will become the most important driver for success. The RES also sets out a commitment to boosting innovation across existing and emerging sectors, including the digi-tech sector, which is currently under-represented across the region and presents a significant opportunity to super-charge economic growth and deliver high-value jobs.

To this end MSW will develop a network of Digi-Hubs to enable businesses to better understand how to start-up and/or improve their processes, products and services through the use of digital technologies. The hubs will be visible locally-based foci and will provide a structure for sectoral focus, leadership, networking and working remotely in small groups. In addition, they will enable collaboration between individuals/companies in the digital tech arena and local communities, and support stimulation of small scale innovation projects. They will also act as a 'gateway' into training and education.

The attached proposition for an 'Enterprise and Innovation Digi-Hub' (EDIH) in Omagh town centre will be the first digi-hub establishment within the MSW collaborative network. This digi- hub will be high spec and aligned to the South West College's Omagh Campus and Strule Shared Campus. It will seek to increase the proportion of the small business sector made up from the knowledge based economy and contribute to the infrastructure required to promote digi-tech entrepreneurship through partnerships between secondary and third level education, innovation and enterprise networks and the SME sector.

Planning for extending the collaborative digi-hub network is being progressed in other MSW locations including for example Banbridge, Portadown and Armagh to provide businesses and communities with the optimum opportunities to embrace digital transformation and/or the recreation of their technology practice and function. The context and scope of the wider network will be fully explored as part of the business planning process.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OMAGH ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION DIGI-HUB (EIDH)'

A key intervention proposed within the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy is the establishment of a network of digi-hubs across the MSW Region.

A digi-hub aims to provide a collaborative space for digi-tech companies to cluster and grow, aligned to wider support networks, eg, Council LED teams, enterprise companies, our regional colleges, Invest NI regional networks and with Catalyst Inc

BACKGROUND

Manufacturing (including Agri-food and Advanced forms) is central to the MSW region's economy providing almost a fifth (18%) of total workplace employment and a third (35%) of the region's GVA, well above the NI average for both. 39% of NI's Manufacturing employment is in the MSW region and 23% of its GVA. The region's economic profile has shown that it has less specialisation in the digi-tech sector.

The proposed intervention is located in the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area of the MSW region. The business base of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council is one of micro-business as 94% of businesses employ fewer than 9 people and 45% have a turnover of less than £50,000 per annum. A review of the economic performance data for the council area confirms the need for intervention as agriculture and construction dominate the small business sector. Average wages in the district are also below the NI average. There are high levels of entrepreneurial activity within the area with 11% of NI's businesses compared to 6% of the NI population, however, there is a need to support and promote the development and growth of these businesses, including through access to innovative approaches.

The labour market structure of Fermanagh and Omagh reflects that of NI with 73%/27% economically active/inactive. Lisanelly SOAs 1 and 2 which are located beside the proposed digi-hub site fall within the top 3 areas of multiple deprivation within the Council area. Through the provision of new employment opportunities, the EIDH will bring economic inclusion to some of Omagh's most disadvantaged wards.

The Council's educational outcomes are amongst the highest at LGD*14 level, with 62% of school leavers achieving at least 2 A Levels; 49% go on to higher education. Every student however does not achieve such grades and therefore the EIDH, through the provision of skills and employment, will contribute towards making these outcomes more equitable. As a result, investment in the EIDH will provide local opportunities for high value jobs, for which people are currently commuting outside the region or leaving the region to secure. The project will not only address the regional imbalance in the economy but also positively address issues of sustainability and climate change

Omagh has one of the highest rates of vacant sites across NI and this will be increased further through the relocation of 6 schools based in the town to the new

Strule Shared Campus which is due to open in 2025. The EIDH will transform 24,500 square feet of derelict space located in the town centre into a vibrant hub to allow local entrepreneurs, businesses and the community to prosper.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR AN INNOVATION AND DIGI-HUB IN OMAGH

The 'Stimulating Regional Economic Growth: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Smart Working' Report commissioned by Vodafone Ireland http://digitalmagazines.online/Vodafone_Gigabit_Hub_Report.pdf undertakes a study of the direct and indirect benefits of six digi-hubs located across rural Ireland in Dundalk, Drogheda, Kilkenny, Carlow, Kerry and Cork. The report concludes that "the growth of digital hubs and smart working is making a significant contribution to the renaissance of regional towns and is helping to alleviate urban migration and slower regional economic recovery". Some of the benefits evidenced in the report include:

• High-quality, highly skilled jobs in the regions

• Business creation, growth and expansion

• Increased economic activity, local spending and employment in rural towns

• Reduction in congestion and commute times

• Increased productivity.

To replicate the success experienced in Ireland, an opportunity exists to kick-start the process to create a network of digi-hubs across the MSW region through the development of an Enterprise and Innovation Digi Hub in Omagh located on the site of the vacated former Health Centre, sitting within the town centre boundary. This site has been acquired by Omagh Enterprise Company, supported by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, through the Community Asset Transfer process. The site is located adjacent to the South West College Omagh Campus on Mountjoy Road and close to the Strule Shared Campus which is due to open in 2025. This project offers an opportunity to support and diversify the existing business base, increase productivity and contribute to economic inclusion through the provision of higher wages and salaries. A strategic partnership with Catalyst Inc, Belfast will foster creativity and innovation to develop the right mix of skills for future sustainable economic growth. Project costs and the funding requirements are outlined below:

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a seismic and permanent change to way we work. Evidence from one research study has shown that the vast majority of global knowledge workers (72%) prefer a hybrid arrangement that combines the home and the office. Workers are far less enthusiastic about going all in on one environment: Only 12% would prefer working from the office all the time. https://slack.com/intl/en-gb/blog/collaboration/workplace-transformation-in-the-wake-of-covid-19 There will be a need to provide local opportunities to facilitate this shift with the opportunity to accommodate many digi-tech workers in locations closer to

their homes. Both Omagh Enterprise Company and Fermanagh Enterprise have noted this spike in demand over 2020 with both experiencing full occupancy levels.

THE NEW VISION

The Vision is to create positive opportunities to grow the economy by boosting the digi-tech sector in the MSW region through provision of collaborative networks and spaces to enable digi-tech companies to start-up, cluster and grow. A high spec digi-hub will be established in Omagh town centre aligned to the South West College Omagh Campus and Strule Shared Campus to increase the proportion of the Council's small business sector made up from the knowledge based economy and to contribute to the infrastructure required to promote digi-tech entrepreneurship through partnerships between secondary and third level education, innovation and enterprise networks and the SME sector.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

Refurbishment of the vacant former Omagh Health Centre building as an Enterprise and Innovation Digital Hub will provide transformational benefits across three themes, including:

1. **Building Communities**: • Supporting 40 businesses and creating 200 jobs. • Fostering enterprise, new business creation and social innovation within the community. • Providing a Digi-Hub to inspire and attract entrepreneurs, technology companies and community and voluntary groups to start sustainable businesses. • Developing strong and sustainable links between the six schools in the Strule Education Campus; South West College; businesses and industry; and enterprise and economic development support agencies. • Engaging with all stakeholders to disseminate best practice models of social enterprise to maximise their contribution to the community and the economy. • Offering opportunities for all sections of the community as the town centre location permits close working with thousands of students from schools and the South West College to nurture future digi-tech entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs. • Providing access to a super-fast fibre broadband infrastructure and modern facilities to enable local people and to develop competitive businesses for the digital age.

2. **Supporting People**: • Supporting people with a best practice enterprise and innovation digi-hub to ensure equity and inclusion for those living in areas of disadvantage with limited access to jobs or self-employment. • Providing flexible business workspace with 'easy-in, easy-out' leases for social entrepreneurs to work alongside and learn from commercial entrepreneurs • Supporting Department for Community and Council strategies for enterprise, social economy, economic development and town centre regeneration in line with the Outcomes Delivery and Community Plans. • Providing a pathway from education in the schools and college to self-employment and starting a

business as a viable career option. • Housing a Cafe Hub as a social enterprise run by entrepreneurs to employ local people and provide training and on the job experience. • Providing access to super-fast broadband for groups, students and young people interested in digi-tech self-employment and entrepreneurship. • Being led by an experienced Board of Directors and Management Team with a 30- year track record of success in developing similar projects as part of the organisation's core mission to support start-up, growth and social economy businesses.

3. **Shaping Places**: • Transforming a derelict building and site in an area of social need, which struggles to attract investment or offer opportunities to the community. • Providing a proven and sustainable model of entrepreneurship to help transform the town centre by creating jobs, building community resilience and social capital. • Supporting previous plans that proposed an enterprise quarter to rebalance town centre, through the refurbishment and regeneration of a derelict building to support the creation of 40 businesses and 200 jobs. • Providing a hub of enterprise and business activity that adds value to the lives of communities, residents, entrepreneurs, students and visitors to the town. • Making a unique contribution to place shaping through the development of a regionally significant and completely sustainable flagship project.

CONCLUSION

The RES has established that it is essential the MSW Region invests in new and emerging sectors if it is to achieve its overall ambition to raise productivity and provide better jobs. A key enabler to achieve this is through boosting innovation and digital activity. Our region has an unrivalled track record of entrepreneurship and innovation. Given the right conditions through the provision of facilities, services and access to a collaborative and creative ecosystem within a digi-hub, there is no doubt that our people have the skills, energy and enthusiasm to take advantage of such an opportunity.

The Omagh digi-hub is the start of a regional MSW network of digi-hubs. This network will also facilitate the switch to new patterns of work, as demand for close to home enterprise hubs that provide business support and access to superfast broadband increases. The trend is already evident in everyday business activity as a significant structural and long-term economic growth model for regional towns and rural areas. Our region has already demonstrated that diverse and exciting indigenous businesses create high-value, quality jobs locally, injecting revenue back into rural towns and reducing the migration of people to urban centres and this intervention will support that.

TRANSFORMING OUR HIGH STREETS – Part 1 (Physical)

The purpose of this paper is to set out the case for much needed investment into Mid South West (MSW) Regional High Streets to enable a process of reinvention and transformation, reshaping our town centres by implementing ambitious, innovative and fresh interventions. The term 'high street' is used throughout the paper to describe the principal shopping area of our regional town centres.

BACKGROUND – THE CHALLENGES FOR MSW HIGH STREETS

The role and presence of our high streets has shifted dramatically in recent decades as a result of the inexorable rise of online shopping, change in global trends and national issues like austerity. The need to live more sustainably combined with addressing changing customer behaviours has resulted in high streets needing to be reinvented, repurposed and attract a mix of uses beyond the buying and selling of goods. Furthermore, the physical configuration of our high streets has shifted since the 1980's giving way to a more mixed picture to where people shop, with an increasing bias towards prime out-of-town locations and retail parks. Whilst it is acknowledged that this shift has brought many benefits to consumers and overall retail performance, we recognise the significant impact on our declining town centres creating longer term sustainability challenges.

MSW region high streets are facing significant challenges as a consequence of lack of competitiveness due to higher operating costs than online competitors (eg property costs), underperformance, evolving economies, developing capability and changing technologies, advancements in artificial intelligence and automation, and the impact of coronavirus. These challenges have been further amplified with the implementation of mitigation measures to ensure customer safety, more precautionary consumer actions and subdued confidence levels leading to further decline in footfall and customer spending.

During lockdown multiple aspects of our shopping habits changed, resulting in people rediscovering their local areas and rethinking what they want from villages, towns and high streets, not just in relation to consumables. The reality of this 'new normal' has brought customer expectations into sharp focus with the demands for a different high street experience, one which embraces culture, community and everyday economies, digitally smart technologies and infrastructures, provides access to services, gateways to recreational and greenspaces, promotes active travel and considers accessibility for all users.

MSW high streets are facing the following common challenges and trends (in no particular order):-

- Dramatic impact of Covid-19 and social distancing/capacity requirements as a direct consequence of the pandemic and adjusting to the “new normal”;
- Building consumer confidence to visit high streets;
- Accelerated trend towards online shopping
- Changing shopping habits/patterns e.g. more people shopping during the week and/or on an ‘as needed’ basis;
- Declining footfall and spend across high streets;
- Rising vacancy and dereliction levels;
- Contracting retail sector/retail declining as a dominant occupier in town centres;
- Decline in traditional outdoor markets;
- Protecting the current business base;
- Falling market demand/low level of investor confidence;
- Rising costs of doing business and the need for rates reform;
- Changing work patterns, with more people working flexibly and remotely;
- Rising unemployment affecting disposable income;
- Constrained areas for transport modes, pedestrian, cycle and vehicular;
- Increasing traffic congestion, air pollution and climate emergency (green agenda);
- Achieving sustainability and inclusive economic growth;
- Need for functional shared spaces for the community to reconnect with each other e.g. pop-up parks;
- Uncertainty of Brexit impacts;
- Changing demographics including a growing elderly population.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MSW HIGH STREETS

Notwithstanding the coronavirus crisis an opportunity exists for MSW to reimagine, regenerate and transform its high streets for the future, and indeed shape the ‘new normal’. It is an opportunity to recognise uniqueness and how local assets can be best developed and used to create safer, more attractive, accessible and vibrant places. MSW high streets must adapt and diversify into ‘multi-functional places’, which no longer rely on retail but offer wide ranging uses which contribute to the economic performance of the area as a whole.

MSW high street interventions must ultimately create the conditions that will attract greater numbers of people to live, visit, shop, work, walk and play, which collectively will increase spending in the region. As retail, society, technology and consumer behaviours continue to change, this transformation is essential not only to survive but to thrive. Interventions must therefore be significant in scale, scope and ambition in order to derive maximum benefit.

Multifunctional high streets will concentrate retail uses in primary cores with a wider range of commercial, cultural, community and residential uses encouraged to locate and revitalise secondary and tertiary areas. Success can be measured in

harmonising a broad mix of uses such as enterprise, residential, civic and cultural buildings, green spaces, offices etc.

The following opportunities have been identified to support the transformation of MSW high streets:-

- **Reimagining the physical and digital infrastructure** of Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Lurgan, Portadown, Enniskillen, Omagh, Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt;
- **Reviewing land uses** with a view to delivering viable multi-functional centres e.g. community, retail, office, hospitality, entertainment, housing, leisure etc;
- **Delivering smart technology** solutions and provide for inclusive digital connectivity – consideration of the revolutionary impact of digital technologies to create smart towns/city;
- **Wider place shaping** and urban regeneration through which high street rejuvenation will be embedded;
- **Identity** branding our high streets and town centres to show how the destination is unique and differentiates (and the experience they offer) from competitors'. The heritage and natural assets of our urban centres are often lost or hidden away due to a focus on historic uses that no longer occur or are considered irrelevant to the day-to-day functioning of the centre;
- **Quality of public realm** – transforming our high streets to be more accessible, for instance: rethinking parking provision, making wayfinding easier, provision of sustainable transport solutions etc.

An opportunity exists for MSW to introduce high street initiatives and interventions that will meet the needs of communities and customers now and into the future by investing in the right offering, facilities and experiences which will ultimately drive economies and footfall. MSW councils do not underestimate the challenges ahead and recognise that a place shaping approach, one which requires collaboration, collective action and decision making in the planning and delivery of targeted interventions is needed. Focus will be placed on shifting mind-sets from the traditional high street offering to more vibrant centres capitalising on natural assets and everyday economies, opportunities for increased social interaction and dwell time, access to services and maximising benefit for a broad mix of users.

A VISION FOR MID SOUTH WEST HIGH STREETS / TOWN CENTRES – POWER TO CHANGE

High streets are at the heart of our communities and are in a good position to reinvent and transform themselves. It is important to be bold in setting a vision which focuses on our high streets becoming more attractive, vibrant, diverse, inclusive, healthy and safe places to invest, work, live, meet, shop and visit.

MSW will create modern, vibrant and economically thriving urban centres taking advantage of the existing natural assets, heritage, cultures, neighbourhoods, and requirements of our residents and visitors to drive prosperity.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

MSW will deliver both a targeted and trial programme of interventions that will transform the economic, environmental, physical and digital infrastructure of our urban centres. Interventions will be test beds for new opportunities and will facilitate the delivery of creatively designed residential, leisure, retail, enterprise and infrastructure to connect people, places and spaces.

MSW aims to deliver targeted initiatives that will be:

- **Transformative** addressing under investment in our high street destinations to deliver exemplar places that will showcase and provide for current, emerging, and future priorities.
- **Vibrant** building an ecosystem of trade for the future with returning day and evening activity and footfall to key areas.
- **Unique** focusing on the natural, historic and cultural assets within our high streets/town centres to create a complementary smart and high tech identity.
- **Liveable** delivering residential living within our urban centres which will provide a range of social, cultural and economic opportunities.
- **Diverse** reflecting how people wish to live, work, enjoy their free time and support their local economy through a wider range of viable uses which are complementary to a more concentrated retail core.

The overall thrust and vision for our high streets will be based on the principles of determining change, promoting inclusive economies, design for mixed uses, managing assets innovatively, trialling new approaches and digitally transforming. Focus will be placed on experimental, strategic and pivotal initiatives which address transformation, underinvestment and underperformance through the targeting of key properties, historic and culture assets, long term vacancy and opportunity sites. This will involve investing in a combination of strategic capital and marketing projects.

The 'Transforming our High Street' intervention would incorporate the following **two** component parts-

3. Creating Spaces and Places for the Future

A capital financial support package to enable physical transformation through the acquisition, demolition, reconfiguration, rebuilding, revitalisation and/or redevelopment of properties/assets/sites/public spaces in order to unlock their economic potential. Unlocking their economic potential will act as a catalyst for high street revival, showcase new opportunities and an intense mix of uses, provide connectivity and infrastructure that will undergird transformation and

redevelopment, and improve the visual amenity, identity and connectivity of an area. This component part will also provide challenge funds to incentivise property owners to invest in the reuse and repurposing of their derelict/empty premises to create modern, lettable and digitally connected commercial and/or residential spaces. A wrap-around service to assist property owners to test innovative approaches and management when securing tenants for disused/underutilised commercial premises will be introduced.

4. Connected for the Future

This component part will deliver major digital and eco-friendly initiatives to reinvigorate MSW high streets. Focus will be placed on the development and implementation of adaptive, connected technologies and sustainable interventions to create 'smart towns' and provide a 'digital springboard' for businesses to maximise the benefits of the digital economy. Interventions will include provision of high speed connectivity including 5G technology integration, smart and enabling technologies, big data capability, green transport systems and building innovative construction solutions to deliver high tech infrastructural improvements/advancements. Carbon emission reduction, adoption of green building practices and green growth will also be key in delivery of interventions. In addition, interventions will look to showcase and promote the latest available technologies and digital applications/tools that willhelp grow the region's urban centres as unique, modern, connected, healthy and sustainable places to live and work.

Both component parts will support the viability and vitality of our rapidly evolving high streets by unlocking economic potential and leveraging private sector investment.

CONCLUSION

MSW Region high streets have reached a turning point. Lessons learned in recent years show that greater innovation, collaboration, collective action and decision making, and significant financial investment are all necessary to support a process of transformation in order to meet the evolving needs of consumers, businesses, investors and communities.

MSW councils recognise that reinvention and transformation of the Region's high streets will require substantial commitment and investment from the Northern Ireland Executive, UK Government and other funding sources. Such investment will enable our high streets to be convenient, connected, enterprising, offer certainty of product availability, provide experiences that cannot be replicated online, and an intense mix of uses to become places of choice for communities to live, visit, shop, work, walk and play.

The interventions to be delivered in achieving the ambitions for our High Streets are significant, but appropriate in light of the challenges faced. It is anticipated that the NI

Executive will invest in Part 1 ‘Creating Spaces and Places for the Future’; and the UK Government in Part 2 ‘Connected for the Future’. Although we are seeking investment for the component parts from the two separate sources, we anticipate that both parts will be delivered in parallel.

DEVELOPMENT OF 'THE O'NEILL' TOURISM PROPOSITION

The Mid South West (MSW) Region encompasses two of the most important historic sites in Ireland; Hill of the O Neill and Tullaghoge Fort. Both attractions are of major historical and cultural significance within Irish history and have an exceptional ability to drive footfall to Co Tyrone and the wider Northern Ireland region. This paper will document the much needed interventions that are required to elevate Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort in providing a significant proposition and competitive advantage to position MSW region within the 'all island' visitor economy. These ambitious interventions will take a three pronged approach with focus on the creation of exceptionally high quality product development, the implementation of state of the art digital solutions and the enhancement of the tourism infrastructure. The innovative, ground breaking interventions proposed will uplift these visitor attractions and in addition the town of Dungannon onto the world stage, competing with internationally renowned immersive visitor experiences.

Above map shows the location of Hill of The O'Neill, Dungannon and Tullaghoge Fort near Cookstown

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the late 16th Century, Dungannon was the powerbase of Gaelic Ireland and the centre of world affairs as Hugh O Neill, Earl of Tyrone challenged English rule in Ireland. The Nine Year's War, often referred to as Tyrone's rebellion, was the climax of English attempts to conquer Ireland dating back to the Norman invasion in the 12th century. With Spanish military assistance, the powerful military alliance led by Hugh O'Neill of Tír Eoghain and Red Hugh O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, threatened to defeat the English at the Battle of Kinsale on December 24, 1601.

The Gaelic chieftains were defeated at the Battle of Kinsale and Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell were eventually forced to leave Ireland, in what is now known as the "Flight of the Earls," in 1607. The two Irish chieftains accompanied by over ninety of their followers, set sail from Donegal, bound for Spain. This period in Irish History effectively ended the Gaelic order in Ireland and paved the way for the "Plantation of Ulster".

The Flight of The Earls in 1607 is unquestionably one of the most pivotal events in Irish history, during which the Earls of Ulster fled from Ireland to Europe to avoid being captured and imprisoned by the English. This signified the end of an era in Irish history, of Ireland being ruled by Gaelic chieftains. While the English had been present in parts of Ireland since the 11th century, it was only after the *Flight of The Earls* that the English took control of the entire country. In the period that followed, major changes occurred as the English seized the opportunity to complete their plans for the Plantation of Ulster. The events that happened during this historical period helps to explain the complexion of the Northern Ireland in which we live today.

Tullaghoge Fort and Hill of The O'Neill fall within the Mid Ulster District Council area. Tullaghoge Fort, Cookstown was the historical O'Neill seat of power and inauguration site from the 11th century. While the O'Neill's later moved to the strategic hilltop in Dungannon in the late 13th century, Tullaghoge Fort remained as the site where generations of future O'Neill's would be inaugurated as the Chieftain of Tír Eoghain, high king of Ulster. Both locations are impressive with commanding views over the vast swathes of lands controlled by The O'Neill's for nearly 400 years, reflecting their dominance over a significant period in Ireland's history.

The story of the Gaelic chieftains notably spans across the MSW region and indeed throughout Ireland. The collective history within the region provides us with significant competitive advantage over other areas. Capitalising on this historical narrative will not only benefit the Mid Ulster region but also has potential for the entire MSW area and will act as a catalyst for partnership projects encouraging working as a collective to elevate the tourism offering within the region.

English cartographer, Richard Bartlett's historic depiction (circa 1602) of Hill of the O Neill Dungannon (centre) and Tullaghoge Fort, the crowning site of The O'Neill's (bottom) depicting the Leac na Rí (seat of kings).

Historically referred to as "Bartlett's map" this image clearly demonstrates the significant connection between both Tullaghoge Fort and Hill of the O Neill in this period of Irish History, a connection that has continued to the modern day.

BACKGROUND

These two cultural heritage locations have major significance within the context of Irish, British and European history and should be matched with investment that positions them amongst the leading Cultural Heritage attractions within Ireland that appeal to national and international visitors.

Currently both locations and, by association Dungannon town, struggle to compete within the tourism market due to a number of interdependent factors. Firstly, an over reliance on traditional methods of interpreting this intriguing and central story in our shared history. There is an increasing requirement for strong experiential tourism. Investment is required to fully realise the economic, cultural and social potential that exists to transform and re-imagine the heritage offering and to capitalise on the story of the O Neill's and the history of Ireland's Gaelic chieftains.

Tourists/visitors to cultural heritage sites now demand "info-cultural-tainment" experiences combining leisure, entertainment, culture, education and sociability. As a result, Cultural Heritage and tourist attractions are using modern technologies, such as Augmented Reality (AR), to enhance visitor attractions with, and perceptions of their real-world environment. AR is widely regarded as one of the most promising and cutting edge technologies of modern times and its development and implementation in a cultural heritage setting provides opportunities for increasing competitiveness; to create new value at cultural heritage sites where visitors can

explore the unfamiliar surroundings in an enjoyable and unique way; contributing significantly to an enhanced and enriched cultural heritage experience; and providing greater scope to reach wider audiences than ever before.

Secondly, Dungannon town centre, despite its rich heritage and central position in Irish history, faces significant challenges. Like many high streets and town centres across the UK, it too is encountering a steep decline in footfall. Given its historic town status, Dungannon is largely dependent upon the travel tourist to attract footfall into the town centre.

Lack of accommodation and hotel provision presents challenges in attracting visitors, with the majority of beds available centered in Belfast. Dungannon, despite its central location, has no hotel provision. Notwithstanding the historic challenges of no overnight stay provision, now there is an opportunity to replicate the successes of projects undertaken elsewhere in NI in the acquisition, restoration and redevelopment of key historical assets as boutique style accommodation and other complimentary facilities. Unlocking this economic potential will act as a catalyst for leveraging private sector investment into Dungannon town centre together with enhancing the visual aesthetics of the heritage townscape.

CHALLENGES

The emergence of new adaptive and interactive technologies has transformed the Tourism sector. These technologies have revolutionised travel behaviours, such as decision making and information searching, radically transforming traditional business channels and value networks. To be competitive and financially viable within the rapidly developing Cultural Tourism sector it is necessary to pursue new ways of providing enhanced, enriched and unique visitor experiences, while also offering value added services at Hill of The O'Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and the development of Dungannon as a historic visitor destination.

The MSW region faces the challenge of attracting visitors inland. Visitors continue to be drawn to the world renowned Causeway coastal route. In 2019 Tourism Northern Ireland launched the 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' brand. A significant objective of this initiative, was to ensure greater dispersal of the tourism offering across Northern Ireland. The growth of the industry increased more rapidly than anticipated with NI "welcoming 5.3 million visitors in 2019 who spent an unprecedented £1 billion".

In addition, there has also been a greater demand from tour operators for new experiences and attractions in Northern Ireland. Mid Ulster and the wider MSW region is rich in archaeological, heritage and cultural tourism. Through closer collaborative working investment in the growth and development of these prestigious historical assets, and the implementation of immersive digital technologies will create a world class visitor destination. This transformation will deliver a competitive heritage offering and become a critical economic driver in rejuvenating Hill of The O'Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and Dungannon town.

OPPORTUNITIES

A key strand within the Mid Ulster District Council Tourism Strategy is archaeological sites, history and heritage. The strategy highlights that "*Mid Ulster is the only place to appreciate the history and importance of the O'Neill's and the Flight of the Earls, while also being at the centre of the C17th plantation movement*". The strategy recognises the uniqueness of the district to exploit the history of the O'Neill's, the Flight of the Earls, and the development of the plantations offering a significant and compelling tourism proposition, exploitation of which will give not only Mid Ulster but the entire MSW region significant competitive advantage.

In 2016 there were 7.3 million visits to heritage attractions in Northern Ireland, including historic properties, museums and art galleries, visitor and heritage centres, workplaces and places of worship (Source: NISRA). When we invest in heritage we support business growth, increase tourism, attract new business and create jobs. UK studies show that the historic environment offers a high return on investment. Each £1 invested generates up to £1.60 of additional economic activity over a ten-year period.

Since 2017, both Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort have witnessed limited growth in visitor numbers (see below). Significant investment in the heritage sites proposed, through the use of immersive and innovative digital technologies, has the ability to radically transform the potential of the unique heritage offering within the region, increase visitor numbers and spend, and establish the region as a national and international heritage and cultural tourism destination.

Visitor numbers to Tullaghoge Fort

2017 (Jan-Dec)	12,000
2018 (Jan –Dec)	11,213
2019 (Jan –Dec)	10,778
2020 (Jan-Dec)	13,989

Paying Visitor Numbers to Hill of The O Neill

2016/17 (April-March)	49,546
2017/18 (April-March)	84,645
2018/19 (April-March)	55,861
2019/20 (April-March)	52,954

The proposed interventions at the sites will contribute significantly to both profit generation and economic growth for the MSW region heritage tourism sector. Studies have shown that if "visitors have a better experience using AR, they are likely to stay longer which would increase their likelihood of spending more money in the region. In turn, this would create a better reputation, broadening the target market, while attracting more visitors, increasing ticket sales and use of local infrastructure, as well as creating more tourism spend to invest back into the area".

Key Economic Benefits of Heritage Tourism

- Heritage tourism is a vital part of the UK economy. In 2015, domestic and international tourists made 192 million trips to visit the UK's cultural, historic and natural assets. They spent £17.5 billion while doing so.

- The heritage tourism sector itself generated an £8.8 billion gross value added contribution to UK GDP and 191,000 jobs.
- In Northern Ireland heritage tourism supported gross value added contributions to GDP of up to £1 billion.
- In terms of share, natural and non-natural heritage attractions made similar contributions to the UK economy, although average spend is slightly higher for non-natural attractions.
- Heritage tourism is high-value. Relative to all tourists on holiday and visiting friends and relatives, those visiting heritage attractions are more likely to be overseas visitors, who spend on average £560 per trip, or domestic overnight visitors, who spend on average £210 per trip, rather than domestic day visitors who spend circa £35 per trip.
- The heritage tourism sector also supports jobs throughout its supply chain by purchasing inputs of goods and services.
- Wage payments made by the heritage tourism sector and its suppliers support additional economic activity and jobs.

THE VISION

Our vision is to create a strong unique heritage proposition within the sector that will elevate the historic townscape of Dungannon and two of the most strategically important sites in Ireland; Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort, into an unrivalled world class tourism attraction and destination. This will be achieved through:

- introduction of interactive sculptural pieces;
- location specific innovative and interactive lighting solutions to connect the visitor to Hill of The O'Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and the town of Dungannon;
- enhanced product development to include for example innovative technologically driven public events and performances;
- creation of a strong infrastructure, and technologically advanced and connected day and evening visitor experiences;
- providing visitors with the full panoptic experiences across the vast swathes of surrounding lands;
- provision of new, improved and repurposed enabling infrastructure to realise the full potential of the historic locations including for example roads, public transport, utilities, parking, active travel and signage;
- an array of immersive and social experiences tailored to suit a broad range of groupings and ages.

Through these interdependent interventions we will extensively enhance the tourism offering within the MSW region which will appeal to the culturally curious market including visitors from: Northern Ireland, Ireland and beyond. In addition, these developments will act as substantial economic drivers of growth, increase competitiveness, market share and significantly grow GVA. It is anticipated that the interventions proposed will increase current visitor numbers and spend in the region tenfold over the first five-year period.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

4. <u>Implementation of state of the art digital solutions</u>

Installation and further extension of innovative and digitised exhibition offering at Hill of the O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort.

Development of AV filming with cutting edge special effects at Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort, transporting the visitor back to a time when Chieftains ruled Ireland.

Development of AR immersive technologies - Deep frame technology, including AR APP technology that signposts visitors to areas throughout the MSW region, including AR enhanced fixed binocular stations that spans across the lands ruled by the O Neill dynasty.

We seek to create state of the art attractions that combine a suite of immersive soundscapes and lightscapes to link Dungannon Town to the Hill of The O'Neill. Multi-screen projections, physical props and structures, 360 degree projections and Augmented Reality (AR) portals will enable visitors to delve into our complex history through an innovative, imaginative, inspiring, engaging and fully immersive experience. An experience that connects the heritage sites of Tullaghoge Fort, Hill of The O'Neill and the town of Dungannon to encourage the visitor to explore the townscape, the architecture and the history associated with the buildings. These interventions will take visitors through a journey; one that is unique to the region and pushes the boundaries of traditional heritage attraction experiences, immersing them in this significant period of Irish history. This proposition can equally be expanded to benefit the entire MSW region with various linkages to notable connected sites to the story of The O'Neill's and the Clans of Ulster, notably the site of the Battle of The Yellow Ford in Armagh, Enniskillen Castle and the ancient O'Neill crowning site at Dun Ruadh which lies on the border between Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

5. <u>Product Development</u>

Removal of telecommunications mast located at Hill of The O'Neill

During the Troubles, the site of Hill of the O Neill was used as an Army base under the control of the Ministry of Defence, at which time a telecommunications mast was erected on the historic site. Despite the fact that the site is no longer used as a military installation, the telecommunications mast has remained and continues to be used by telecomms providers and as a transmitter for local emergency services. The mast is an imposing structure that dominates both the heritage site and the wider landscape of Dungannon Town Centre and significantly

detracts from the visitor experience (as can be seen from attached image). The intervention proposed will require the mast and the metal walkways onsite to be removed, thus ensuring that the aesthetics and visitor experience of this location is greatly enhanced. A significant proposition for development will be the replacement of the mast with a site specific interactive sculptural piece and viewing platform that will connect the site to the town centre of Dungannon and provide visitors with a focal point in its own right, but also provide visitors with unrivalled views of seven counties that was once ruled by the O Neill dynasty at the height of their reign as Chieftains of Tír Eoghain and High Kings of Ulster.

Unearthing the 16th century tower house remains

The Channel 4 *Time Team* television programme visited the site in 2007, during which time a large area of the site was excavated and which uncovered the walls of O'Neill's medieval tower house, surrounded by a section of wall belonging to the military fort that was constructed by Arthur Chichester after he gained possession of the hill fort in the early 17th century. This important historical feature will be re-exposed and covered with a transparent walking surface allowing visitors to view these significant archaeological structure underfoot feet. The feature will also be enhanced through the use of AR technology to enhance the presentation of the archaeology that has remained unseen for in excess of 400 years.

Art sculptures at Tullaghoge Fort and Hill of The O'Neill

The creation of two interactive sculptural art pieces developed to reflect the historical significance of both sites. These sculptural pieces will be further enhanced through the use of augmented reality solutions and will connect the story of each site location as well as linking to the heritage town of Dungannon.

Creation of C16th Gaelic Irish Wattle and Daub dwelling

There is growing emphasis and demand to create authentic tourism experiences where the visitor can take part and feel fully immersed in history. The creation of a native Irish dwelling provides an imaginative and compelling experience, allowing us to expand our appeal and market share to include Aspiring Families (TNI). This will be augmented through the use of living history digital solutions to recreate the sight, sounds and smells of a 16th Century dwelling, contributing to a unique and memorable visitor experience. As the domestic market will be a key component for the success of the tourism sector in Northern Ireland moving forward, by extending our target market into this core segment will present additional opportunities to drive continued and sustained growth. This will also support and enhance existing education programme provision making it more attractive to schools throughout Ireland to visit The Hill of The O Neill, Tullaghoge Fort and Dungannon Town.

Creation of Educational Resource Area at Tullaghoge Fort

This resource will create the capacity to offer a year round educational programme as well as enhanced visitor experience through the use of innovative and immersive digital technologies to convey the history of the site in an engaging and fully immersive manner and connect Tullaghoge Fort to the Hill of The O'Neill and Dungannon town.

Development of heritage townscape

The cumulative interventions will stimulate and support the wider economic regeneration of Dungannon by enhancing its distinctive historic character. Through the use of new innovative technologies such as smart, sustainable lighting systems and innovative digital solutions we will connect the historic hill to the town centre to increase awareness of the rich built and cultural heritage of Dungannon. Thus depicting how the Ulster Planation impacted upon the architecture and creation of Dungannon town as we know it today.

6. <u>Enhancement of tourism infrastructure</u>

Refurbishment of the events space at Hill of The O'Neill

The Events Space is located on Hill of The O'Neill and has capacity for 1200 people. Unique in its architecture, it includes a 360 degree viewing tower, meeting room and large outdoor auditorium. It does however have seasonal restrictions, as it is primarily an outdoor venue, and many of the events delivered are largely dependent on weather conditions.

The enhancement of this space, through the creation of immersive interactive LED touch screen walls that will relay the history of the O'Neill dynasty, the Flight of the Earls and the plantation of Ulster period to the visitor, will also enable large scale indoor events to be staged. Thereby acting as a key economic driver and catalyst for the regeneration of the area, creating jobs, boosting both the daytime and night time economy and escalating the tourism infrastructure and offering to an international level.

Restoration of historic buildings connected to Dungannon Heritage (Longer Term Ambition)

As a part of our longer term ambitions we will seek to acquire and/or partner with private sector to reimagine key historic buildings located in Dungannon centre to further enhance the historic prominence of the town which could be developed to create boutique style accommodation and/or other complimentary facilities. The benefits from the restoration and repurposing of other historic buildings within Northern Ireland is demonstrated by examples such as Titanic Drawing rooms (Titanic Hotel) and Northern Counties building (Bishops Gate Hotel). This intervention would act as a significant catalyst for the future development of the area, creating long term benefits

in terms of confidence building, economic development, and stimulation of private sector investment, job creation, and regeneration of Dungannon.

CONCLUSION

The O'Neill story is at the centre of Irish and European history. It has been included in the Tourism NI brand for Northern Ireland 'Embrace A Giant Spirit' as a unique authentic, experience. The MSW region has significant competitive advantage in terms of heritage and the ability to exploit the story of The O'Neill's, the Flight of the Earls and the Plantation of Ulster. This strong proposition enhances the competitiveness of the area as it allows the visitor to understand this significant period in Irish history.

Significant investment is required to improve the infrastructure, innovate and enhance the visitor experience to compete in a highly, competitive market place. Through the development of this innovative and exciting proposition MSW will foster greater partnerships across the region and further build upon the story and the historic heritage offering at Hill of The O'Neill and Tullaghoge Fort through digital and immersive technologies, product development and enhanced infrastructure. Delivering on this ambitious proposition will require partnership working at all levels including Mid Ulster District Council, DFC Historic Environment Division, NI Environment Agency, Dungannon Town Centre Forum, businesses etc.

ARMAGH CITY REINVIGORATION

This intervention focuses on the need to significantly invest in MSW physical and digital infrastructure, with targeted investment in tourism hubs, to improve the region's competitiveness, increasing market share and growing GVA.

The City of Armagh is set within a picturesque landscape of drumlins, characteristic of county Armagh. Armagh is Ireland's oldest city, with evidence of human settlement dating back 6,500 years. In early history, Navan Fort, on the west of the City, was seat to the kings of Ulster. Arguably, Armagh's defining moment occurred when St. Patrick arrived in 445 AD, establishing a principal church on a hilltop.

Due to the importance of place, Armagh became an academic centre with educational institutions including the Public Library in 1771, the Armagh Observatory in 1790 and much later the Planetarium in 1968.

For these reasons, Armagh City is recognised as one of the key tourism hubs in Northern Ireland, and a Tier 1 priority in the Council's Tourism Strategy 2017-2022. With a wealth of heritage buildings, two magnificent cathedrals, museums and libraries, an observatory and planetarium and beautiful green spaces, there is much to admire about this ancient city.

Armagh has previously benefited from investment in public realm schemes and a number of heritage protection and preservation projects, including the current Townscape Heritage programme. Recent investments in the Southern Regional College and Market Place Theatre & Arts Centre provides state of the art facilities which will boost the arts, educational and evening economy sectors.

Much work remains to be done to maximise the tourism potential of Armagh City as a result of a growing tourism economy in Northern Ireland, and there is much economic benefit that can be derived. The time is right to invest in projects of scale in order to provide more coherent and welcoming tourism destinations for visitors leading to further investment by the private sector and a growth in GVA from a relatively low base.

This project centres on the reinvigoration of Armagh City through a number of interventions including investment in new digital technologies as well as enabling infrastructure. Cognisance will be taken of complementary interventions proposed for inclusion in the Mid South West Region Growth Deal including the 'Transforming our High Streets' proposal, delivery of the A28 Armagh East Link and the development of the Armagh Gaol.

BACKGROUND

The MSW Strategy clearly articulates the challenges faced by the MSW region in terms of a declining share of overnight visitors to NI; though the converse to that is tourism to NI had increased significantly between 2013 and 2018 so the market to Northern Ireland does exist. Northern Ireland has experienced significantly less growth in GVA than the Republic of Ireland. A key part of Tourism NI's strategy to overcome this is to grow tourism in the regions across Northern Ireland. Armagh has been identified by Tourism NI as a City with significant growth potential. Attracting a greater share of tourism to NI is about providing attractive, inspiring, safe, welcoming, interesting, authentic places to visit, stay and enjoy. The core of that is in Armagh – it is now about shaping and honing that offer to become a viable longer term proposition.

As per above, there has been significant investment in the attractions, hotel and wider accommodation product in other regions in Northern Ireland. Similar levels of investment intervention in MSW have not taken place or not to the same degree with private sector investment more prevalent in larger urban areas compared with the MSW region.

Armagh City is also off the key tourism route in Ireland which tends to focus on the coast, which has made attracting visitors inland more difficult.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The opportunity exists to focus investment in Armagh City through a series of direct interventions and joint working with the private sector. These interventions will act as a pump-prime and a catalyst to leverage additional investment from the private sector and other stakeholders across health, leisure, hospitality and the evening economy sectors all of which will be complemented by an animation programme to draw visitors to the city. This integrated programme of investment will demonstrate the regional significance of Armagh City as a destination for both visitors and its citizens and will be fundamental to its future vibrancy and longer term sustainability.

THE VISION

The Armagh Masterplan sets out the following vision;

"The historic City of Armagh will flourish as a lively and attractive place in which to live, work and visit. Known far and wide as the cultural and religious capital of the island, the city's cherished buildings, streets and spaces will provide the fine backdrop to a forward-thinking European destination. Excellent amenities for residents, businesses and visitors, strengthened by improved environment and connectivity will underpin the success of a creative, friendly and people orientated City Centre."

In more recent times the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Tourism Strategy articulated the following vision:

'*"to be a market leading cultural tourism destination in Ireland by 2022".*

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We are going to develop and deliver a series of interventions, including through private sector partnerships, to reinvigorate Armagh City as a destination for visitors and residents to enjoy, and as a place for businesses to invest in.

Some of the key interventions include:

- Investment in the city's vacant building stock to create quality accommodation in line with other MSW pillars and priorities;
- Undertake restoration works at the majestic Mall, a fabulous green space located right in the heart of the city;
- Improve navigation and orientation in the city through investment in welcome, signage and digital infrastructures and in the creation of interesting linkages between places of leisure, living, recreation and working;
- Implement a city wide innovate lighting scheme which will literally shine a light on the city's beautiful streetscapes, landmark buildings and spaces many of which are Listed to illuminate the city's Conservation Area and enhance the most surprising and delightful of views;
- Implement the city cycling strategy to encourage active travel by providing sustainable means of connecting neighbourhoods, moving residents and visitors across the city and beyond to the Greenways on the outskirts of the urban area;
- Implement a pedestrianisation scheme in Market Street to create a safe and welcome environment for all, opening up traditional alleyways thus enhancing visitor flows;
- Invest in key heritage buildings across the city in order to attract new health, recreation and business tenants;
- Initiatives which tell the story of the City and move people across the City, this could include a reimagined museum offering and evening economy initiatives;
- Infrastructure projects including, for example, a Coach Park for Armagh and improved car parking as well as opportunities for Park & Share provision; and
- Investment in the Navan Centre, working alongside Historic Environment Division to create an attractive complementary visitor proposition for the city.

Bringing forward the A28 Armagh East Link will alleviate traffic congestion and pollution greatly enhancing the impact of the interventions outlined above.

CONCLUSION

Armagh is Ireland's oldest City, with a unique history and heritage that has been acknowledged by Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland as a place of significance with considerable tourism potential.

However, from a tourism perspective there are infrastructure challenges and significant investment is required to fully realise the City's potential and its ability to

compete on an international stage as a tourism destination. Investment on the scale required will give the private sector confidence to invest in the City and ultimately have an enduring impact on GVA.

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

COOKSTOWN HEALTH AND CARE HUB

A healthy community is a productive community. Improved health and wellbeing indicators are linked to improved economic indicators. While the development set out in this paper relates mainly to the provision of innovative approaches to the delivery of health and social care services for the Mid South West Region, the benefits will be seen far beyond the positive health impact on the population. Given our ageing population and expected slowdown in population growth, increasing productivity will become our most important driver for success (as reflected in both the UK and NI Industrial Strategies). It is important to recognise health and social care as an 'economic driver' over and above being a core service providing sector in MSW. Cookstown Health and Care Hub will be designed to achieve an integrated approach to the delivery of primary services in co-locating health and public services within one site, but more importantly adopting transformative approaches to health innovation, addressing regional imbalances and ultimately driving growth and productivity in the Mid South West Region. The proposed development will be enabled by innovative working practices and technology, acting as a test bed for new and developing technologies in healthcare.

BACKGROUND

The Mid South West Region comprises Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council and is a unique collaboration formed in 2018 with the sole purpose of driving economic growth and boosting productivity. The Mid South West Region of Northern Ireland has a large rural hinterland and has struggled historically with access to primary and acute healthcare services.

Cookstown is an historic market town, the second largest of the five towns within the Mid Ulster District Council area. Located between the Sperrin mountain range and stretching to the shores of Lough Neagh, the former District Council of Cookstown comprised a population of 38,952, accounting for just under 30% of the Mid Ulster District total. It is a predominantly rural area, in line with the overall Mid Ulster profile approximately two thirds of the District's population are located outside the town. Consequently, access to services remains an ongoing issue for its rural dwellers.

The population of the Cookstown area has grown by 19.5% in the 18 years to 2019. Over the 25 years, to 2043 the population is expected to increase by 7%. However, the biggest change is expected to be in the over 65 age bracket, with an expected increase of 74.8% on over 65s and 109.8% in over 75s. This is significantly higher

than the NI average of 56.2% for over 65 and 89.1% for over 75. Mid Ulster residents (and most especially Cookstown) are geographically located farther away from acute hospitals than the majority of NI residents, and ambulance response times have been recorded as 25 minutes longer than the NI average. The quality of the road infrastructure (poor terrain and narrow roads), particularly in the rurally isolated areas, has an undeniable impact on access to primary and acute health care services. People living/working in these areas should not be penalised because of their rurality, underinvestment in infrastructure or access to innovative health care services that are already in place in other parts of the region and wider UK.

Cookstown includes one of the most deprived areas in NI (in the top 20% based on multiple deprivation measures and 32 of the 59 areas within Mid Ulster are included in the top 20% of most deprived areas in NI. The area has a higher than average prevalence rate of heart disease, hypertension and asthma. In addition, none of the top 20% of least deprived areas are in the Cookstown area. Seven of the most deprived areas in terms of Access to Services are in the Cookstown LGD area.

While recent years have seen some slight improvements in the health prospects of Cookstown/ Mid Ulster residents, significant inequalities remain in a number of areas and some health outcomes remain worse than the NI average, as outlined in the Department of Health (DoH) Health Inequalities (Annual Report 2020):

- Circulatory-related death rate Under 75s: the NI rate stands at 72/100,000 while the rate for Mid Ulster's deprived areas is 86.
- Cancer U75s Deaths: NI's level is 147 /100,000 with Mid Ulster's deprived areas having decreased from a previous high of 170 to 161.
- Standardised Prescription Rate – Statins (Prescriptions/1000) the NI rate shows a reduction to this trend at 167/1000, however, Mid Ulster's deprived areas remain high at 197/1000.
- Male life expectancy in Mid Ulster's LGD's most deprived areas was 77.3 years, 2.0 years less than the NI LGD average of 79.3 years.

It is clear that poor health significantly impacts on an individual's ability to work. Analysis by the Office of National Statistics in February 2019, demonstrated that of the 16-64 year old cohort in the UK who were economically inactive and had never had paid employment, 440,000 had a physical or mental condition which impacted on their ability to carry out day to day activities. In addition, there are people who do work but their working life is interrupted or cut short by short term or long term illness. Absenteeism due to sickness remains a challenging issue for employers and clearly impacts on productivity. Research and data collection focuses on the impact of health inequalities and the wider social determinants of health and wellbeing such as poverty, lack of employment, poor housing, fuel poverty and lack of educational attainment on health outcomes. However, it can also be said that the reverse is the case, that poor health outcomes contribute to lack of economic activity.

Currently Mid Ulster's economically inactive numbers sit at 17,000, equating to 18.4% of the working population; a significant proportion of these are on some level of disability benefit and are long term unemployed, an issue which has affected the District for many years. Increasing the health opportunities for these individuals will

consequently stimulate the re-engagement with the labour market, via accessing employment or training/ education, impacting on increasing economic activity and productivity levels in the District and wider sub-region.

The GP practices in Cookstown currently provide General Medical Services (GMS) and a range of local enhanced services. A number of practices already deliver GP training but it is understood that they would wish to increase this provision if additional capacity becomes available. The practices are currently working from premises which are substantially below the area required for their practice size and there is limited ability to extend to allow expansion of services to meet demand. In addition, the recruitment of new GPs to rural practices in NI is generally challenging due to distance from acute hospital provision, a growing and ageing population, increase in long-term chronic conditions like diabetes, an aging GP workforce and changing expectations of younger doctors.

In order to meet the growing demands of the population of Cookstown and surrounding hinterlands, it is expected that GP practices will need to introduce new and innovative ways of working. In addition, Cookstown is on the periphery of the Northern HSC Trust which presents significant opportunities to develop innovative and digital connections between primary and secondary care and the community and voluntary sector. There are currently no healthy living centres in the Cookstown area.

Technology Innovation

Virtually every aspect of modern life has been, and will continue to be, radically reshaped by innovation and technology – and healthcare is no exception. Sustained advances in computing and the democratisation of information are driving choice and control throughout our daily lives, giving us heightened expectations around digital services. Technology is continually opening up new possibilities for prevention, care and treatment. The Health and Social Care sector (HSC) is a source of technological advancement in clinical practice, however, we have not yet enabled the wholesale transformation of public health services in the UK generally and Northern Ireland specifically, that patients have a right to expect. The way we deliver care remains locked into the service model largely created when the NHS was founded in 1948. NI is exploring a wide range of technology enabled healthcare developments which could be considered within the primary and community care setting, these include:

- Developing a new strategy, platform and contract for Technology Enabled Care (TEC) for remote monitoring, telemedicine and telecare;
- The Primary Care ICT Modernisation Programme, looking at the GP practice management systems and the wider GP IT estate;
- The Digital Pharmacy programme, delivering electronic transmission of prescriptions as well as access to patient data for community pharmacy delivered HSC primary care services;
- Exploring digital tools to improve access to psychological therapies, reflecting on the successes of the 'IAPT' programme in England with referrals from primary care; and
- Technology enabled Vaccine Management System.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Innovative Service Model

It is recognised that there is an absolute requirement to change the way in which health and social care services are delivered. A core theme of the direction of travel set out in the Minister's Vision 'Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together' is the importance of the role of the primary and community care sector in delivering a new model of person-centred care. Primary and community care is considered to be the appropriate setting to meet the majority of the health and social care needs of the population and directly contribute to better distribution of health outcomes and enhanced well-being / quality of life, which in turn bring important economic, social and individual benefits to the wider region. The services and resources available within primary and community care have the potential for fewer unnecessary hospitalisations and readmissions, better adherence to treatment, reduction in the number of patients entering into care homes, increased patient satisfaction, health literacy and self-care, greater job satisfaction for health workers and overall improved health outcomes.

The new direction of travel will also create opportunities for the wider independent contractor network (GPs, dentists, pharmacists etc.), supporting practitioners to work collectively through innovative linkages, with access to community services provided in shared facilities. This approach should create the opportunity for greater advancement and efficiencies within integrated care pathways. In addition, this new way of working will provide services to enable local people and community groups to access information and space to support a healthier lifestyle.

The 'No More Silos' strategy was launched after the first wave of Covid-19 infectivity and sets out an HSC model to deliver both same day and same week access to healthcare for the Northern Ireland population. It envisages a level of structured collaboration within HSC and between primary and secondary care which has not been achieved before. This integrated care model would be supported in the development of a health and care hub in Cookstown and allow access to the population of the Mid South West Region of Northern Ireland.

In addition to creating the opportunity for greater efficiencies within integrated care pathways, it is widely acknowledged (as outlined in the Background section above) that people's economic circumstances are influenced by a range of factors including health and well-being. The vision for this proposal is to transform health care provision and in so doing improve the economic outlook of the population of the Cookstown and hinterland area along with the wider MSW Region. Transforming access to health care through innovative approaches and solutions will directly address issues of health inequalities and improve people's life opportunities. A fit, healthy and thriving population will ultimately contribute to economic growth. Whilst it is acknowledged that in the absence of detailed economic modelling it is harder to articulate the economic impact and growth potential for health innovation projects, there is good reason to expect additional economic value and efficiency gains resulting from the hub intervention due to better coordination of available resources,

extensive range of innovative services offered, job growth in local community and additional business activity.

Technology Innovation

The types of innovations to be deployed and tested in this primary and community care environment would create modern experiences for citizens, the best possible outcomes and care, the empowerment and enablement of GPs and multidisciplinary colleagues, and improved efficiency for the service. From the digital perspective this might include:

- Support for people with long-term conditions through improved interoperability of data, mobile monitoring devices and the use of connected home technologies. As we consider the future of these services there are great opportunities from continued exploration of these data feeds into a Digitally Enabled Primary Care hub with multidisciplinary teams using a data driven approach to delivering the best care.
- Virtual consultations / photo based triage technology will bring professional / clinical staff together to triage patients and then consult virtually. Having the technology to link primary care and secondary care specialists is important in rural communities such as Cookstown. For example, live streaming for dermatology and tissue viability conditions with GPs being able to consult with secondary care consultant colleagues which can then move into treatment at a distance, prescribing and monitoring.
- Exploring patient owned personal health records that hold a care plan to incorporate information added by the patient themselves, or their authorised carer - these may also hold data that the patient chooses to share with the HSC. Patients who choose to join a condition monitoring programme will be able to benefit from insights from these data and will be monitored for combinations of symptoms that may indicate clinical events and result in contact from a health adviser or clinician to help the individual stay well.

Enabling Infrastructure

An existing multi-tenant site within the ownership of the Health and Local Government families has been identified. The physical transformation of this site to include the provision of the most digitally advanced infrastructure will enable the vision for the transformative delivery of primary and secondary health care in Cookstown to be realised.

THE VISION / WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

The Hub will co-locate a wide range of services across the Community, Mental Health and Learning Disability, Children’s and Acute Divisions of the Trust services. The local GP practices will be invited to consider relocating. A new digitally

enhanced facility would enable expansion and development of services delivered locally, for example, diagnostic (radiology, DEXA and ultrasound services), and outpatient services. This would support the Commissioner intention that outpatient consultations for a range of specialities should occur in the community setting where care is closer to home and more cost-effective. The hub would not only provide access to a broad range of health related services for the population of Cookstown, but would be an innovative health care hub for the wider Mid South West region.

The vision for elderly day care services in the Cookstown area is to provide a modern facility that incorporates technologies to support clients that need short term enablement/ rehabilitation rather than the long-term care that is provided currently. This would involve delivery of proactive and progressive programmes, with clients at the end of their intensive programme, supported by the community and voluntary sectors. For Learning Disability clients, the aspiration would be to move away from only a building based model to accommodate the increasing number of people with learning disabilities who are living longer. The future solution will find alternative innovative pathways which are complementary to the building based care. Themodel will support community based provision with a shared responsibility and colocation across the sectors within the Cookstown area, to support our Learning Disability clients to be economically active.

GP practices would be supported by Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) through the addition of other health specialists to meet the health and social care demands of the population, for example through the addition of advanced nurse practitioners, practice based pharmacists, first contact physiotherapists, mental health specialists and social workers, with improved access to specialist support. Access to GMS services on a sustainable basis is a priority; the implementation of MDTs will enable expansion of service and extension of capacity for patient contacts, same day appointments and potentially assess and discharge a number of patients without the need for further investigation or referral. Practices are committed to developing triage systems appropriate to making best use of new first line staff and allowing patients direct and co-ordinated access to physios, mental health workers and social workers as part of the wider GP team. This co-ordinated effort will ultimately transform access to health care services and have far reaching impacts for our rural population. The opportunity also exists to develop and deliver services as part of HSC wider commitment to Elective Care Reform. Focus will be placed on prevention and early intervention for holistic care incorporating all aspects mental, physical and social needs. There may be opportunities to include a focus on early intervention, prevention and health promotion to improve health outcomes. Virtual links can also be used to engage with the Community and Voluntary sector through technology providing holistic management of the patient /client. This could include a health and emotional approach via e learning, e.g. virtual relaxation, yoga and exercise classes / inter-generational work with clients.

This model will support the testing of innovative systems as part of developing an approach to delivering services at single point of contact. We are determined to provide robust pathways and links for Mental Health, Social Services and

Community Voluntary Sector such that patients have the best possible access to appropriate health care professionals.

The hub will also allow for opportunities to increase medical student training and could support the planned increase in time spent within primary care by medical students. A number of the GP practices are already training practices but have limited space to support the training requirements of the students. In addition, there are practices who would wish to offer training to students but who have been unable to due to their accommodation constraints. The new hub will provide not only opportunities for medical students in their final years of education but will also allow for opportunities to train students in earlier years of their education, for example it is anticipated that students in the third year of their medical degree will be required to spend additional time in primary care. These students require less independent time with patients but rather require seminar type space where GPs can provide learning experiences. Given the number of GPs in Cookstown, it is expected that this facility could become a high quality training ground for medical students training in both Queens University Belfast and within the new Ulster University School of Medicine at Magee. This is likely to in turn increase the number of medical students wishing to enter into General Practice and in particular to the Cookstown area, supporting the sustainability of services into the future.

There will be opportunities to consider centralising services. For example, the hub may be suitable as a sub centre of excellence for Gait Analysis, were dynamic examination of a person's gait will provide a better diagnosis and treatment plan for a variety of medical conditions that are affected by the foot. The current Trust service is provided in Ballymena Hub but Cookstown Hub could provide a service to its local population. Improved digital technology will allow occupational therapists to assess clients in their own homes virtually.

The goal is to create test beds for health innovations to scale across the region, crucially ensuring that GPs and other primary care organisations are involved from the outset.

CONCLUSION

We will seek to innovate and digitally transform the delivery of GP and other primary care services within Cookstown and the wider Mid South West region. The redevelopment of an existing site will provide the enabling infrastructure to accommodate the physical and digital transformation of health provision in Cookstown and surrounding hinterland areas. The re-location and co-location of the range of services articulated in this paper will be underpinned by innovative approaches to delivery which will address inequalities in access to services and health inequalities in general. Fundamental to this is the premise that a healthier population will be more economically active and contribute more to the wider economy.

BUILDING A HIGH-PERFORMING TOURISM ECONOMY

SPERRINS FUTURE SEARCH AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Iniscarn to Lough Fea Long Distance Route & Slieve Gallion Experience

The Mid South West (MSW) Regional Economic Strategy (RES) identified four main pillars of action including:

1. Future-proofing the skills base
2. Enabling infrastructure
3. Boosting innovation and digital capacity
4. Building a high-performing visitor/tourist economy

The 'Sperrins Tourism Development' intervention will be developed as part of the fourth pillar within the strategy, which is to build a high-performing visitor/tourist economy and capitalise on the region's natural attractions including the wider Sperrin's Landscape.

BACKGROUND

The Mid South West Region area stretches from the Border with Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal and Louth, to the mountains of the Sperrins.

For the purposes of this proposal the area will be defined as the Sperrins AONB and its wider foothills. The Sperrins geographic area covers a total footprint of 1181km^2 which extends across four of Northern Ireland Council areas, two of which are within the MSW region: Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. Whilst Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council is not within the AONB, it is true to say that the landscape to the north of the ABCBC area, just south of Lough Neagh, is designated as a RAMSAR area and has many similar physical characteristics which are reflective of those associated with the wider Sperrins region, for example:

- Extensive tracts of peatland
- Loss of important natural habitats due to resource extraction
- Geographic isolation
- Underdeveloped Tourism industry

Many of the challenges and opportunities associated with the wider Sperrins region were extensively considered and reviewed by stakeholders and communities as part of the 2018 Sperrins Future Search exercise, and later documented in the follow up report “The Sperrins, Reaching New Heights and Reaching our Potential”. A number of common themes were identified within the report including low infrastructure levels, need for community bottom-up engagement and no overall management structure. Specific issues and challenges associated with tourism sector were also highlighted. These included:

- Physically isolated;
- Demand for building materials and negative impact on landscape;
- Loss of natural and built heritage and possible linked tourism product;
- Area not branded as a tourism destination;
- Appearance of villages need improved;
- No management structures;
- Private sector tourism product has declined;
- Need to link with Tourism NI plan and develop strong experiential tourism.

MSW is aware that over the last number of years there has been a sustained growth in experiential travel, with people preferring to spend their holidays seeking out more meaningful and personal experiences in beautiful locations that are often perceived as 'off the beaten track', rather than in conventional or popular holiday destinations.

This growth is even more evident considering the COVID-19 pandemic which has caused a significant decline in international travel and an increased demand for outdoor countryside access experiences closer to home. Travel is now more about appreciating the way of life hidden gems like the Sperrin Mountains can offer; learning about local history, cultural and natural landscapes and embarking on voyages of self-discovery that will stay with the person long after the holiday has ended.

Recreational tourism continues to be an important growth area, and the natural resources available to us in Northern Ireland offers significant potential to avail of the economic benefits that this type of tourism can bring to rural areas. The development of (i) the new Slieve Gallion to Lough Fea Long Distance Route (LDR); and (ii) Southern Sperrins Route (Gortin, Rousky, Creggan, Broughderg) will further open the Sperrins to an international market and maximise the use and the potential of existing walking trails such as Hudy’s Way and Sli an Carn, by adding value to the existing walks and helping to entice visitors to stay in the local area for longer.

The Sperrin Mountains provide the setting for a highly distinctive landscape, containing a rich tapestry of both spatially extensive and diverse built, cultural and natural heritage assets many of which remain unknown to the wider public and underutilised as a tourism resource. The Sperrins remain a highly inaccessible landscape, more so than many other similar landscapes in the UK and Ireland, with only short to medium distance access routes developed by local communities as a localised recreational resource. However, it is this inaccessibility, extensiveness and diversity of the

resource base that lends itself to the provision of opportunities for creating a wide range of outdoor recreation, tourism, wellbeing and heritage engagement activities for both the local population and for an increasing number of visitors to the area.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SPERRINS

In recent times there has been strong public sector tourism products and experiences developed within the Mid-South West Region area. Examples of these include the Seamus Heaney Homeplace and OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory, the Navan Centre and Fort and Oxford Island and the Gortin Glens and the Ulster American Folk Park. However, one large aspect of the wider area is its connection to the Sperrins mountain landscape and its wider foothills. It is the opportunity stemming from this landscape's rich built, cultural, and natural heritage that will be exploited and developed as part of the MSW Regional Economic Strategy and this intervention. The following is the main opportunities that have been identified both within the Sperrins Future Search and other associated council tourism plans and strategies. These include:

Opportunities

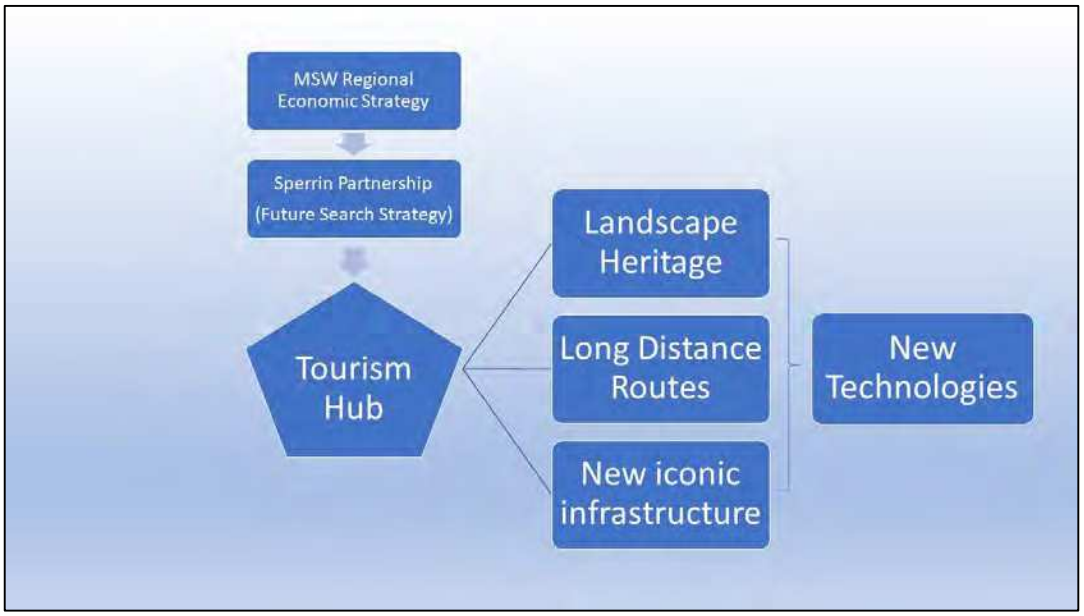
- Build on the areas rich natural built and cultural heritage.
- Brand and market the wider area as a destination;
- Connect new public sector tourism product developments with tourism private sector and add new experiential tourism products;
- Improve the environment of local small towns and villages;
- Built on and develop a new management structure;
- Develop digital capacity and ensure quality training.

Longer Distance Routes (LDR) can provide valuable opportunities for recreation, tourism and active travel, attract significant use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and disabled users, and help to achieve a range of public policy outcomes. The effective provision, management and marketing of LDRs and their active use by local residents or visitors, can contribute to the 'delivery' of a wide range of national legislation, strategies and policies. In particular, they can help to achieve many of the policy outcomes relating to the NI Assembly's 'New Decade, New Approach' and Council's Community and Tourism Plans. When developed in combination with local heritage, the arts and the bespoke business sector, LDR's can and do make a significant contribution to building a high-performing visitor/tourist economy. For MSW, it is Slieve Gallion, its geography and its wider heritage landscape and the Southern Sperrins activities and culture that now provides an exciting opportunity to contribute to Pillar 4 of the MSW RES '*Building a high-performing visitor/tourist economy to boost existing and new tourism businesses and products'* through the development and creation of a new LDR that will draw on the areas rich natural, built and cultural heritage and allow the Sperrins Partnership Project (Future Search) to brand and market the wider area as a visitor destination.

The Sperrins Partnership Project (previously Sperrins Future Search) identified the potential of tourism as an economic driver and highlighted the need for increased tourism product development and strategic leadership operating on a vision centred

on '*Think big, Think iconic, Think innovation'*. A resulting strategic outcome has been developed from the need to develop tourism hubs that are physically and/or thematically linked to extend and broaden the visitor offering and subsequently present a greater economic value to the area.

Key tourism development opportunities associated with these hubs draw on the combined interaction between sustainable utilisation of heritage assets, recreation & outdoor programming, development of bespoke, iconic infrastructure, and, through the adoption of new technologies, create a subregional tourism attractor that would engage visitors with the landscape. In combination, these would provide a framework for the establishment of a high quality, unique, geographically referenced hub that would act as a focal point for product marketing, regional promotion and visitor destination planning for the region. A recent example of this is the new proposed Sperrin Sculpture Project which thematically links different visitor hubs in the Sperrins extending the visitor experience, duration of stay and increasing visitor spend.



It is anticipated that in addition to the Slieve Gallion to Lough Fea LDR and Southern Sperrins Route, that substantial other investment will be required to realise the aspirations of the Sperrins Partnership Project. Other projects will follow later as the outworking's of the Sperrins Partnership Project plans are developed.

Tourism demand for LDR's

As well as being a popular activity among the domestic population, walking is one of the key activities that attract overseas tourists to Ireland and N. Ireland. Based on the Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT) data available from Fáilte Ireland, the recent trends in the number of overseas tourists that have engaged in walking shows an average of 680,000 participants annually engaging in walking/hiking between 2008 and 2018. Overseas visitors who engaged in walking also engaged in a variety of different types of walking. For example: 58% participated in walking on pathways; 42% participated in walking on roads; 41% engaged in cross-country walks; 35% took part in hill walks; 18% used waymarked ways; and 11% used looped walks. About 8%,

meanwhile, engaged in walking that was accompanied by a guide. Furthermore, it should be noted that 366,000 overseas holidaymakers in 2014, and 245,000 holidaymakers in 2018, stated that hiking and hillwalking was an important factor in their decision to holiday in Ireland. Also, the number of overseas visitors and holidaymakers who walked off-road for 5 km or more in 2014 using recreational trails or similar product, totalled 388,000.

A VISION FOR THE SPERRINS

The vision for this intervention should reflect on the need to expand the local economy within the MSW Region area by helping boost existing and new tourism businesses and products whilst reflecting the challenges and opportunities provided by the character and heritage of the Sperrins landscape. As such the vision of this intervention is described as follows:

"Inspire and empower existing and new tourism businesses to build on the opportunities within the wider Sperrins area and contribute to expanding the local economy"

Slieve Gallion is the most easterly of the Sperrins giving definition to what is beyond for all those who gaze across Lough Neagh from the populous east. Rising to a height of 528m at Grid Reference: H79873 87810, it can be currently accessed from an off road trail through Iniscarn Forest to a communications mast and cairn on the basalt mountain top - the burial place of Callan, the grandson of Colla Uais, a figure from pre-history named as High King of Ireland. Views of the surrounding region include Lough Neagh, the Antrim plateau in the distance and northwards to Lough Foyle and Donegal. The mountain is geological diverse, formed from igneous basalts and granites to create a volcanic plug. The landscape comprises blanket bog which extends towards Lough Fea in the west and intermittent coniferous forest plantations which add to the arresting vistas and confirms the panorama as an area of "High Scenic Value". There is significant evidence to suggest that the area has been occupied since the late Iron / Early Bronze Ages with the landscape hosting a range of archaeological features including standing stones, cairns and souterrains.

The Economic Value of Walking and LDR's – An Overview

Recreational walking participation in N. Ireland has risen from 36% in 2011 to 49% in 2017. Such an increase has resulted in rises in consumer expenditure in terms of sport equipment and sportswear; this indirectly pays back the public investment through greater public receipts from VAT on outdoors spending. In a study carried out by Sheffield Hallam University on behalf of Sport NI in 2017, data evidenced a considerable increase in the economic impact of outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland with a generated GVA exceeding £131m, representing an increase of 28% based on

the 2011 baseline. This has been brought about by improvements in the NI economy, greater participation rates, especially in recreational walking (Kokolakakis, 2019)[1].

An Irish user survey carried out as part of a 2010 study by Fitzpatrick Associates into 'walker spend' estimated that the average spend per visit at that time was €14.91. This typically included spend on items such as food, drink and (to a much lesser extent) accommodation, local crafts for tourists etc. While many users would have spent less than this amount, many others would have spent more, and in some cases considerably more (e.g., tourists who spend on accommodation). A more recent study has indicated that this spend has increased to an average €15.26 per person suggesting a total direct combined expenditure on visits to recreational trails of €198,484,076 per annum in the Republic of Ireland.

There are no robust estimates available for the number of jobs supported by expenditure on LDR's. Furthermore, the number of jobs supported from a given level of expenditure will also vary in individual cases, e.g., because of differences in the share of local and non-local users, or as a result of "leakages" out of the local economy. However, for illustrative purposes we can make an assumption that every £50,000 in expenditure supports one FTE job.

Key Economic Benefits of LDR's

- Quality LDR's attract high numbers of visitors who on average spend £11 to £14 in the local economy;
- LDR's increase the value of nearby properties;
- Trails boost spending at local businesses. Communities along trails benefit from the influx of visitors going to restaurants, shops and other retail establishments. On longer trails, hotels, bed and breakfasts, and outdoor outfitters benefit;
- Trails make communities more attractive places to live. When considering where to move, homebuyers rank walking and biking paths as one of the most important features of a new community;
- Trails influence business location and relocation decisions. Companies often choose to locate in communities that offer a high level of amenities to employees as a means of attracting and retaining top-level workers. Trails can make communities attractive to businesses looking to expand or relocate both because of the amenities they offer to employees and the opportunities they offer to cater to trail visitors;
- Trails reduce medical costs by encouraging exercise and other healthy outdoor activities;
- Trails revitalise areas suffering from multiple deprivation;
- Trails provide low or no-cost recreation to families with low costs relative to other recreational services that could be provided by government;

- These benefits represent a huge economic return on the money invested into LDR projects. The costs of land acquisition for trails, trail construction and maintenance are far outweighed by the economic benefits generated by trails. These costs can also be offset through permissive path agreements, use of PROW's and partnership agreements with other public sector bodies e.g., Forest Service.

Case Study - Walking in Scotland

Outdoor visits in Scotland, most of which involve walking or cycling, generate around £2.6 billion in expenditure per annum, with an average spend per visit of £9 (including those who spend nothing). Hillwalking makes a significant contribution to the Scottish economy with estimated annual expenditure in excess of £65 million. VisitScotland estimates that the annual economic impact of walking tourism is £1.6 billion. On the Scottish Canals towpath network, total visitor expenditure is estimated to be £29.3 million per annum. This supports 544 tourism-related jobs and £12.0 million in associated GVA. Activities undertaken on and around Scottish canals are estimated to generate a minimum of £11 million in direct tourism benefits and £23 million in indirect benefits. The estimated economic impact of trips taken for recreational purposes is £85 million of expenditure in the local economies. It is estimated that the £2 million cost of creating the John Muir Way generates £16.3 million in direct expenditure and create or safeguard 700 FTE jobs. In addition, it is estimated that £8.8 million of direct visitor expenditure and 384 FTE jobs could be generated from increased day use. The Fife Coastal Path supports an estimated 800 – 900 FTE jobs in Fife, with annual net expenditure associated with the route estimated between £24m and £29m annually.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

Build on the areas rich natural built and cultural heritage.

As part of a project scoping exercise, Mid Ulster District Council has identified the development of a long-distance looped walking route connecting Iniscarn Forest in the east via Slieve Gallion Mountain to Lough Fea in the west as a viable proposal under the Mid South West Growth Deal Programme. The proposal covers a distance of c. 24.6Km (Figure 1) and aims to connect users with the multifaceted heritage diversity present throughout the development corridor. The scheme will use the geographical and topographical setting of Slieve Gallion to create a gateway feature on top of the Mountain that will celebrate, recognise and bring attention to the Sperrins region. This will take the form of a highly visible and iconic viewing platform, that will act as a landscape marker for the MSW region and will help establish a branded identity and signature that will contribute to capitalising on the region's natural attractions.

In addition to the walking product the proposal includes an iconic viewing platform with Café that will take in the stunning views of the Lough Neagh basin with views extending all the way to the Glens of Antrim, Belfast Hills and the Mournes. This multi-function

purpose tower will act as the starting and finishing point for the long distance route with the augmented landscape experience starting when the visitor enters the cable car, which will bring the visitor to the platform from the service area, at the forest entrance. The platform will also act as an in, or over starting point for the forest experience, which could be a high energy zip line or through forest roller coaster experience. This will take the form of an iconic designed viewing tower which will help establish a branded identity and signature landmark for Slieve Gallion that will contribute to capitalising on the region's natural attractions.

This proposed project will become one of the potential tourism hubs within the Sperrins and specifically offer a family experience to the local and international market. Recent research shows that the adventure & nature tourism propositions are accelerating in terms of market demands, both with the local and international markets. It is also anticipated that post COVID-19 that this trend will continue.

This research also shows that 89% of global consumers say they are more focused on mental health and wellbeing because of COVID-19. (TNI Spark Research Nov 2020)

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council see the development of the Southern Sperrins as connector through a "Greenway" from Omagh to Gortin through tourism hubs from Gortin into Rousky, Creggan and Broughderg with the ambition to link to Lough Fea and Slieve Gallion through activity and cultural experiential activity.

Target Market

In the short term the Council's marketing activities will target the domestic market.

In the short to medium term the Council will target the ROI and subsequently the GB market. Long term we will target the International market.

This project will appeal to the priority segments below. The development of the project has considered each segment's need throughout the process.

Domestically the Council will target the 3 priority segments.

1. Aspiring Families;
2. Natural Quality Seekers; and
3. Social Instagrammers.

In the ROI market the key market segments that this project will target are:

- Active Maximisers;
- Families Seeking a Buzz;
- Open Minded Explorers; and
- Open to Ideas.

In the GB and International market the key market segments that this project will target are:

- Great Escapers; and
- Culturally Curious.

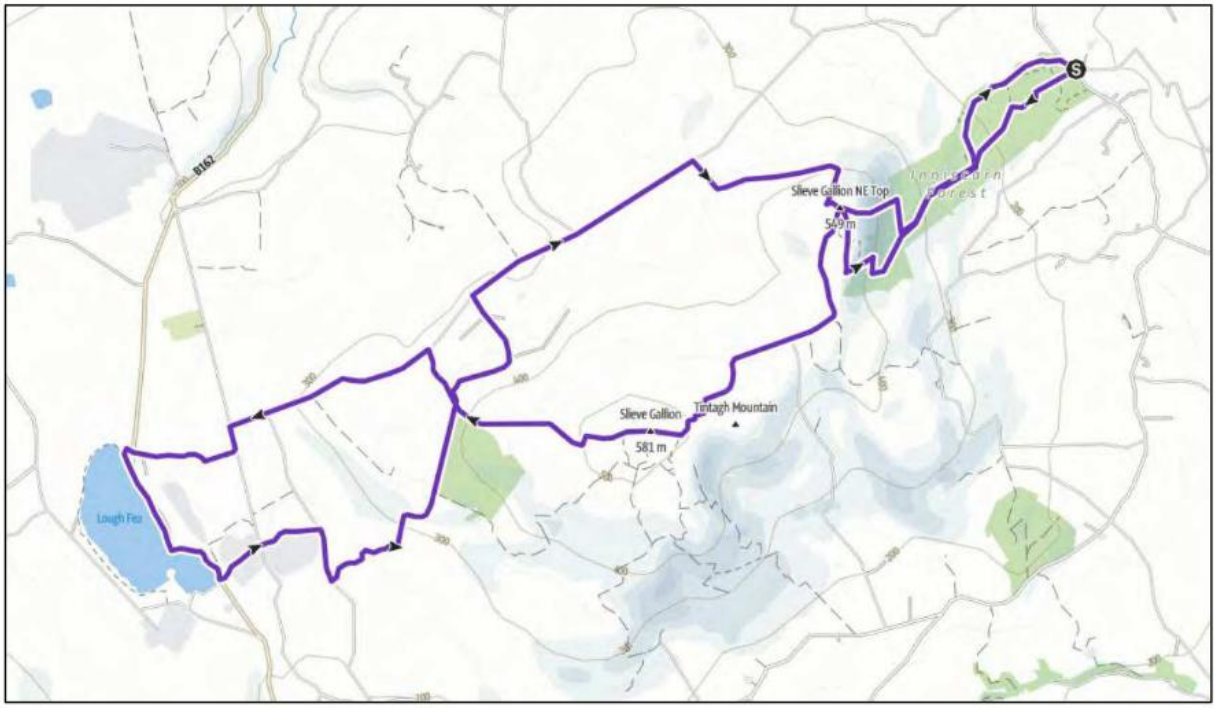


Figure 1: Proposed Iniscarn to Lough Fea LDR (15.33 miles/24.6Km/9hrs 15mins)

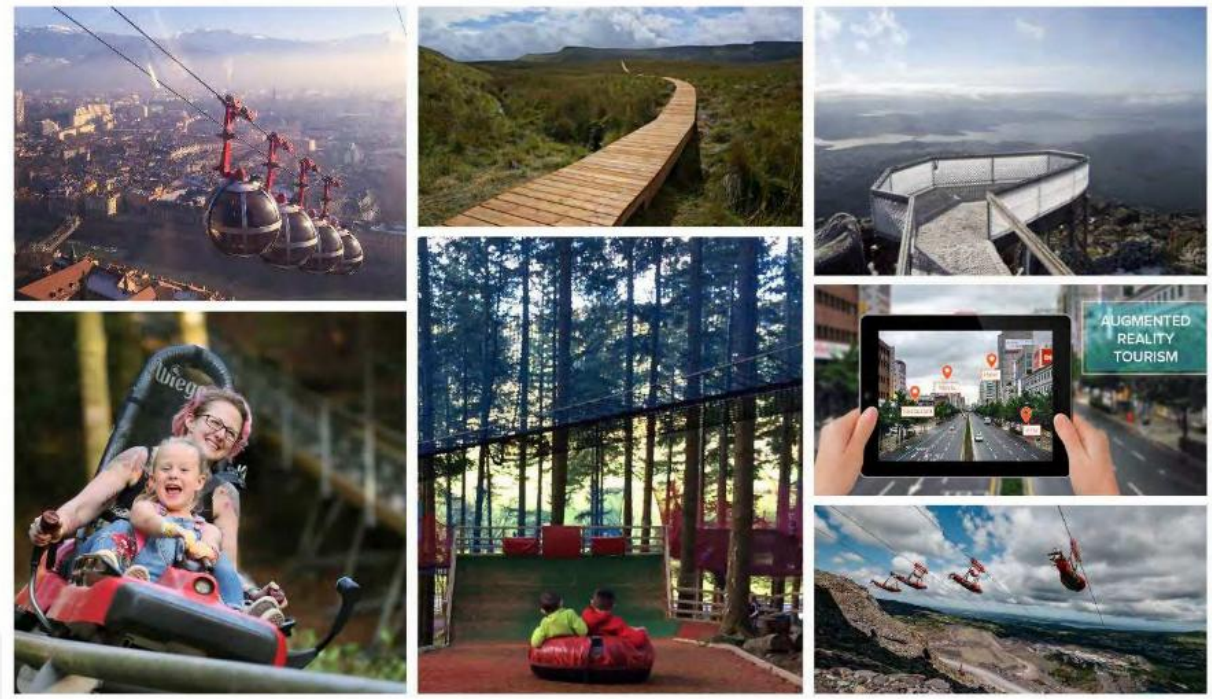


Image 1. Examples of different potential elements of the proposed visitor experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the actions and outcomes of this intervention will have significant positive impact on addressing the tourism and economic needs of the Sperrins, whilst contributing to its economic expansion and transformation of the wider geographic area.

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

ULSTER AMERICAN FOLK PARK

Transforming local relevance and international significance

BACKGROUND

Ulster American Folk Park is a unique place that preserves the importance of Ulster people's contribution to establishing modern North America (including Canada), tells compelling stories of Irish emigration and seeks to alter perceptions about emigration through personal stories of discovery.

The Park was established in 1976 and comprises of over 30 original buildings lovingly moved and restored in situ from across Ulster and North America to create the journey through time and locations, including a full-size replica of a migrant ship marking the crossing between the Old and New Worlds. The Park was originally developed around the Mellon House, the birthplace of Thomas Mellon, the founding father of the Mellon banking dynasty.

Visitor guides provide live interpretation across the site including demonstrations of heritage crafts skills such as linen weaving, blacksmithing, candle-making, printing and open-hearth cooking. The outdoor offer is supplemented by an annual programme of events including the popular Bluegrass music festival, an indoor permanent exhibition and a temporary exhibition programme.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Ulster American Folk Park is getting left behind in Northern Ireland's heritage attraction marketplace, as competitors are strengthening their offer for families and international visitors. The museum's visitor numbers are now at their lowest point in two decades. The decline shows no sign of slowing down and is forecast to become even more challenging due to the impact of Covid-19 on overseas markets.

Visitors enjoy a day out at Ulster American Folk Park, but there is lack of engagement with the deeper values which underpin the museum. It is commonplace to hear expressions of warmth towards the museum without any genuine intention to revisit. The site has the most extreme seasonal visitor profile in the National Museums NI group, with the lowest visitation between November and March. The Park and the offer are not seen as particularly family friendly. Learning visits have been declining at dangerous levels, resulting in decreased engagement with children and young people.

The visitor experience and programming model used in the past 20 years has delivered many successes, but now feels tired and in need of renewal. The lack of investment has run parallel to rapid change in the leisure and consumer environment. The ageing workforce, the challenging geography and the lack of development in the wider area's tourism product are all limiting factors.

The reality is that these challenging truths need addressed. Doing nothing is not an option.

THE VISION

The vision is for the Ulster American Folk Park to be an international cultural heritage visitor attraction offering the embarkation point for a inspiring, transformative journey, sharing in the remarkable lives of Ulster people who helped to shape a New World:

- To create dramatic and immersive visitor experience spanning two centuries of emigration and settlement;
- To explore the achievements and impacts of Ulster emigrants on people, culture and landscape;
- To honour our ancestors' personal journeys, to better consider and connect with our own.

The New Strategic Vision for Ulster American Folk Park is built around two Core Principles:

- **Deepening stories and deepening engagement**
  Exploiting its remarkable heritage and archive assets to revolutionise interpretation, choreographing coherent, immersive, contemporary experiences across the site to bring the open-air site to life all year round.

- **Becoming a cultural heritage enterprise**
  Maximising its enterprise focus and commercial opportunities, revitalising its workforce and championing environmental sustainability to achieve a sustainable business model.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

Museums and heritage attractions are increasingly future proofing their offer by providing compelling visitor experiences. Over the last five years the sector has focused on selling experiences through which the visitor becomes a hands-on participant not a passive observer, informed by the maxim:

A tourism product is what you buy;

a tourism experience is what you remember.

Therefore, a revitalised offer for Ulster American Folk Park will bring history to life through three overarching themes:

1. **Journeys** – creating environments in which visitors can become immersed in the emotion and drama of departure, crossing, arrival and settlement of Ulster people in North America over two centuries; becoming a destination for visitors to reconnect with their roots and honour their own family's journeys;
2. **Stories** – telling the stories of the experiences and achievements of Ulster men and women; confronting the impact they had on the people and communities they encountered; enabling visitors to engage with a fundamental story of Ulster identity – a story of who we are;
3. **Landscapes** – engaging visitors in a celebration of the natural world and what it can teach us about sustainability; engaging with the creativity of traditional skills and crafts; feasting on the sounds, tastes and smells of another world.

These three themes can lay the foundations of a new vision for the Folk Park.

A key enabler to achieve the vision, create unforgettable visitor experience and increase visitor numbers is the ability to refresh, renew and invest in museum facilities. A Strategic Development Framework commissioned by National Museums NI, identified six priority areas for the development of the museum:

1. First Impressions + Lasting Impressions – focusing on the visitor centre and a desire to create: i) a new Introduction Gallery with modern integration narratives in the form of digital and interactive exhibits, and ii) A Lasting Impressions Reflections Gallery.
2. Transition + Voyage – focused on the Ship Gallery and the town areas including refurbishing and remodelling of the ship gallery into America Street.
3. Repurposing existing – enlivening Ulster Street and America Street, introducing new commercial opportunities (shop, café, etc) and new educational space.
4. New Play Park and toilet facilities.
5. Wayfinding and multi-streamed routes – potential for character themed pathways and visitor journeys for short or long stay at the museum.
6. Events Space.

The next steps for the realisation of the vision is for National Museums to continue its engagement with its strategic partners and stakeholders, undertake further market research and consider appropriate phasing of the development based on feasibility studies, costs and special implications. The emerging project/s will be subject to the usual business justification and planning processes.

What do we expect to Achieve?

The potential of this substantial investment in the redevelopment of the Ulster American Folk Park will see a significant increase in visitor numbers, not only to the Park but to the region in general. Improved dedicated Coach Parking provision close to the entrance and improved space in the restaurant will meet and indeed exceed the needs of the coach tourism clientele, allowing the Ulster American Folk Park to

continue to be one of the “must visit” Visitor Attractions on the All-Island Bus Tour circuit.

With increasing numbers of visitors to the Park, it is anticipated that businesses within the local visitor economy will be sustained and even grow with more high quality accommodation establishments that will attract domestic and out of state visitors with disposable income, that will, in turn, improve the performance of the economy within the Sperrins region.

It is anticipated that this development, along with other major inventions such as an improved transport infrastructure along the A5 Dublin – North West corridor, could help realise a year-on-year increase of visitor spend of 5% within the District. As a result of this capital investment at the Ulster American Folk Park, there is potential to grow annual visitor spend from £79m to over £100m over a five-year period, using the baseline from NISRA’s Local Government District figures for 2019.

CONCLUSION

Strategic capital investment will transform the Ulster American Folk Park from a much-loved visitor attraction of the past to a dynamic heritage centre and tourism hub, benefitting both local people and inbound tourism visitors. It will play a relevant and meaningful role at the heart of the community, offering inclusive opportunities for learning, wellbeing and skills development. It will also be a powerhouse of MSW’s economic growth engine, generating tourism from both close-to-home and international tourism markets with a particular focus on the high growth potential in North America.

This investment will complement other proposals including but not limited to the development of the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark, Gortin Glens Forest Park, a long distance walking route around Slieve Gallon and improvements to the A5 Dublin to Derry / Londonderry transport corridor. These developments have the potential to grow the visitor offering and increase the overall GVA to the regional economy.

GORTIN GLEN FOREST PARK & SURROUNDING AREA VISITOR EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Gortin Glen Forest Park provides an outdoor resource located in the Southern Sperrins that has potential for supporting the delivery of long-term health and wellbeing for residents of the Fermanagh and Omagh District and has the potential to grow economic activity associated with increasing numbers of visitors and tourists from outside the Council area to the wider Sperrins region. Significant investment has been made over the last two years in the Park and its facilities including a destination play area, enhanced walking trails, provision of mountain bike trails, new and improved amenity buildings and outdoor facilities. In the shorter term, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has committed to invest in the offer through the Sperrins Sculptural Trail which will see the installation of an iconic sculpture on the summit of Mullaghcarn, within the Forest Park. This links to a series of iconic sculptures across the Sperrins with two others located in the neighbouring Mid Ulster District Council area and Derry City and Strabane Council area. This investment has seen visitor numbers already significantly increasing.

This Proposition will be guided by the three key recommendations from The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern (2015), namely; Healthy active lifestyles for local people from all communities; Economic growth through encouraging visitors and tourists to come and enjoy the outdoors; and, Protection of landscapes and ecosystems for future generations. It will also demonstrate an active contribution to the sustainable development of the area. The original Masterplan (2015) for Gortin Glen Forest Park aimed to maximise positive impact with respect to the economic benefits to the area through an enhanced offering for the visitor/tourist. It should be noted that the principles of Responsible Tourism and Responsible Development underpin the Development Plan. Sensitivity to and respect for the environment is a central tenet to the Development Plan.

In recent years there has been sustained growth in experiential travel, with people preferring to spend their holidays seeking out more meaningful and personal experiences in beautiful locations that are often perceived as 'off the beaten track', rather than in conventional or popular holiday destinations. The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated significant decline in international travel has brought this trend into greater focus through increasing demand for outdoor countryside access experiences closer to home. This brings a significant opportunity to highlight and market hidden gems such as the Gortin Glens and its wider Sperrins location to domestic and international visitors with the added attributes of local natural and cultural heritage and the outdoor experiences offered, including walking, hiking and mountain biking.

This Proposition reflects the opportunity to contribute to Pillar 4 of the MSW RES '*Building a high-performing visitor/tourist economy to boost existing and new tourism businesses and products'* through the development and creation of a new outdoor visitor experience that will draw on the area's rich natural, built and cultural heritage and, through the Sperrins Partnership Project, market the wider area as a visitor destination.

Future development at this site will address the fact that recent research indicates that, despite its appeal, Tyrone & Sperrins is not recognised nor is it functioning optimally as a tourism destination/area in the eyes of the visitor.

The report arising from the Sperrins Future Search Conference contains five action plans in relation to development of environment and heritage; infrastructure; branding and tourism; community and management, collectively geared to realising a co-ordinated vision for the future of the Sperrins AONB summed up in the report title 'reaching new heights, realising our potential'

BACKGROUND

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council recognises that a partnership approach is required to achieve greater accessibility to the outdoors in a sustainable and responsible manner to realise its full potential as a visitor destination.

Location

Gortin Glen Forest Park is located six miles north of Omagh off the B48, at the southern gateway to the Sperrin Mountains in the northern part of the District within the Sperrins Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB). It is located in close proximity to the Ulster American Folk Park, a key visitor destination within the region.

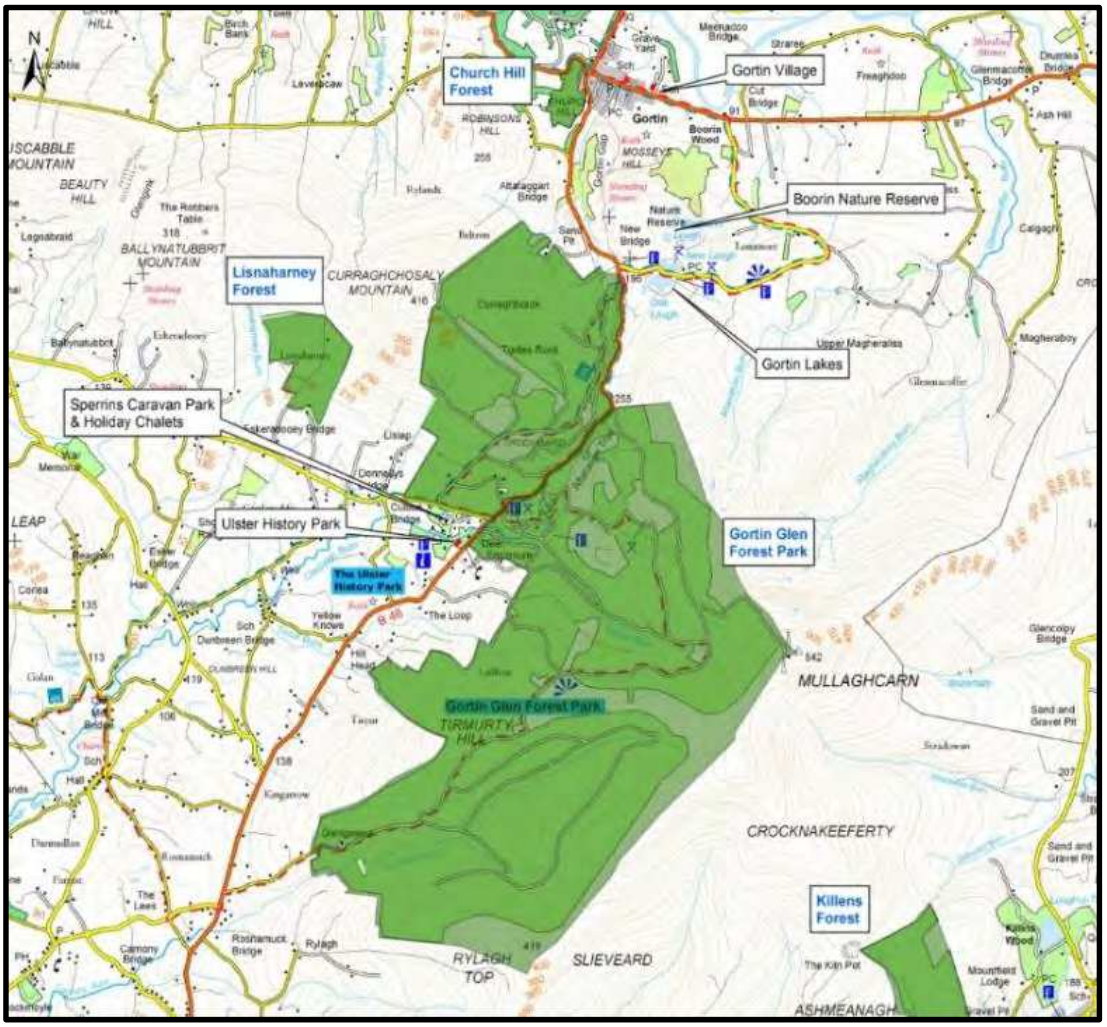
The challenges and opportunities are those linked to the wider Sperrins region which were extensively considered and reviewed by stakeholders and communities as part of the 2018 Sperrins Future Search exercise, and later documented in the follow up report "The Sperrins, Reaching New Heights and Reaching our Potential". A number of common themes were identified within the report including low infrastructure levels, need for community bottom-up engagement and no overall management structure. Specific issues and challenges associated with tourism sector were also highlighted. These included:

- Physically isolated;
- Demand for building materials and negative impact on landscape;
- Loss of natural and built heritage and possible linked tourism product;
- Area not branded as a tourism destination;
- Appearance of villages need improved;
- No management structures;

- Private sector tourism product has declined;

Need to link with Tourism NI plan and develop strong experiential tourism.

Gortin Glen Forest Park Location



THE OPPORTUNITY

There will be a need to take stock and review the Masterplan for Gortin Glen Forest Park with a focus on future developments that will attract increased numbers of visitors and tourists from outside the Council area and encourage them to stay longer, overnight, and spend money in the local economy.

A number of emerging ideas may help augment the attractiveness of the Gortin Glen Forest Park to realise this ambition:

Medium Term (up to 10 years)

- Creation of a board walk experience from the summit southward across the pristine heathland that would open up landscape size vistas and create memorable visitor experiences
- Extend the Mountain Bike Trail network to create over 50km of trails, to become one the largest trail centres in Northern Ireland. This could include the installation of an iconic over pass through the valley linking both sides of the forest (ORNI Masterplan 2015)

- Creation of unique and iconic forest themed play structures throughout the forest park

Long Term (10 years+)

- Installation of cable car on or near the summit of Mullaghcarn that could link with Gortin village (to the north) and the Ulster American Folk Park (to the south)
- Connecting Omagh and Gortin to provide a safe off-road trail using a mixture of; public road, forest land and private property (scoping report by ORNI 2013)

These propositions, and possibly others, will have to undergo a Strategic Outline Business Case Process.

Economic Assessment

Research undertaken by Forest Service NI through its annual visitor survey concludes that every adult visitor to Gortin Glen Forest Park spends in the region of £22.00 per person, equating to an annual spend of just over £900,000. This relates to the survey in 2014. The report from the 2019 study is due to be published in early 2021. In absence of this report and based on visitor figures for the calendar year of 2020, an estimated 60,000 adult visitors has the potential to generate just over £1.3m to the local economy.

In a report commissioned by Sport NI in 2019, it evidenced a considerable increase in the economic impact of outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland with a generated GVA exceeding £131m, representing an increase of 28%. This has been brought about by improvements in the NI economy, greater participation rates, especially in recreational walking, and growth in the outdoor recreation business sector as testified by the increase in the numbers of outdoor recreation operators. (Source: Outdoor Recreation Review 2019 – Commissioned by Sport NI)

Therefore, it is contended that additional developments such as those proposed in this paper, will generate increased GVA in the region and help to sustain and grow employment in the rural areas.

THE VISION

The Vision for this Proposition is:

"A Sustainable Family Orientated Outdoor Experience of International Standout"

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

This vision will be achieved through:

- Improving access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone through a range of outdoor recreation activities that enhances the local resident and visitor experience and increase dwell time in the area;
- Linking the health, wellbeing and outdoor recreational outcomes as contained within the Fermanagh and Omagh 2030 Community Plan;
- Responsibly managing the outdoor recreation product at Gortin Glen Forest Park through an agreed process with Forest Service Northern Ireland, the landowner; and
- Create opportunities for outdoor recreation related and hospitality businesses.

CONCLUSION

Any future development of Gortin Glen Forest Park must create the potential to offer a strong fit with the themes reflected in key tourismstrategies. These developments will also complement other projects in the regions such as the Long Distance Route in the Slieve Gallon region, the proposed redevelopment of the Ulster American Folk Park and Marble Arch Caves, and the proposed upgrade of the A5 Dublin to Derry / Londonderry transport corridor.

Specifically, the proposed project has the potential to:

- Contribute to long-term economic growth through the development of the tourism economy of the MSW and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area, offering a distinct and complementary sustainable outdoor recreation product to that offered by the outdoor and water-based activities within the Fermanagh area;
- Encourage visitors and tourists to the area to stay longer and spend more, by creating a cluster of outdoor activities;
- Encourage diversification of the rural economy and improving quality of life in rural areas;
- Build the tourism product by developing quality tourism assets that are aligned to visitor needs;
- Offer a particularly strong fit with TNI's "Embrace a Giant Spirit" themes supporting assets (i.e. adrenaline activity, walking, cycling, etc.) that TNI suggests are of strong appeal to international visitors;
- Improve the health (mental and physical) and wellbeing (including social inclusion) of local people and visitors through the development of sports, leisure and recreation infrastructure within the area in order to provide formal and informal opportunities for people to engage in physical activity and to better access green spaces;
- Protect our natural environment through the development of environmentally sensitive trails and an education facility;
- Contribute to the development of a strong and shared community by unlocking the potential of the leisure sector as an instrument for positive change;
- Encourage active citizenship through volunteering opportunities; and

- Support the new Council's vision to create a district that will be recognised for its unique and beautiful natural environment and for its quality facilities and services through the provision and promotion.

Tourism is a growing industry within NI and has the potential to represent a particularly important sector with the new Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area:

- Within the general tourism industry, outdoor recreation has been identified as having particular potential for growth. Indeed, TNI has identified that a focus on experience-based tourism is increasingly required by the tourism sector, if it is to succeed.

TNI has identified that:

- Many tourists want to get away from the stress of a busy life and retreat to a relaxing rural environment;
- Tourists can be attracted by the establishment of national parks or forests as centres of recreational activity, with trailheads offering amenities for various activities, along with maps, guides, food and drink, and secure parking;
- Tourism sector must emphasise experiences which offer stunning immersive natural phenomena and architecture within a short distance;
- The tourism sector should also consider the geographical hubs that cluster together a range of integrated outdoor activities; and
- The value of short breaks in NI has the potential to increase over the coming five years.

CUILCAGH LAKELANDS GEOPARK

This proposition is targeted at MSW RES Intervention Pillar "Building a High Performing Tourist Economy – Cross-Border Tourism Product Development" and is intended to enhance the visitor experience and the carrying capacity of Geopark sites, building on current rising levels of demand for natural resource tourism and access to outdoor recreation and the opportunities presented through Tourism NI's (TNI) *Embrace the Giant Spirit* and Failte Ireland's *Hidden Heartlands*.

Sustainable tourism is at the heart of this proposal; alongside the undoubted potential economic benefits and returns of increasing the number of visitors, their dwell time and their dispersal across the area. All component parts of this intervention have core values of environmental sustainability and adding social value through enhancing quality of life and wellbeing for residents in the Geopark and the wider area.

BACKGROUND

The **Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark (MACUGG)**; a cross-border designation that recognises the quality of the geomorphology and landscape around the Cuilcagh Mountain Park and the wider surrounding countryside comprises an area of approximately 18,000 hectares. Initially located exclusively in Fermanagh, it became the first area in the UK to be awarded European Geopark status by UNESCO in 2004. In 2008 and following a formal partnership agreement with Cavan County Council, it became the world's first cross-border Geopark. In 2020, Fermanagh and Omagh District and Cavan County Councils adopted a ten-year development plan for the Geopark. This integrated and ambitious plan embeds UNESCO's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and details initiatives and actions intended "to nurture and protect our unique heritage so that our place can restore and revitalise those that live and visit here, and can enable connections between people, heritage and nature." The current Geopark and its sites is attached as Appendix 1.

Following extensive market research and community consultation in 2020, 2021 will see MACUGG deliver against a new brand. This includes a new boundary (Appendix 2), a new name – ***Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark*** and a new proposition – ***Experiences, It's in Our Nature.***

The **Marble Arch Caves** is the gateway to exploring the wider Geopark and is a unique visitor attraction in its own right. It is a key driver and contributor to the long-term growth of tourism for the area and for Northern Ireland. As well as servicing visitors for tours of the show cave, it is the hub from which visitors can explore the immediate

surrounding landscape, including the near-by Cuilcagh Boardwalk - known as “the Stairway to Heaven”. It is also acts as visitor information centre and first port of call for visitors to sites across the Geopark.

Marble Arch Caves is located in **Marlbank** (Appendix 3), an area on the northern, lower slopes of Cuilcagh Mountain offering some of the most picturesque and evocative landscapes in the region and, as well as the Cuilcagh Boardwalk and the show-cave, offering a range of outdoor leisure and recreation opportunities including access to Crossmurrin and Killykeegan National Nature Reserves, Hanging Rock, Gortmaconnell, the stunning Claddagh Glen and “rough caving” opportunities. In recent years, Marble Arch Caves has extended its range of visitor experiences to take full advantage of this unique landscape through expanding its offer to include above ground and seasonal experiences.

In 2019, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council commissioned an Economic Appraisal study on the Marble Arch Caves Visitors Centre. It found a dated facility not fit for the increasing number of visitors and not matching the extraordinary quality of the visitor experiences available and recommended the design and build of a new visitor centre as the most economically advantageous course of action. The below ground experience in the show cave is currently being enhanced through TNI funding of £400k to upgrade elements of the lighting and to create a pilot virtual reality experience. Further investment in the cave and AR/VR can turn this into a world class visitor attraction and international draw.

The **CANN** project is a multi-partner, cross-border environment project involving Cuilcagh Mountain and the Boardwalk which aims to improve the condition of protected habitats and to support priority species, ensuring the future of this internationally important habitat and species and create best-practice in sustainable visitor management. Drawing from the knowledge and experience of international experts in sustainable uplands management, a number of recommendations have been made with respect to Cuilcagh and the boardwalk in order to negate adverse environmental impacts and improve the visitor experience. Key amongst these is the redesign of the final stretches of the Boardwalk and the viewing platform

Amongst the key infrastructural developments across the Geopark in-train that inform but are separate to this proposition are, within the Marlbank area, the further development of the Cavan Burren Park and Shannon Pot, a €6.6 million capital and experience development project. Due for completion in 2024, it is anticipated that this project will double the current 24, 000 plus visitors a year to these sites. Development in the Marlbank area is complemented and enhanced by further developments across the Geopark that will increase and diversify the outdoor recreation offer for both visitors and residents. These include the Scarplands Cycle Trail (Ireland’s longest off-road cycle trail, to be launched April 2021), and heritage driven development at **Tully Castle** (2018 – 2022) and an inter-agency masterplan to develop the untapped potential at **Castle Caldwell** (2022 – 2025). The **Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Greenway** will pass through the Marlbank area and the key settlements of Belcoo and Blacklion before going on to Enniskillen. This will

provide an added dimension to the **Beara-Breifne Way -** Ireland's longest waymarked trail that ends in Blacklion.

In 2020, the Council took on the lease for Killykeegan Nature Reserve and secured £445,000 to upgrade car parking, toilets, interpretation and the visitor amenity; works will be completed by Spring 2021. Killykeegan will provide facilities for visitors to the Cuilcagh Boardwalk and provides an additional reason to visit Marlbank and the Marble Arch Caves. The next phase of development can link Killykeegan to the MAC visitor's centre by an off-road trail and then on to the Cavan Burren Park (Blacklion) by the Smuggler's Way" trail.

Included in this proposition is the realisation of The **Lough Navar Masterplan** 2021 – 2024. Lough Navar Forest is in the scenic, mountainous uplands of West Fermanagh approximately 4 miles from the village of Derrygonnelly and 14 miles from Enniskillen town. It comprises 2,600 hectares of mature working forest with a mixture of coniferous trees, open habitat areas, rock outcrops, lakes and streams. In 2020 FODC commissioned a development plan for Lough Navar to ensure an integrated approach to further development that would allow this site to fully meet its visitor potential. Proposed within this plan are enhanced car parking, visitor amenities, rough/wild camping, enhanced walking trails, cycling and angling facilities. The Lough Navar Development Plan, whilst commissioned by FODC has been informed by a steering group made up of residents, community groups and businesses and its implementation will be managed in a similar way. This will ensure that benefits to communities and to businesses continue to be central to the thinking for this project.

The **Ballyshannon – Belleek Greenway** is, once again gaining traction; a partnership project between FODC, Donegal County Council and Waterways Ireland, this €4Million project will join to the North West Greenway and provide a sustainable transport and leisure cycling/walking opportunity linking the North of the Geopark and the settlement of Belleek to the Wild Atlantic Way. In 2019, a feasibility study estimated the cost of extending this Greenway to the key Geopark hub of Castle Caldwell at a cost of **£1million**. As well as connecting the Geopark, there is significant potential for this greenway to act as a driver for tourism in its own right; in 2019 Failte Ireland stated "Greenways are one of the biggest success stories of Irish tourism that have brought transformative benefits to local communities" The number of tourists coming to Ireland on walking and cycling holidays has grown exponentially in recent years, from 371,000 in 2012 to 1.8million in 2017. In 2019 46% of all overseas holidaymakers to Ireland engaged in walking and cycling as part of their holiday experience.

THE CHALLENGES

The key challenge facing The Geopark, Marble Arch Caves and the Marlbank area is **growing tourism <u>sustainably</u>** to **maximise the social and economic benefits** of these key tourism drivers whilst minimising and adverse environmental impacts.

Recent years have seen a high growth in visitor numbers. Between 2015 and 2019, visits to Marble Arch Caves have increased from 57,000 to 72,000 with users of the visitors' centre increasing from 111,000 to 180,000. Use of the Cuilcagh Boardwalk has increased over the same period from 2,500 per annum to 122,000. This growth in numbers has put a strain on the existing infrastructure and has not been without adverse environmental impact and impact on the local community. Cuilcagh and the wider Geopark is a unique landscape. It is vital that visitors are managed to ensure this landscape and its eco-system are not damaged and degraded. In addition to managing the visitor experience at Cuilcagh and Marlbank, expanding and extending the natural resource tourism offer across the Geopark can disperse visitors as well as bring increased visitor numbers and consequent economic benefit to other locales.

THE OPPORTUNITY

To address the challenges, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is working collaboratively with neighbouring Councils and stakeholders from the private, public and voluntary sectors on three lynchpin solutions/opportunities:

1. **The Marlbank Masterplan**

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has a Masterplan for the Marlbank area; a plan that can build on the current growing visitor numbers driven by the Marble Arch Caves and Cuilcagh Boardwalk whilst encouraging "dwell time" in the area bringing associated additional visitor spend and benefit to the villages of Belcoo and Blacklion whilst minimising any adverse environmental impacts. The Masterplan has key infrastructure developments; a new Visitor's Centre for Marble Arch, enhancing the visitor experience in the Show cave; connecting MAC to Killykeegan, Cuilcagh on to the Cavan Burren and enhancing the Boardwalk.

2. **Green Connections To The Geopark**

Alongside the Marlbank Masterplan, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and its Geopark partner, Cavan County Council, has an aspiration to raise the connectivity of the Geopark and enhance its "green" connections to neighbouring areas and attractions. In train is the ambitious Sligo – Enniskillen Greenway, passing through the heart of the Geopark and Marlbank. At a more advanced stage of development, The Belleek – Ballyshannon Greenway will connect the north of the Geopark to Donegal and the Wild Atlantic Way. Through this intervention it is proposed to extend this Greenway linking Belleek as a key tourism site to the unique and expansive Geopark site at Castle Caldwell.

3. OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE GEOPARK

Essential for the Geopark to reach its full potential as a world class destination for sustainable outdoor recreation tourism is the dispersal of visitors across the area. This can increase dwell time and the length of stay, bring economic and social benefits to settlements and communities across the Geopark and ensure that the risks of over-tourism at honey pot sites are managed and mitigated. Through the realisation of its development plan, Lough Navar has the potential to significantly enhance the Geopark offer and disperse visitors bringing benefits to businesses and communities in the neighbouring villages of Derrygonnelly, Belleek and Garrison. It will complement the well developed Geopark facilities at Castle Archdale and the nascent development plan for Castle Caldwell.

The time is right for the proposed interventions. 2020 saw a growth in the use of the Geoparks outdoor recreation sites. Despite restrictions on international travel and in a challenging trading environment, Marble Arch Caves tours were fully booked between its reopening in July and the mid-September. The appetite for sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation has grown year on year for twenty years and Covid-19 has accelerated this trend.

The significant year on year growth in visitor footfall to the Marlbank area has brought many benefits but also highlighted the need for an integrated approach to visitor experience development and management. This proposition can enable Marlbank to sustainably manage further growth, ensure that negative environmental impacts are limited and encourage dwell time, bringing benefits to the settlements of Belcoo/Blacklion and wider Fermanagh.

With the current focus on the staycation market and the tourism propositions of TourismNI and Failte Ireland 'Irelands Hidden Heartland' and 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' now is an ideal time to harness opportunities together with partners to connect people with the outdoors, nature and the stories of this stunning landscape. The key to maximising the potential benefits of the growth in Natural Resource Tourism in the Marlbank area and the broader Geopark is taking an integrated and planned approach underpinned by the three pillars of sustainability and increasing the "green" connectivity.

THE VISION

The vision for this project is simple and achievable; to create a world class visitor destination that benefits businesses, communities and the environment; bringing economic return to the area. A vision is meaningless without values and the values for this, once again, are simple:

- **Sustainable Development**; Development is underpinned by the three pillars of Sustainable Development and by the 17 UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals
- **Universal Accessibility**: whilst not always possible in natural resource sites, all developments will aspire to the principle of universal accessibility.

- **Carbon Neutral and Climate Change:** all developments must aspire to being carbon neutral; no development can have an adverse impact on the natural environment.

Community Tourism: we want to create an infrastructure with year-round use, servicing both the tourist and the "local" and see the benefits of an expanded visitor economy shared with businesses and residents. To borrow from *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands "*Our brand is centred around rural communities and their lifestyles, as well as the many spaces for adventure and relaxation". Key to this is management groups, management agreements and steering groups made up of residents, communities and businesses

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

We are going to….create a world class visitor destination through:

- Building a nearly zero energy visitor centre at Marble Arch Caves as a gateway to the Geopark with a new visitor centre
- Link this visitor centre to the significant developments at Killykeegan Nature Reserve and on to the Cavan Burren and, potentially, the Shannon Pot by the "Smugglers Trail"
- Enhance and extend the Boardwalk Experience
- Create a Greenway linking Castle Caldwell to Belleek; providing green infrastructure between two key tourism assets.
- Create a "national park" experience at Lough Navar
-

Through these interventions we can over 5 years…

- **Create a 5* Tourism NI Visitor Attraction at Marble Arch Caves**
- **Increase Marble Arch Caves tour visitor numbers by 33% to 93k**
- **Sustainably increasing visitors to the Cuilcagh Boardwalk by 60k**
- **Increase visits to the Marble Arch Caves Visitors Centre by 50% to 200k**
- **Increase visitors to Lough Navar by 33% to 75k**
- **Attract 50k visitors a year to the Belleek – Castle Caldwell Greenway**

These are initial SMART targets drawn from the Lough Navar Development Plan and the Economic Appraisal of Marble Arch Caves Visitors' Centre. The potential for a Greenway to drive growth has not been quantified but with the Waterford Greenway attracting 250,000 users a year, a target of 50,000 is achievable

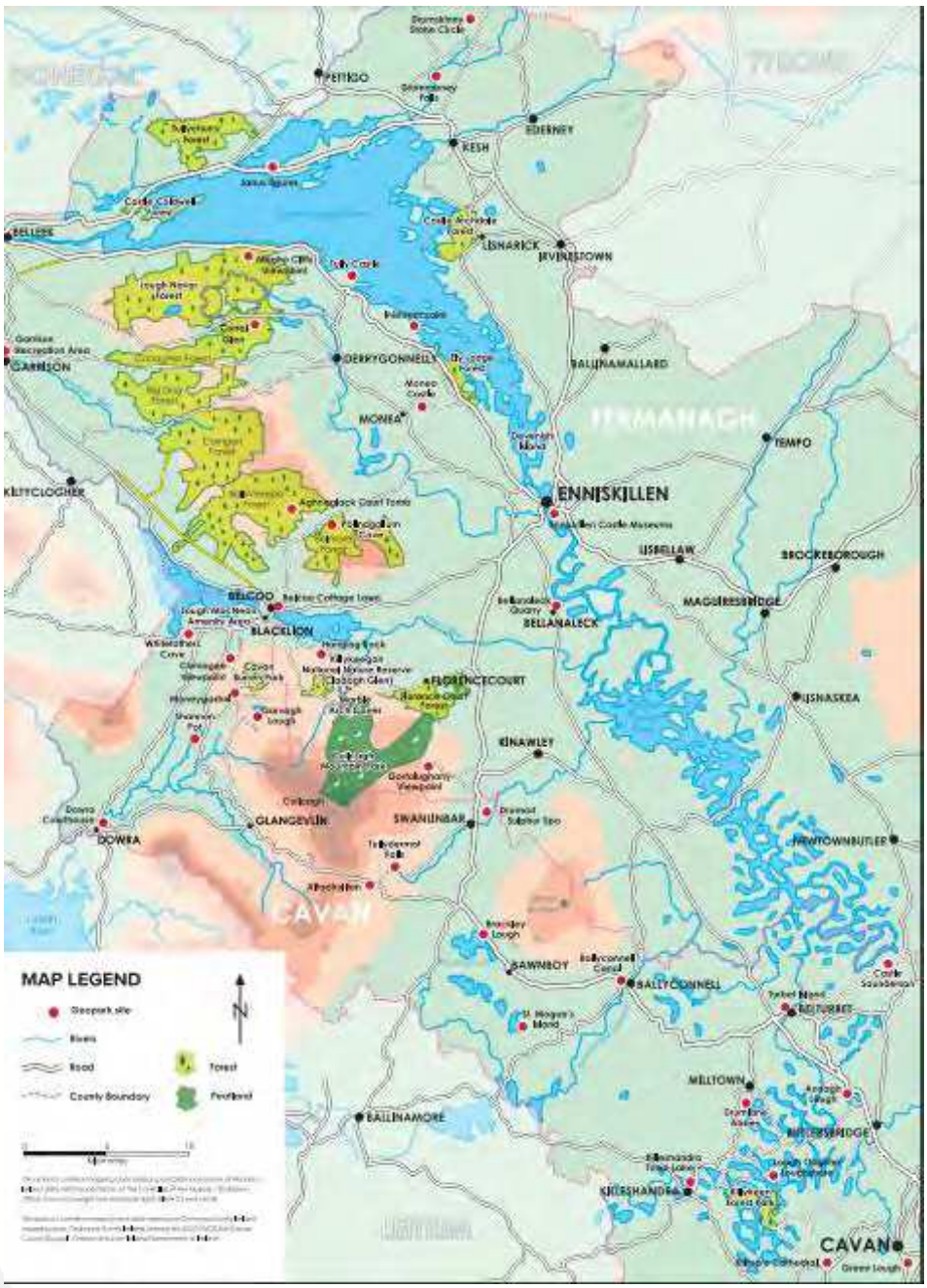
The goal is an additional 250,000 visitors a year to the Geopark with 10% of these staying overnight. Using £18 Additional Visitor Spend for overnight stays and £18 for day trippers/staycation this gives a potential economic benefit to the area of £5.425million.

CONCLUSION

This is a multi-faceted, integrated proposal that builds on established success and rising demand. It is a proposition of scale that can change the shape of the area's and the region's tourism offer, driving visits and visitor spend whilst ensuring the three pillars of sustainability are pursued and delivered.

We have the opportunity to develop and create a world-class stand-out tourism offer that will benefit businesses, communities and the environment. With the unprecedented growth in outdoor recreation tourism, staycations and the rise of "wellbeing" as a policy priority the time is right and the opportunity is obvious.

Appendix 1 – MACUGG Map

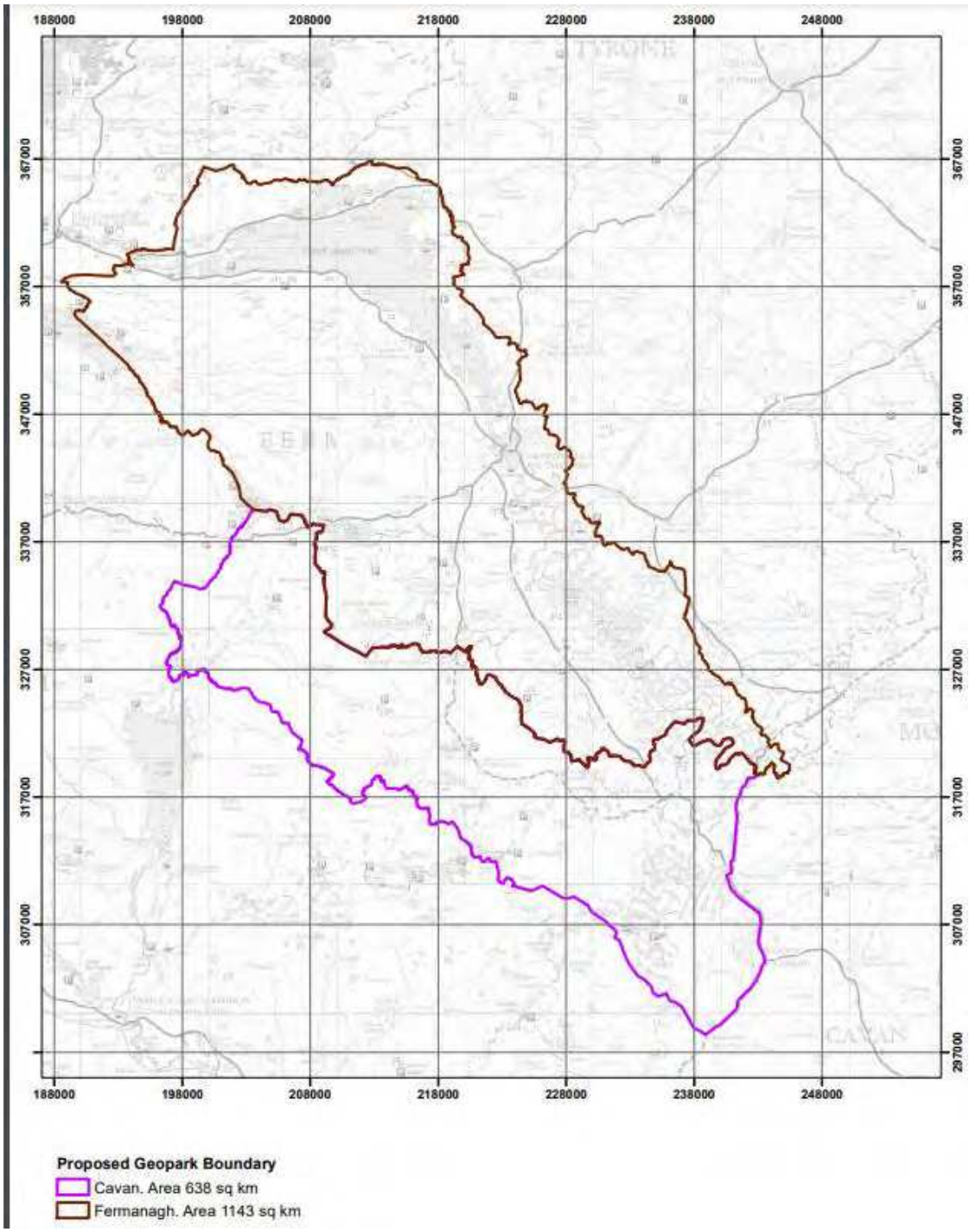


Appendix 2 – Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark

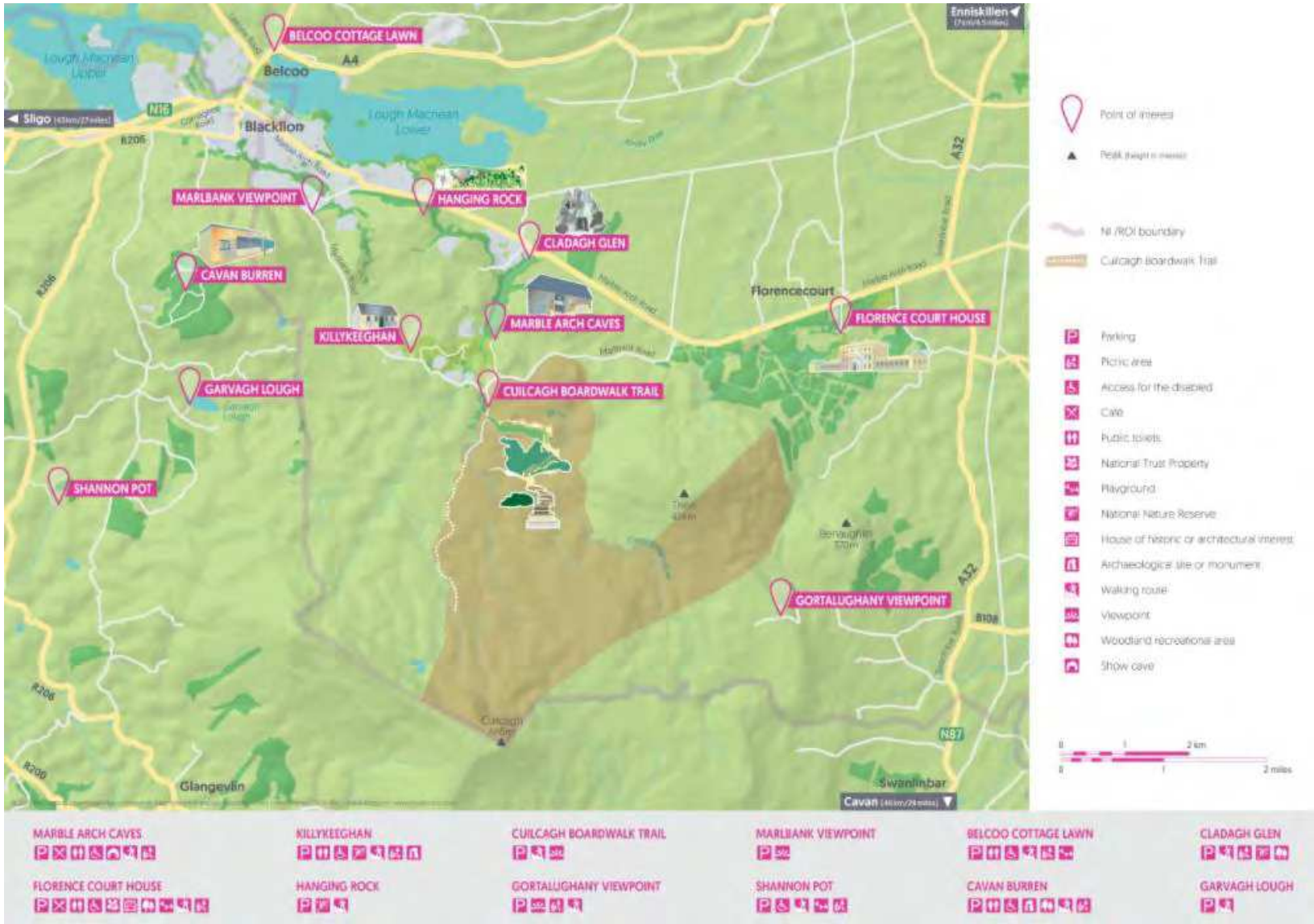
CUILCAGH LAKELANDS GEOPARK

EXPERIENCES, IT'S IN OUR NATURE

www.cuilcaghlakelandsgeopark.com



Appendix 3 - Marlbank



Appendix 4 – Belleek – Castle Caldwell Greenway

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

THE ENGINEERING SKILLS
AND INNOVATION CENTRE

ESIC

DRIVEN BY INDUSTRY
FOR INDUSTRY

SWC

CONCEPT PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

The Engineering Skills and Innovation Centre (ESIC) will deliver a purpose built, state-of-the-art engineering and advanced manufacturing facility, and will focus on the diffusion and adoption of innovation, industrial digitalisation and higher-level technical skills within the Mid-South West (MSW) Region. The facility will connect business, innovation, and education, supporting SMEs and start-ups to overcome both the technological and skills challenges associated with the adoption of industrial digital technologies.

It will serve the world's largest cluster of Advanced Manufacturing businesses in the materials handling sector and a competitive region that represents two-two fifths (39%) of NI's manufacturing employment and a quarter (23%) of its manufacturing GVA[1]. The MSW manufacturing sector employees some 36,300 individuals and has 70% more employment in Advanced Manufacturing compared to the UK average, however below average levels of productivity, innovation and R&D activity present a challenge for future growth[2].

The Centre will provide an anchor for collaboration between industry and the skills system, offering the facilitates and expertise necessary to provide workforce talent and skills that are aligned with technology and productivity opportunities. The Centre will act as the focal point for the development of both higher level skills and apprenticeship programmes to support the industrial economy of the MSW, in alignment with the Northern Ireland FE Sector hub for Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering. In this context, the Centre will work closely with industry to establish workforce need, co-create curriculum and skills solutions, and deliver direct training to learners at all levels.

The Centre will represent a realistic manufacturing environment for education, training, and applied research purposes, critically linking skills development and innovation, and speeding up the flow of knowledge, ideas and resources between education and industry. Importantly, it will provide a suitable environment for businesses to realise their innovation goals, co-creating and working together to de-risk innovation and create technological opportunities through market-driven research and innovation (R&I) support.

The Engineering Skills and Innovation Centre is outlined in the Mid-South West (MSW) region economic strategy as a signature project under the priority for 'boosting innovation and digital activity' within the region. The realisation of the strategy is underpinned by the announcement of Growth Deal funding from the UK Government in October 2018 which seeks to increase the skills, productivity, and competitiveness of regions across the UK. Ultimately, the facility will enhance economic growth and employment in the MSW Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Sector, supporting these businesses to prosper in a post-Brexit and technology-driven environment.

[1] Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2019) 'Future Skills Needs Growth Region'.

[2] Mid South West Region (2020) 'Regional Economic Strategy.

A purpose built, state-of-the-art engineering facility, dedicated to boosting skills and capabilities, digital awareness, and innovation activity within the Mid-South West (MSW) Region Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Sector

Objectives

The Engineering Skills & Innovation Centre seeks to deliver four major objectives, namely to:

1. Act as a vehicle for collaboration between industry and education, creating an industry standard training facility that will increase the volume, quality, and level of training for engineering students, apprentices, employees, and educators. Training content will be industry led and the environment and ethos in which its conducted will replicate industry need.

2. Strengthen the productivity and resilience of the MSW region, through the provision of higher-level and flexible training programmes driven by industrial need, in specialist areas that will enable industrial digitalisation and provide a skills base that can deploy and exploit such processes and technologies.

3. Create an enabling environment to support the Manufacturing sector innovate and digitalise, by increasing the availability of industry-led R&D and Innovation support, targeted at SMEs and start-ups, and guided by their customer needs and growth opportunities.

4. Establish a world-leading facility that will form the skills component of Northern Irelands Advanced Manufacturing Ecosystem, and strengthen connectivity with Industry, Schools and University to maximise the development of the sector and opportunities for individuals, industry and society as a whole.

THE MID SOUTH WEST REGION

Profile

The Mid South West region covers the council areas of Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon, Fermanagh & Omagh and Mid Ulster. A quarter of Northern Irelands population live in the region and it is home to a third of Northern Ireland businesses. Importantly, the region has very significant levels of Advanced Manufacturing activity, with 70% more employment in high and medium tech manufacturing than the UK average.

The economy of MSW is driven by the private sector and includes many large world-leading companies which are major innovators and global exporters. There is also a very substantial SME base in Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing who export globally and also support the supply chains for these companies. In addition to strengths in pharmaceutical and food manufacturing, the region has acknowledged global excellence in the manufacture of machinery for materials handling for the quarrying and construction sectors.

One of the world's most successful clusters of engineering companies is located in the region with upwards of 200 companies manufacturing 40% of the world market share of materials handling plant. This engineering cluster is skills hungry and has a significant ongoing demand for higher level skilled employees and apprentices in all disciplines associated with Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing.

The region has a number of well-established industry led collaborative networks including 'MEGA' (Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement) and 'GET Engineering' formed to address the skills shortage and employability issues within the sector. Supported by government, industry, and education, both networks will have a fundamental role in the development and operation of the Centre.

Consistent with this economic landscape, the MSW region is an important player within the Northern Ireland Manufacturing Innovation Ecosystem. ESIC, physically located in the MSW region, will catalyse further new economic opportunities and ensure future success. The Centre will primarily support companies in the region and help new indigenous and emerging companies, in particular SMEs, to turn commercial ideas into a reality, improve their productivity, develop and keep high value jobs and attract new customers to businesses in the MSW region.

NEED

The MSW region has important industrial strengths in Manufacturing and Engineering. Local companies have a global customer base and a mature local supply chain. A 2019 study by Ulster University Economic Policy Centre highlighted that MSW accounts for two fifths of NI's manufacturing employment and a quarter of manufacturing GVA. However, the productivity level within the MSW region is lower than the rest of NI and this is a key economic challenge. There is a need to close this productivity gap through increased use of technology and automation.

This will require new and higher-level technical and professional skills in Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, delivered through skills apprenticeships, higher-level apprenticeships and professional training for employees. There is also requirement to 'future-proof' these skills to enable a longer-term perspective on what the 'world of work' will look like in 10 years plus time.

This 'future-proofing' of the skills base has emerged as the top priority from engagement with employers across MSW and is aligned with the findings from the regional socio-economic analysis that skills and access to labour are both a major current and future constraint to growth and competitiveness.
In tandem with the identified skills need, there is a need to foster higher levels of innovation and R&D in companies in MSW.

Despite the above average concentration of activity and employment in Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing, business expenditure on R&D represents only one fifth of the overall NI business total.

There is a need to facilitate new and a higher level of knowledge sharing with respect to RD&I in the region to support companies with an interest in improving their competitive position through innovation. There is a requirement to provide access and demonstration to new technologies and systems, which are relevant to companies in MSW.

There is also a need to facilitate new networking into the wider NI Manufacturing Innovation Ecosystem, through Universities and City Deal initiatives, and also through investment networks across the UK and Ireland including the relevant Catapult Centres, providing access to revenue streams for MSW via participation in major national innovation programmes and by attracting FDI.

> "The MSW Region is a world leader in Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering with 70% more employment in high and medium tech manufacturing than the UK average"

INDUSTRY DRIVEN CENTRE

The development of the project proposal and the realisation of the centre will be overseen by three main groups; a Project Board, Project Delivery Team and Stakeholder Advisory Group. To effectively deliver the potential of this Centre, industry in the MSW region will drive conceptualisation, shaping, and governance of the training and services provided in the Centre. They will be integral to the governance and management of the services offered. There will be industry representation both on the Project Board and Stakeholder Advisory Group. This is to ensure that the Centre is responsive to industry needs, while still freeing industry to focus on their core activities of selling and producing; and not on managing a whole innovation/workforce development infrastructure and ecosystem.

As part of this initial scoping phase, SWC have engaged with industry partners from across the MSW Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering sector to seek support and agreement as to the direction of the Centres primary functions, service offering and priority technology areas. Companies and industry stakeholders involved in this initial consultation phases have included.

- Dawson Manufacturing & Engineering Ltd
- Terex
- Sandvik
- CDE Global
- McCloskey's International
- Mannock
- JMG Systems Ltd
- Hyster-Yale Group
- Kingspan Group
- Mallaghan's Engineering Ltd
- Emerson
- Manufacturing Northern Ireland
- Mid Ulster 'MEGA' Manufacturing & Engineering Network

Initial industry consultation has confirmed a strong willingness for instilling an industry-led approach to the conceptualisation and delivery of ESIC. Stakeholders agree there is a real heritage of engineering and manufacturing excellence in the region and this needs to be sustained by bringing through the next generation in engineering excellence and innovation via ESIC. As the proposal advances so will the level of industry and stakeholder consultation.

Additionally, ESIC's design will continue to be informed by the regions existing employer-engagement structures including 'Get Engineering', MEGA, Industrial Advisory Boards and the Engineering Hub network.

PRIMARY FUNCTIONS

ESIC will have four overarching functions that will provide a unique range of services directed to the needs of the manufacturing industry, individual learners, and wider stakeholders. This includes:

Aligning Skills to Industry Demand (Current & Future)

ESIC will position skills, both at a sector and firm level, at the core of improving industrial productivity. Premium will be placed on addressing skill shortages and providing the necessary facilities and expertise for individuals to acquire new or enhanced skills in line with industrial digital technologies and techniques.

Applied Industrial Research & Innovation (R&I) Support

ESIC's model will be focused on industry-driven and market-driven research and innovation support for the SME and start-up Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering sector. It will provide companies across NI with access to the latest manufacturing technologies in areas such as Industry 4.0, Additive Manufacturing & Virtual/Augmented Reality, and provide the knowledge and expertise required to leverage these emerging technologies and de-risk the innovation process for SMEs. Transferring the knowledge of novel technologies and processes through applied R&I models is central to the region grasping the opportunity to improve productivity, open new markets, and deliver a sustainable industrial base.

Network Facilitation for the Region

ESIC will provide a physical structure for enabling network facilitation, better connecting education to the diverse range of stakeholders in the global manufacturing community. To support the increasing pace of technological and business model change, the Centre will build an ecosystem of collaborative partnerships with the private sector, education, government, and complementary manufacturing networks that are necessary to strengthen the position of the region. This will include strong collaboration with the University sector facilitated through the 'AMIC' network, and also wider manufacturing networks including 'MEGA', Manufacturing NI and the UK's High Value Manufacturing Catapult. Additionally, the Centre will work closely with our existing school network to advance practical and effective STEM education, with the aim of raising young people's interest in manufacturing & engineering careers.

Access to Facilities & Technologies

The Centre will provide access to both the intellectual and physical assets that are necessary to raise the quality of training, R&I and knowledge exchange in line with industrial need. It will be aimed at a variety of target groups including; industry, students and employees, schools, educators and other stakeholders (industry bodies, councils), all of whom can directly benefit from access and usage of the facility. The industry-standard facility will comprise of workshop R&D space, engineering laboratories, demonstration & training areas, supported by a community of experts who will facilitate the collaboration and innovation process.

TARGET GROUPS

Industry
(Start-Ups and SME's)

The Centre will target the sectors start-up and SME businesses who tend to be disconnected from academic-lead R&D approaches which govern a large part of innovation activity in NI's Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering Sector. These businesses will benefit from the strategic approach that will place skills and innovation support at the foundation of enhancing economic performance, productivity and growth.

College Students & Employees
(Apprentices, Trainees, Lifelong Learners)

The industry standard training facility will cater for increased volume, quality, and higher level of training for engineering students and apprentices. It will also directly benefit employees seeking to engage in lifelong learning, opening up greater opportunities for specialist training and employee upskilling. Both categories of learner will benefit from the facilities innovative learning spaces which will provide a realistic manufacturing environment for education, training and research purposes.

Schools
(Pupils and Teachers)

The Centre will provide access to the environment, the skills and the technologies required to support schools accelerate technology-enhanced learning experiences outside the traditional classroom environment. It represents a unique space where pupils and teachers will benefit from expert-led outreach initiatives designed to stimulate interest in STEM disciplines through early exposure to advanced manufacturing technology.

Stakeholders
(Industry Bodies, Councils and Skills Association)

The flagship facility will strengthen existing and facilitate new collaborations to complement the MSW Advanced Manufacturing Ecosystem. This will include building stronger networks with the University sector facilitated through 'AMIC', and also wider manufacturing networks including 'MEGA', Manufacturing NI and the UK's High Value Manufacturing Catapult.

FOCUS AREAS

The facility will focus on range of activities and development areas which are closely aligned to the core functions we want to deliver to our target groups. A diagram of the core activities the Centre will undertake to effectively deliver on its objectives is outlined below:

ALIGNING SKILLS TO INDUSTRY DEMAND

The Centre will increase capacity for

- Industry Upskilling, Lifelong Learning & Expert Masterclasses
- Higher-Level Training and Apprenticeships in all disciplines that complement Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing (marketing, business, production management).
- Learning Factories
- Train the Trainers
- Leadership & Management Programmes
- Skills Forecasting
- Bespoke Skills Academies

APPLIED RESEARCH INNOVATION SUPPORT

Areas of Applied R&I support will include

- Advanced Manufacturing Technologies
- Advanced Product Control Systems
- Industry 4.0
- Additive Manufacturing
- Visualisation and Immersive Technologies
- Low Carbon Economy

NETWORK FACILITATION FOR THE REGION

The Centre will provide dedicated collaborative space for

- Engineering Curriculum Hub
- Employer-led Industrial Advisory Boards
- Stakeholder groups (MEGA, Manufacturing NI)
- National & International Collaborative Networks
- University Collaboration (AMIC)
- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- Applied Industrial Research & Innovation Projects
- FabLab workshops for Schools

ACCESS TO FACILITIES & TECHNOLOGIES

The Centre will be resourced with

- Industry 4.0 infrastructure, training and demonstration
- Immersive Technology Suite
- Additive Manufacturing Centre
- Low Carbon technologies training and demonstration
- R&D Testing & Laboratory facilities
- Dedicated collaborative innovation space

PRIORITY TECHNOLOGY AREAS

ESIC will prioritise the technology areas below, in line with industry demand and the specialisms of the MSW engineering sector. It will align skills development strategies to these areas consistent with industry's current and future needs. This includes:

- **Advanced Manufacturing Technologies;** Synergised advanced automation for welding, joining, fabrication, metal cutting / machining and related design technologies for optimisation of the manufacturing and design process in the Mineral Handling/ Extractives/Recycling Sectors.
- **Advanced Product Control Systems;** including mechatronics, PLCs , hydraulics and pneumatics, Industrial electrical / hybrid systems and related design technologies
- **Industry 4.0;** Robotics and Automation including the utilisation of cyber-physical systems through sensors and connectivity infrastructure, artificial intelligence, machine learning and data analytics.
- **Additive Manufacturing;** including polymer, carbon fibre and metal printing
- **Visualisation and Immersive Technologies;** including the use of virtual and augmented reality to enhance the design process/review, marketing & sales, aftersales.
- **Low Carbon Economy;** including the use of industrial digital technologies to enhance sustainability and the more effective utilisation of renewable energy sources to support the decarbonisation of industrial sectors through electrification and the use of "green" hydrogen.

The operations of ESIC will run in synergy with the proposed Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), both working in tandem to tackle the regions industrial challenges through industry-led and market-driven research and innovation support. ESIC will assist local industry at the early innovation stages, ensuring they have access to the facilities and expertise required to initially road-test the latest industrial digital technologies and techniques in a low-risk environment. This support will be critical for enabling companies to experiment with emerging technologies and processes, ensuring they can identify potential benefits and adoption challenges prior to implementation in their own factories. To ensure this R&D is exploited and sustained, the ISCF will provide financial support to companies to make the necessary investments in manufacturing equipment that will underpin transformations in their productivity.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

A study by the High Value Manufacturing (HVM) Catapult[3] investigated the role and impact of Centres of Innovation in developing the future workforce that UK manufacturing needs, by seeking examples of international good practice. The headline message of the study, in all 39 locations investigated, was that successful innovation is dependent on the availability of a workforce with the right skills needed for its full exploitation. It concluded a strong link between innovation & skills development, with Centres of Innovation playing an important role in ensuring the correct skills are in place to anchor the benefits of industrial digitalisation. The overarching recommendation for the UK manufacturing is to make improved connections between innovation, education and training initiatives, using the concept of a 'Skills Value Chain' that recognises the necessity to link current and future initiatives and generate a strategic and system-level response to the manufacturing workforce. The study concluded that Centres of Innovation, such as the proposed ESIC are well placed to convene and support workforce development, especially during the innovation process and at early stages of industrial and education adoption.

There is clear evidence to suggest that such 'Centres of Innovation' deliver overwhelming positive impacts for the manufacturing sector. For example, the UK's HVM Catapult has reported significant impact on GVA, attracting high value inward investment and an increase in innovation projects, particularly with SMEs, to harness the power of innovation and strengthen their performance. These impacts are achieved by Innovation Centres providing companies access to world-class facilities and skills, playing a role in demand-led R&D and enabling workforce development in high-level skills[4].

The growing international trend of 'learning factories' in Centres of Innovation to support the digitalisation of manufacturing also has clear benefit. An example in Europe is the Centre for Industrial Productivity, at Darmstadt Technical University in Germany. Over the past decade it has provided specialised training to 4000 students and 2000 industrial employees. A common theme of many of these Industry 4.0 focused learning factories is the role they play in exposing SMEs to the potential for digital transformation, in conjunction with student education and cooperative research. A recent study has concluded that Centres of Innovation with such facilities, are a fundamental vehicle to raise levels of skills and awareness to enable improvements in manufacturing productivity[5] . In terms of current deployment of learning factories, the UK appears to be behind in comparison to Innovation Centres with similar structures in Germany, Ireland and the USA.

[3] HVM Catapult (2020) Manufacturing the Future Workforce
[4] HVM Catapult (2020) 'High Value Manufacturing Catapult Annual Review 2019/2020'
[5] Gatsby Foundation (2021) 'The opportunity for learning factories in the UK'

SUSTAINABILITY

The Centre will represent a significant project for the region and sustainability from a financial, environmental, and operational perspective will be at the core of the projects design. SWC are a leader in the field of sustainable design and practices, and have experience constructing large capital projects to the highest international standards in environmental construction. For example, the Colleges new Erne Campus will be the first Passive House Premium project of any kind in the UK, continuing our commitment towards sustainability, previously seen with the awarding winning CREST Innovation Centre, which opened in 2016 as the first Passivhaus Certified Educational building in the UK. Our College-wide sustainability strategy, informed by 'one planet living' principles for land, materials and zero waste & carbon energy, will be incorporated into the design and management of ESIC.

Financially, the Centre will become 'self-sustaining' in the longer-term through delivering centrally funded skills & innovation programmes, generating income in the form of funded and commercial projects and potentially securing corporate partnerships for investment. SWC have a proven track record of generating income to cover the running and operational costs for innovation centres and the operational model proposed for ESIC will be similar to other SWC Innovation Centres such as 'InnoTech'. The InnoTech Centre facilities, carry out 225 R,D&I projects for industry annually and have an income generation target of £1.6m which is annually exceeded. This demonstrates the ability for Innovation Centres to be financially stable and self-sustaining. ESIC will complement and enhance this provision for industry allowing for the delivery of higher level, higher value and more complex Engineering and Manufacturing skills and innovation assistance.

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE

South West College

The proposed development of the Engineering Skills and Innovation Centre (ESIC) will be led by South West College (SWC) and supported by a number of key stakeholders including the three councils that make up the MSW region - Mid-Ulster, Fermanagh and Omagh and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon District Councils.

SWC is rurally located in the western region of Northern Ireland, with five campuses operating across both the Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. It is one of the largest vocational and technical Colleges in the United Kingdom employing over 900 staff, servicing some 22,000 full-time and part-time learners, with an annual turnover of £40million. In April 2014, the Education and Training Inspectorate declared SWC a 'Grade 1 – Outstanding' College, placing it as the only regional College in Northern Ireland to be awarded this accolade, and one of only a few in the UK.

The scope of curriculum at the College ranges from Level 1-7 provision including a portfolio of Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE), Apprenticeships and bespoke industry courses. This includes a broad range of modern and industry-relevant curriculum primarily delivered across three faculties: (1) Professional and Social Sciences, (2) Built Environment Creative and Life Sciences and (3) Automotive, Computing and Engineering.

Engineering Curriculum

SWC is recognised for its sector-leading, economically focused and industry relevant approach to engineering skills and innovation activity. Consequently, the College are the designated 'Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Curriculum Hub' for Northern Ireland's FE sector. This copper-fastens the Colleges ability to take a leadership role in driving industry-led engineering curriculum, skills support, and research & innovation services, generating benefit for learners, employers, and stakeholders throughout the entire NI Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering ecosystem.

Engineering at SWC includes a balanced curriculum that facilitates multi-level entry to industry through a range of complementary pathways. Current provision is Grade 1 'outstanding' and covers Mechatronics, Mechanical, Electrical, Electronic, Industrial

Electronics, Advanced Manufacturing, Materials, Wind Turbine Technology and Engineering Management. Curriculum is driven by industry, primarily through the established 'GET Engineering' Cluster which encompasses 102 indigenous and international engineering companies. The embedded college-industry partnership facilitates the future scoping of curriculum, ensuring provision is aligned to both regional employer's needs and global industry trends. The cluster meets monthly and outputs have directly influenced the development of a suite of Apprenticeship, Higher Level Apprenticeship and Degree programmes in the field of Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering.

Innovation Centres

Alongside academic delivery, SWC operates an innovation centre model for industry engagement which is staffed by a team of 30 industrial development associates, research lecturers and PhD students. Under the brand of 'InnoTech', the College operate four specialised innovation centres which directly support the delivery of specialist research, development and innovation services to businesses and entrepreneurs throughout NI. This includes:

- **CREST:** Centre for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technologies
- **IDEA:** Product Design and Development Studies
- **STEM:** Science Technology Engineering Maths
- **IMAGE:** Creative Industries Studio

InnoTech aims to help businesses grow by providing flexible access to technical support, modern equipment and industrial training in a number of specialist areas including Engineering, Renewable Energy and ICT. InnoTech assists over 250 businesses annually, delivering applied R&D, innovation support and technology mentoring, primarily to micro and SMEs who find more difficult to innovate. SWC has historically been the largest deliverer of SME innovation support with the FE sector and in 2020 delivered 261 projects of which 183 (70%) were in the Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering sector. This is achieved through the delivery of funded SME innovation support programmes including Innovation Vouchers, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and the 'InnovateUs' employer support programme.

ESIC would complement SWC's existing innovation centre network and will be focused exclusively on enhancing the competitiveness of Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering companies. This will be achieved by offering new facilitates and expertise necessary to leverage emerging technologies, improve productivity and build a sustainable workforce. In line with the College's existing innovation centres model, ESIC will be openly accessible to companies throughout NI at various stages of development. It will enabl new and more intensive forms of industry engagement, to enhance both our business support and curriculum offering in line with the skills and innovation needs of local industry.

Appendix 2

22 December 2020

By email to Sir Peter Hendry CBE ucr@dft.gov.uk

Dear Sir Peter

REF: OPEN CONSULTATION, UNION CONNECTIVITY REVIEW

Mid South West Region (MSW) welcomes government's commitment to levelling up the UK economy by supporting economic growth and addressing regional inequalities and imbalance. Furthermore, the opportunity to comment on the quality, availability and impact of transport infrastructure within Northern Ireland and border connections to the wider UK and Republic of Ireland is also welcomed.

The Mid South West Region comprises Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council and is a unique collaboration formed in 2018 with the sole purpose of driving economic growth and boosting productivity.

The 'Response' section that follows focuses on matters relevant to transport infrastructure, connectivity and growth challenges for the MSW region.

Attached for your information is a copy of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy launched in September 2020.

On behalf of the Councils representing the Mid South West Region and as part of our submission to the 'Union Connectivity Review', I invite you to visit the region to ascertain greater understanding of our geography and connectivity challenges, as well as ambitions for inclusive growth and greater prosperity.

Yours Sincerely

Roger Wilson, Chief Executive of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council on behalf of Mid South West Region, Northern Ireland.

Enc.

OPEN CONSULTATION

'UNION CONNECTIVITY REVIEW'

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

A Response from Mid South West Region, Northern Ireland

Overview

Mid South West Region (MSW) is the 'Economic Engine' of Northern Ireland.

Mid South West Region (a collaboration between Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council) has a global vision to supercharge the economic growth of our region. The economy is driven by a thriving private sector that includes many world-leading companies which are major innovators and global exporters.

With diverse people and economically competitive businesses, our region has grown faster than all others in Northern Ireland (NI). In NI terms, the region accounts for over a quarter of its population, almost half of its land mass, one third of the NI business base, and has the longest proportion of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Corridor. Many of NI's world leading companies were born here and it continues to be home to headquarters of their globalised operations.

MSW has a contrasting urban and predominantly rural landscape which includes Ireland's oldest city and ecclesiastical capital, Armagh and the towns of Enniskillen, Omagh, Lurgan, Portadown, Banbridge, Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and the "new town" of Craigavon.

Despite significant historical underinvestment in the region's basic enabling infrastructure, communication networks including broadband and mobile coverage, and utilities such as wastewater and sewerage systems, our extraordinary people have created a sophisticated and unique ecosystem for businesses to thrive. Entrepreneurial spirit is a distinctive characteristic of the region. Our business mentality, reputation and dynamism has given us a critical edge over other regions demonstrated by the export of more goods and services than all other areas of NI.
The Region specialises in the manufacturing of machinery, equipment, pharmaceuticals and food products. Our specialisms are even more pronounced when compared to the UK average. We are a truly globally connected region that is driving NI's international dominance across many sectors.

Alongside the economic impact, we have much more to offer – not least our region's natural and cultural heritage. We are custodians of some of the most unique landscapes and internationally important nature conservation sites. From the Lakes of Fermanagh and the spires of Armagh to the earthy homeland of Heaney, we boast a rich tapestry of assets which can lead to greater economic prosperity.

Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy, launched in September 2020, clearly articulates the vison of our region and focuses on specific and targeted interventions and investment to drive growth in the longer-term. Our ambition is to 'supercharge' the growth of the regional economy and ensure inclusive prosperity for the Mid South West Region. In essence, this means boosting productivity; more and better jobs; tackling inequalities; greater investment in the area; supporting our businesses to innovate and grow; improving skills, ensuring future skills to meet the needs of our growing economy; and the resilience of our place.

MSW Regional Economic Strategy is underpinned by the announcement of Growth Deal funding form the UK Government, and is in line with the 'New Decade, New Approach' deal to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland. The economic rationale for our Growth Deal centres around a range of interventions across four pillar areas including: 'Future proofing' The Skills Base; Enabling Infrastructure; Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity; and Building a High-Performing Tourism Economy. The validity of each intervention has been shaped by industry in response to prevailing economic challenges.

Key Data and Facts

Below are statistics that must be taken into consideration by the UK government when undertaking the 'Union Connectivity Review', as they are significant in terms of articulating existing connectivity and inclusive growth challenges in MSW and the wider Northern Ireland region.

- The MSW region makes up almost **half** of Northern Ireland's **land mass**;

- MSW's geographical position is hugely significant as it **spans five of the six** counties in Northern Ireland: Down, Armagh, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry/Londonderry, and has the longest proportion of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Corridor.

- Geography and proximity to the border means that MSW is contiguous to counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland. The region forms a **central part of the North/South border corridor** with much higher levels of cross-border trade, commuting, access to services (including health and education) and recreational use than would be found in other parts of the island of Ireland. In addition, the border region has a co-dependency on tourism, movement of workers, inward investment and funding.

- MSW represents **one quarter of NI population** - combined population of over 470,000 people and a working age population of 300,000 which is forecast to grow;

- MSW created its **own sophisticated and unique ecosystem** for business to thrive, and is home to a third of Northern Ireland businesses and **214,000** workplace-based jobs;

- Generated **£7.7Billion** GVA in 2018 (1/5 of the overall NI Economy). This figure does not consider contribution from **supply chains**;

- MSW is home to many world leading businesses and as such is a globalised, outward and forward looking region which accounts for **27%** of NI **exports**;

- **Leading the Way** in: Manufacturing, Engineering, Agri-Food, Health and Life Sciences, Tourism and Construction. Our regional specialisms are even more pronounced when compared to the UK average;

- MSW is a **significant contributor** to NI Manufacturing Innovation:

  - **39%** of Northern Ireland **manufacturing employment** and **23**% of its manufacturing GVA;

  - **70% more** employment in high and medium tech advanced manufacturing compared to the UK average;

  - **37%** of NI business manufacturing of **machinery and equipment**;

  - **31%** of NI **Agri-food** manufacturing firms;

  - Employment in the manufacture of machinery for **mining, quarrying and construction** sector is almost **four times** the size of the NI average and over **22 times** the UK average;

  - Employment in the manufacturing of basic **pharmaceutical** products is nearly **3 times** larger than the NI average and **15 times** the UK average.

Key Points for Consideration

- In terms of position, NI is the most peripheral of the UK regions and distinct from its neighbouring nations by being connected to them by sea and air only. From a connectivity perspective, MSW's location in NI makes it one of the most peripheral

regions in the UK and indeed Europe. Historically, there has been little or no investment in connectivity (including infrastructure) in the MSW Region and as such regional imbalances and inequalities are profound. However, this landscape is changing as is evident from the key data and facts outlined above.

- The economic geography of the MSW region is shaped by the presence of Northern Ireland strategic corridor routes - the M1, A1 Dublin/Belfast, A4 Ballygawley/Border, A5 (N2) Derry/Dublin, A6 Derry/Belfast and A29 Coleraine/Armagh - all run through the region. MSW's positioning is at the centre of important wider connections and markets, particularly at this critical time when the UK is departing from the EU. Future investment in our north/south and east/west cross border connectivity will significantly influence the functioning of trade, access to labour markets, business productivity and competitiveness. Such investment is essential and will ultimately lead to improvements in NI and UK economic output and the geographical distribution of trade.

  To achieve geographical cohesion across the border regions, MSW connectivity must be prioritised. Greater access to regional, national and global linkages (roads, rail, ports and airports) are essential. Strengthening the region's strategic and unique geographic location through enhanced infrastructure and digital connectivity will advance north/south and east/west cross border interactions and global transactions.

- As the 'economic engine' of NI, and with our evidenced strengths in Manufacturing, Engineering, Agri-Food, Health and Life Sciences, Tourism and Construction, MSW is in a prime position to drive wealth creation, exports and innovation. The critical mass of our global economic activity to date has been achieved in spite of underinvestment in basic economic infrastructure and connectivity, demonstrating the resilience and determination of our indigenous businesses in the region to succeed.

  MSW Regional Economic Strategy identifies significant challenges to be addressed, amongst them: productivity levels which are almost 10% lower than the rest of NI, and 15% lower than the UK average; providing more and better jobs and the ability to keep our economy open to all levels of international talent in the face of a weaker outlook for population growth, and changing migration policy.

  Addressing the productivity shortfall represents a massive opportunity for MSW and NI regions. Doing so would generate substantially more GVA and wealth for our businesses and citizens. For illustrative purposes, if our businesses had closed the 2017 productivity gap (in applicable sectors) with the NI average, productivity would have been approximately 22% higher and thus would have increased MSW's GVA by £1.7bn in that financial year.

- As home to a third of NI businesses and amongst them, many world leading export businesses, MSW industry has been forced to operate with substandard infrastructure networks and connectivity for decades, with consequent constraints on the efficiency of their operations and associated productivity.

  Facilitating transport, advanced cross-border connectivity, greater access to road, rail, ports and airports, progressive digital communication capability, access to industrial land, energy and water are considered by MSW as the bedrock to our prosperity and well-being for the regional economy.

- Future investment by government must be bespoke in nature, and address the actual needs of MSW in order to provide NI regional balance and UK level playing field. Whilst we acknowledge that support for innovation-driven development and the creation of new technologies are vital for future prosperity, it is even more critical that MSW is provided with the opportunity to firstly address the basic economic needs enabling high quality connectivity to facilitate faster movement of products to market, and strengthen our competitive advantage in becoming more progressive in global, complex and strategic supply chain ecosystems.

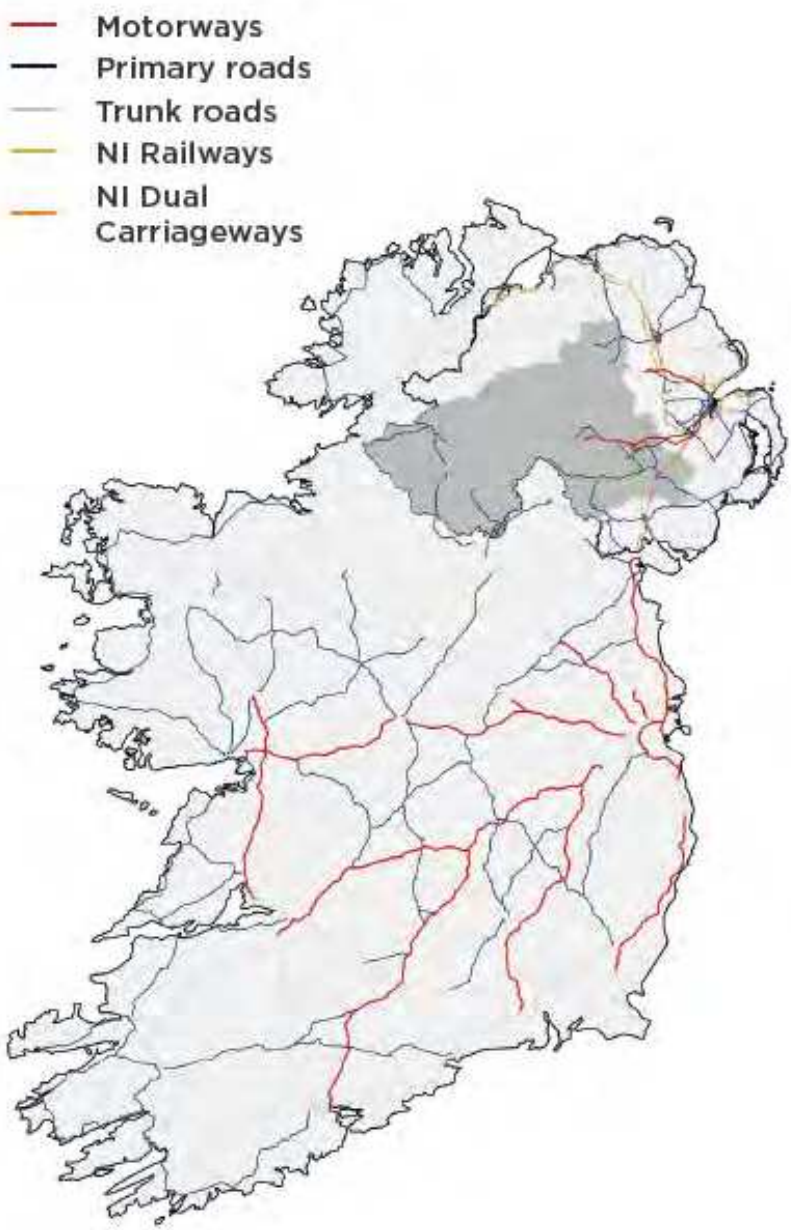
  In order to address regional imbalances and achieve levelling up of NI and UK economies, it is essential in the first instance, to install the basic infrastructure systems that will undergird the structure of our economy and take advantage of our distinctive positioning along the north/south and east/west border corridors. In the absence of redressing the fundamental economic problem (infrastructure gap), increasing productivity and achieving virtuous economic effects will only remain a distant possibility for the MSW region. Based on the financial contribution that the MSW Region makes to the NI and UK Economies, this is an unacceptable position.

- The following basic enabling infrastructure must be prioritised for MSW by NI and UK governments to realise inclusive growth ambitions and achieve a regionally balanced economy (level playing field):
  - Physical Infrastructure – new road networks, rail to the West;
  - Connectivity – improved cross border connections, greater access to rail, sea and air ports, increased digital connectivity, technologies and capability to facilitate 'Freeport' economic zone, broadband and mobile coverage;
  - Access to Industrial Land;
  - Investment in Utilities – electricity, sewerage and wastewater systems;
  - Regeneration and Place Shaping of our Towns and High Streets.

- Whilst MSW accounts for half of the land mass in NI, data shows that motorway and A roads account for only 8% of our network. The map on the next page provides a stark illustration of this. It shows the coverage of motorways, dual carriageways and

primary roads on the island of Ireland, with an evident gap in coverage out to the West:

- There is almost no dual carriageway in Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area (0.6km);
- Dungannon and Cookstown have no bypass networks and as a consequence these major towns in our region, and the roads that surround them are regularly congested;
- Need for bypass networks in Armagh City and Enniskillen, through the East Link in Armagh and the Southern Relief Road in Enniskillen.



- We are told that in order to address economic growth and competitiveness, or to embed new ways of working and technologies, that the infrastructure must be fit for purpose. MSW is significantly disadvantaged and challenged in this way as can be seen above.

- Given that the MSW region is already a hotbed for innovation and hub for global trade, we consider that a central inland 'Freeport' hub site should be located within our region. The 'Freeport' would provide a convenient central management, storage and industrial location for the multiple modes of entry to Northern Ireland and the UK including the airports, rail ports and sea ports and also the multiple points of entry from the Republic of Ireland. The 'Freeport' would greatly assist inward investment across Northern Ireland through developing and enhancing existing competitive clusters and ports, and will maximise the significant regenerative spill-over impacts on adjacent communities within the wider catchment area.

  Sophisticated regional, national and international enabling infrastructure and connectivity will be critical to the success of the Freeport in maximising the opportunity and benefits across the unique context of Northern Ireland, addressing our extensive land border and allowing each port to develop its own specialism thereby creating economic regeneration, innovation and job creation benefits across the country.

Conclusion

Mid South West Region is the 'economic engine' of Northern Ireland and is globally connected with driving NIs international dominance across many sectors. The region is in a prime position to build upon the many evident strengths that we have, and further drive wealth creation, innovation, exports and global trade.

Notwithstanding the many successes achieved by our region, we have significant challenges to be addressed including; poor enabling infrastructure; inadequate cross border connections and communications; lower productivity levels that NI and UK averages; providing more and better jobs, ability to keep our economy open to all levels of international talent in the face of a weaker outlook for population growth, changing migration policy, and other key economically challenged areas.

In order to address regional imbalances and achieve levelling up of NI and UK economies, it is essential in the first instance, to install the basic infrastructure systems in MSW that will undergird the structure of the economy and take advantage of our distinctive positioning along the north/south and east/west border corridors. In the absence of redressing the fundamental economic problem (infrastructure deficit), increasing productivity and achieving virtuous economic effects will only remain a distant possibility for the MSW region. Based on

the financial contribution of MSW to the NI, UK, and EU economies, this is a non-acceptable position.

Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy affirms that connectivity drives the economy. The Strategy recognises that the single largest impediment to our Region's economic growth and prosperity is the absence of the basic economic infrastructure that other regions of the UK take for granted. Our Region's ability to move people and goods is vital to the success of our businesses and the growth of our economy.

If the UK Government is serious about its commitment to levelling up and addressing regional imbalances, then it can no longer continue to direct investment in such a way that only serves to exacerbate these imbalances and inequalities. The Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy confirms the need and evidence base for such investment.

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

31 March 2021

Dear First Minister Arlene Foster MLA and deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA

Ref: Programme for Government Framework Consultation

Mid South West Region (MSW) welcomes the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to developing a new strategic, outcomes-based Programme for Government.

The Mid South West Region comprises Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council and is a unique collaboration formed in 2018 with the sole purpose of driving economic growth and boosting productivity.

The 'Response' section that follows focuses on key points relevant to achieving an inclusive society and regionally balanced economy to enable our people to thrive and businesses to grow.

Attached for your information is a copy of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy launched in September 2020.

On behalf of the Councils representing the Mid South West Region and as part of our submission to the 'Programme for Government Framework Consultation', I invite you and relevant officials to visit the region to ascertain a greater understanding of our challenges, as well as our ambitions for inclusive growth and greater prosperity for all citizens.

Yours sincerely

Mr Roger Wilson
Chief Executive of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council on behalf of Mid South West Region, Northern Ireland

Programme for Government Team

Draft Outcomes Framework

A Response from Mid South West Region

Mid South West (MSW) Region would like to highlight the following summary key points as constituting its 'Response' to the 'Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework' and requests these be considered together with the MSW Regional Economic Strategy https://midsouthwestregion.org/res/ launched on 9 September 2020.

The Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy (RES) clearly articulates an ambition to drive economic growth and boost prosperity, and in doing so creating an inclusive society that will enable our people to live ambitious and fulfilling lives.

Overview

Mid South West Region (MSW) is the 'Economic Engine' of Northern Ireland.

Mid South West Region (a collaboration between Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council) has a vision to supercharge the economic growth of our region and thus creating a better place for citizens and businesses to live and work.

With diverse people and economically competitive businesses, our region has grown faster than all others in Northern Ireland (NI). In NI terms, the region accounts for over a quarter of its population, almost half of its land mass, one third of the NI business base, and has the longest proportion of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Corridor. Many of NI's world leading companies were born here and it continues to be home to headquarters of their globalised operations.

MSW has a contrasting urban and predominantly rural landscape which includes Ireland's oldest city and ecclesiastical capital, Armagh and the towns of Enniskillen, Omagh, Lurgan, Portadown, Banbridge, Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and the "new town" of Craigavon.

Despite significant historical underinvestment in the region's basic enabling infrastructure, communication networks including broadband and mobile coverage,

and utilities such as wastewater, sewerage and electricity systems, our extraordinary people have created a sophisticated and unique ecosystem for businesses to thrive. Entrepreneurial spirit is a distinctive characteristic of the region. Our business mentality, reputation and dynamism has given us a critical edge over other regions demonstrated by the export of more goods and services than all other areas of NI. The Region specialises in the manufacturing of machinery, equipment, pharmaceuticals and food products. Our specialisms are even more pronounced when compared to the UK average. We are a truly globally connected region that is driving NI's international dominance across many sectors.

Alongside the economic impact, we have much more to offer – not least our region's natural and cultural heritage. We are custodians of some of the most unique landscapes and internationally important nature conservation sites. From the Lakes of Fermanagh and the spires of Armagh to the earthy homeland of Heaney, we boast a rich tapestry of assets which can lead to greater economic prosperity.

MSW Regional Economic Strategy clearly articulates the vison of our region and focuses on specific and targeted interventions and investment to drive growth in the longer-term. In essence, this means boosting productivity; more and better jobs; tackling inequalities; greater investment across a broad range of areas; supporting businesses to innovate and grow; ongoing internationalisation of the region; improving skills to ensure our people can reach their potential, ensuring future skills to meet the needs of our growing economy; and the capacity and resilience of our people and place.

The Strategy is underpinned by the announcement of Growth Deal funding from the UK Government, and is in line with the 'New Decade, New Approach' deal to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland. The economic rationale for our Growth Deal centres around an approach to deliver the optimum interventions to further accelerate the growth of the MSW economic engine across four pillar areas including: 'Future proofing' The Skills Base; Enabling Infrastructure; Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity; and Building a High-Performing Tourism Economy. The validity of each intervention has been shaped by industry in response to prevailing economic challenges.

Key Information and Data for Mid South West Region

MSW requests that the economic contribution of the region (detailed below) be recognised and profiled in future NI government plans.

- Mid South West Region consists of three Council areas – **Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, Fermanagh and Omagh, and Mid Ulster** (see map below). Collectively they make up almost **half** of Northern Ireland's (NI) **land mass** and **all border** the Republic of Ireland. **One quarter** of NI's population live in MSW (478,000 people) with approximately **two thirds** of all residents living within **rural** areas, and in 2018 the **214,000** workplace-based jobs generated an estimated **£7.7bn of GVA** - corresponding to **one fifth of NI's economy**. Significant additional GVA also arises from the supply chain and consumer spending impacts associated with this direct employment. The MSW region is a functional economic geography with **90%** of local jobs taken by residents.

- Our region is a highly entrepreneurial, private sector led economy. Over **one third** of the **75,000 NI firms** are based in MSW, meaning there are 54 businesses in MSW per 1,000 residents— significantly higher than the NI average (40 businesses). The three District Council areas that make up our region rank **1, 2** and **3** amongst the 11 Council areas in NI for **early-stage entrepreneurial activity** (TEA). This converts into a business birth rate for MSW above the NI average (4 versus 3.6 respectively). Furthermore, business survival rates in MSW also outperform the NI average.

- MSW is home to many **world-leading export businesses** and as such is a globalised, outward and forward-looking region. This is evidenced by the fact that our businesses accounted for **22.6% of turnover** in NI in 2018, **27% of NI exports** and **31.1% of NI external sales**. Further evidence of our outward and forward-looking ethos is the fact that our businesses have historically been very **successful in attracting new labour and skills** to our region. Our success is predominantly based on the vision and determination of indigenous business champions, as Foreign and Direct Investment (FDI) has not played a major role in our region to date. The importance of our indigenous business champions is further underlined by the fact that in large parts of our region there is a **severe lack of public sector jobs**. Previous initiatives aimed at

decentralising public sector employment in NI have failed to have a material impact on our region. However, we welcome the recent announcement of the establishment of new civil service regional hubs and we call on the Finance Minister and the NI Executive to expedite plans to establish Connect2 hubs in Craigavon, Omagh and Enniskillen.

- The positioning of the MSW region along the **Ireland/Northern Ireland Border Corridor** is a key attribute. The Border Corridor is recognised as the sub-regional economic driver within the Regional Development Strategy for NI to 2035. Our region (relative to the other City/Growth Deal regions in NI) has the **longest proportion of the Border Corridor**and as a result, there are significant existing cross-border **co-dependencies** in our region (e.g. in areas such as **trade, movement of people/labour, agri-food, tourism, shared services such as health and education, and inward investment and funding**). Evidence from successive reports and studies all highlight that the impact of Brexit will fall disproportionately on the Border Region and within that on a number of sectors such as indigenous SMEs which are predominant along the Border Corridor. As a region we are now in the very early stages of the **new trading environment** of the post-Brexit era. Access to effective trade pathways in a North/South (island of Ireland) and East-West (GB mainland) context has never been more critical for our region. This however is highly **dependent on effective physical and digital connectivity** with export markets for our products.

- Our region has significant strengths in **manufacturing, engineering, agri-food, health & life sciences, tourism and construction** and mature local **supply chains** in all of these sectors. A 2019 study by Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) highlighted that our region accounts for two fifths (**39%**) of NI's Manufacturing employment and a quarter (**23%**) of its manufacturing GVA. We have **70% more employment** in high and medium tech advanced manufacturing compared to the UK average.

- We have particular **regional specialisms** that are very pronounced at both the NI and UK levels. For example, employment in the manufacturing of basic pharmaceutical products is nearly **three times larger** than the NI average and **15 times** the UK average. A second example is employment in the manufacture of machinery for mining, quarrying and construction sector, which is almost **four times the size of the NI average and over 22 times the UK average**. Allied to this our region is a global leader in the niche market of the manufacture of tracked mobile stone crushing and gravel screening equipment. A final example of a regional specialism is the agri-food sector – our region accounts for **31% of NI's agri-food firms and employs nearly 11,500 people**. We have a strong

presence and capacity for R&D and innovation in the agri- food sector - with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) site in Loughgall in Co Armagh and two of the three CAFRE Campuses in NI based in MSW (in Loughry and Enniskillen).

- Finally, our region has particular competitive advantages in terms of the quality of our **tourism product**. The Loughs and Lakes of Lough Erne in Co Fermanagh are a superb recreational and tourism resource and strongly differentiates our region from other destinations in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Sperrins are a defined Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (one of only eight in NI) and the cross-border Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark is designated by the Geopark Network and UNESCO. Further east in MSW is the distinctive charm of the majestic city of Armagh, a city that has a unique sense of place with a significance and influence felt across the island of Ireland for 6,500 years and at the heart of celebrating the life of Saint Patrick.

Key Points for Consideration

OUTCOME 2 - WE LIVE AND WORK SUSTAINABLY – PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

MSW Key Priority Areas to be Addressed

- Climate Change
- Water and Wastewater Management
- Housing

Specific MSW Feedback

MSW is of the opinion that sustainable development should be an overarching theme of the PfG, and not a specific outcome.

Whilst the following list of key strategies is not exhaustive, MSW recommends the inclusion of the following strategies in targeting the current climate and nature emergency:

- Local climate change law (Bill) with targets for Northern Ireland to contribute fairly to UK Net Zero by 2050, with the relevant actions put in place and committed to;
- Ammonia Strategy, which would be fundamental to both Climate Action and the delivery of a Clean Air Strategy;

- A new Waste Management Strategy to provide clarity on how the EU Circular Economy Package (CEP) will be implemented in Northern Ireland as previously committed to.

MSW recommends that rurality be specifically addressed as a core issue within this outcome. This is particularly relevant when it comes to issues such as sustainable transport, infrastructure and connectivity, built environment, natural environment etc. MSW requests that the final version of the PFG addresses rurality in this theme, and also in associated themes and key priority areas.

Due to above average population growth and house building not keeping pace with demand, many people in the MSW region are currently facing major housing challenges with exceptionally high levels of housing stress and homelessness. Notwithstanding these challenges, many new housing and business developments (particularly in MSW urban towns and key settlements) are being constrained by NI Water with restrictions on new connections to the sewerage network. Underinvestment in MSW region wastewater infrastructure has resulted in lack of capacity in wastewater treatment works and networks, as well as new water mains not being delivered. During 2019/2020 only 92 new social housing units were delivered across the MSW region, and 163 onsite, which is nowhere near the level required to meet housing demand and alleviate housing stress and/or homelessness. Reason for not delivering greater numbers has often been related to inability by social housing providers to connect to the main sewerage network.
The impacts of the sustained underfunding in our water utility demands urgent action and significant capital investment. The supply of social and affordable housing is a key issue in going forward. NIHE estimate that 1,523 new social housing units are required in the Mid South West Region between 2019-2024. Given that housing need is greatest in our urban towns, this is particularly concerning with many of these areas having NI Water restrictions. Failure to find a solution to unlock investment in our water utility will not only have detrimental impacts for our people but also businesses and the natural environment.

OUTCOMES 3 & 4 – WE HAVE AN EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY WHERE EVERYONE IS VALUED AND TREATED WITH RESPECT / WE ALL ENJOY LONG, HEALTH AND ACTIVE LIVES

MSW Key Priority Areas to be Addressed

- Access to Health
- Connectivity
- Deprivation
- Rurality

- Housing

Specific MSW Feedback

40% of MSW's SOAs are ranked amongst the most deprived in NI for access to services. This indicator covers travel time by private and public transport to a range of 16 services and the proportion of properties with slow broadband connections. One of the services considered within this indicator is access to healthcare: Accident and Emergency Services. In many parts of the MSW region deficiencies in the road network and broadband capabilities contribute to some of the lowest performances in relation to ambulance response times in Northern Ireland. Residents are impacted again (and again) because they have the poorest access to acute health care provision as the travel time to a hospital with major injury treatment capabilities is over eight minutes longer than the NI average, and limited availability to public transport infrastructure. It has been acknowledged by the NIAST that the quality of our roads infrastructure (poor terrain and narrow roads), particularly in rurally isolated areas, has an undeniable impact on travel time. This is the 'lived experience' of many in our region to the realities of poor access to critical services and sub-standard infrastructure and connectivity.

The local availability and effectiveness of Health and Social Care services in our region necessitates an urgent review and must be enhanced and future-proofed to meet the needs of our communities. This will require investment in the health estate, infrastructure, reconfiguration of existing services and facilities as well as emergency ambulance services. The importance and role of Primary Care, as provided by our General Practitioners (GPs), as the entry point to the Health and Social Care system for the majority of people, must be central to a future co-designed service.

The access to services deprivation indicator referenced above also reflects the fact that much of MSW has relatively poor access to higher capacity broadband service availability (ultrafast and full fibre). As a result, a high proportion of premises do not have access to higher speed connections, which is particularly evident in Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster District Council areas. Constraints in our digital connectivity remain a barrier to our people, education, services and businesses. The largely rural nature of MSW requires commitment and positive investment by relevant government departments to ensure no gaps exist beyond the roll out of Project Stratum and other planned interventions.

MSW recognises the issues of poverty and social isolation within the region, and in particular the rural areas. Even though our local economy (pre pandemic) was near or at full employment, with high levels of resident employment and relatively low levels of inactivity and unemployment, there continues to be 'deep pockets' of

deprivation including some which are within the top 10% deprivation levels across NI. As two thirds of the MSW region is located in rural areas, deprivation has higher prevalence among our rural dwellers.

MSW strongly believes that reducing social isolation and loneliness are immediate priorities as is the promotion of good mental health together with other interconnected social determinants of health and well-being including: poor housing, poor jobs, poor mental health, lack of employment and lack of educational attainment on health outcomes.

As MSW is a low wage economy it is imperative that the minimum wage is addressed in order to tackle poverty, disadvantage and inequality. It is recommended that the NI Executive review the use of zero-hours contracts, casual contracts and living wage implementation in order to support the achievement of this outcome.

As previously stated in Outcome 2 the MSW region has above average population growth, however house building has not kept pace with growth in demand. Many people and households are currently facing major housing challenges with exceptionally high levels of housing stress and homelessness. In March 2020, there were 6,803 people in the MSW Region on NIHE waiting lists with 4,272 in housing stress and 2,437 Full Duty homelessness. From March 2019 to March 2020 only 1006 housing allocations were made.

OUTCOME 5 – EVERYONE CAN REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

MSW Key Priority Areas to be Addressed

- Future Proofing the Skills Base
- Reshape our Education Policy
- Address Underachievement
- Education to Jobs

Specific MSW Feedback

Future proofing the skills base is a top priority for the MSW region with skills and labour being both a major current and future constraint to growth and competitiveness in the region. MSW robustly supports the need for reform in the NI Skills Eco-System enabling greater collaboration with and between industry, schools and colleges to ensure students study industry relevant curriculum and subjects reflective of particular local and regional specialisms. Quite simply education policy must be reshaped to provide the skills that our businesses need, and to support the upskilling of many of our residents. At present, the proportion of our labour force that

have no qualifications (16.7% compared to 8% in the UK) is too high while the share that have not progressed to NVQ 4+ or above (31.6% compared to 38.4% in the UK) is too low.

Given that before the Covid-19 pandemic our economy was near or at full employment, there is a need to intervene with actions to ensure that the requisite skills for the future are there in scale and profile to not only fulfil the needs of business but also develop capacity and resilience of our people to achieve high level attainment and access better jobs.

Given that our people are our greatest asset, we now have an increased imperative to focus on these particular areas of need within our overall education and skills development plans. Actions are required to:

- address underachievement
- improve careers education, advice and guidance;
- address under supply of mid-high level tier skills;
- align Further and Higher education to labour market demand;
- promote, inclusive and engaging workplaces;
- develop leadership talent alongside technical and professional skills; and
- increase the uptake of vocational pathways and quality of modern apprenticeships enabling progression to employment or to higher education on a par with general or academic qualifications, particularly to ensure inclusive workplaces.

The above actions will need further development and be 'future-proofed' to enable a longer-term perspective on what the world of work will look like for our people in 10 years plus time, with associated skills implications. In addition, there is a need for sustained funding from central government departments to progress the delivery of 'local' programmes and initiatives aimed at addressing skills issues in the area.

OUTCOME 6 – OUR ECONOMY IS GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE, REGIONALLY BALANCED AND CARBON NEUTRAL

MSW Key Priority Areas to be Addressed

- NI Regional Balanced Economy
- Physical Infrastructure Deficit
- Connectivity
- Utilities
- Productivity Challenges
- Green Jobs

Specific MSW Feedback

MSW primary objective is to drive economic growth and boost prosperity for all businesses and citizens, and in doing so creating an inclusive society that will enable our people to be ambitious and reach their full potential.

MSW strongly supports ‘levelling up’ and ‘regional balance’ within the NI economy. MSW requests that the Executive makes clear what the government policy agenda will be for a regionally balanced economy in NI, and that it applies an evidence based approach consistent with ensuring an equitable allocation of funding and investment in the future. In addition, the use of statistics and index data will be necessary to achieve regional competitiveness development. Such approaches will be critical in order to address the serious infrastructural and connectivity deficits that exist in MSW, and to unlock the productivity gains and economic growth that our region will deliver as a result.

MSW states the need for a separate PfG outcome aligned to the development of high value infrastructure and connectivity in terms of roads, rail, air and sea transport, environmental improvements, urban development, public transport, sustainable travel and availability of high speed telecommunications (broadband and mobile phone networks). MSW requests that the Executive recognise the importance of infrastructure (physical and digital) as an economic driver and contributor to quality of life.

The MSW RES presents an evidence based position on the economic infrastructure challenges that prevail in the region. Facilitating transport, promoting communication, providing access to land, energy and water are the bedrock of prosperity and well-being in any economy. Our RES documents serious gaps in several aspects of this basic economic infrastructure, some of which are named below.

The economic geography of the MSW region is shaped by the presence of Northern Ireland strategic and economic corridor routes - the M1, A1 Dublin/Belfast, A4 Ballygawley/Border, A5 (N2) Derry/Dublin, A6 Derry/Belfast and A29 Coleraine/Armagh - all run through the region. MSW’s positioning is at the centre of important wider connections and markets, particularly at this critical time following the UK’s departure from the EU. Future investment in our north/south and east/west cross border connectivity will significantly influence the functioning of trade, access to labour markets, business productivity and competitiveness. Such investment is fundamental and will ultimately lead to improvements in NI and UK economic output and the geographical distribution of trade.

To achieve geographical cohesion across the border regions, MSW connectivity must be prioritised. Greater access to regional, national and global linkages is essential. Strengthening the region's strategic and unique geographic location through enhanced infrastructure and digital connectivity will advance north/south and east/west cross border interactions and global transactions.

As home to a third of NI businesses, MSW is in a prime position to drive inclusive growth and wealth creation, exports and innovation. The critical mass of our global economic activity to date has been achieved in spite of decades of underinvestment in the basic economic infrastructure and connectivity, demonstrating the resilience and determination of our indigenous businesses and people in the region to succeed.

Facilitating transport, advanced cross-border connectivity, greater access to road, rail, ports and airports, progressive digital communication capability, access to industrial land, energy and water are considered by MSW as the bedrock to future prosperity and essential for the well-being of our regional economy. Future investment by NI and UK Governments must be bespoke in nature, and address the actual needs of MSW in order to provide NI regional balance and UK level playing field. In order to address these challenges, it is essential in the first instance, to install the basic infrastructure and connectivity systems that will undergird the structure of our economy and take advantage of our distinctive positioning. In the absence of redressing the fundamental economic problem (infrastructure gap), increasing productivity and achieving virtuous economic effects will only remain a distant possibility for the MSW region.

In addition to the physical and digital infrastructure constraints, there are also major deficits in relation to the prevailing wastewater network capacity (refer to Outcome 2) and state electricity supply in MSW. The deficit in wastewater network capacity is most pronounced in Mid Ulster but arguably increasingly more prevalent in other parts of MSW. This is a major constraint on housing development (impacting on the ability to attract people to live and work from elsewhere to MSW) and on the development of serviced land, to enable our businesses to grow and expand. Sufficient access to high quality electricity to meet future supply needs in the region is imperative. As well as security of supply it is essential that the reduction in cost be achieved to support economic growth and facilitate investment.

Key catalyst interventions to achieve this outcome for the MSW region include the completion of a full fibre broadband network across our region, investment in wastewater and sewerage systems as well as the delivery of strategic road network improvements including the A3 North and West Link, A4 Enniskillen Southern

Bypass, A5 Derry to Aughnacloy, A28 Armagh East Link, A29 Cookstown and Dungannon bypasses, and A32 Cortnamuck & Kilgortnaleague.

The acute need for development land has been identified as a key development constraint for medium/large sized companies in MSW. This issue continues to stifle economic growth, indeed it threatens the region's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and yet there is industrial land available in MSW that could be made available to our indigenous businesses to support their immediate growth plans. There is also a lack of high-quality innovation space to enable our people to test new ideas, work with emerging sectors and collaborate in research and development. Yet collaboration and the sharing of ideas, is a key ingredient for a successful knowledge economy.

MSW RES identifies significant challenges to be addressed, amongst them: productivity levels which are almost 10% lower than the rest of NI, and 15% lower than the UK average; providing more and better jobs and the ability to keep our economy open to all levels of international talent in the face of a weaker outlook for population growth, and changing migration policy. Addressing the productivity shortfall represents a massive opportunity for MSW and NI. Doing so would generate substantially more GVA and wealth for our businesses and citizens.

Despite the MSW region being recognised as the 'economic engine' of NI, and a highly entrepreneurial economy with favourable survival rates, there is evidence that too many of our indigenous businesses fail to grow. Over 86% of local businesses have less than 10 employees compared to 83.9% in NI. In addition, over a third of MSW businesses have a turnover of less than £50,000 compared to a quarter across NI. The need for increased support for SMEs is evident.

In relation to the 'Green Economy' it is essential that government policy champions an increase in the number of 'green jobs' and the provision of support for existing and start-up circular economy businesses. Incentivising industry to innovate should also be a focus of this priority.

OUTCOME 9 – PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE, WORK AND VISIT HERE

MSW Key Priority Areas to be Addressed

- Visitor and tourism economy/Tourism Sector
- Accessibility/Physical Infrastructure Deficits
- High Streets and Town Centres
- Housing

Specific MSW Feedback

As noted previously our region has particular competitive advantages in terms of the quality of our tourism product and our ambition for the tourism sector is to build a high-performing visitor and tourism economy. The opportunity to further grow tourism in MSW, sits in the context of the strong growth in overall tourism activity in NI in the five years, pre the pandemic, and the potential to route 'out-of-state' visitor traffic on from the tourism 'hotspots' of Titanic Belfast and the Causeway Coast. This in turn will help create greater regional balance in the tourism economy of NI. However, the performance and impact of investment in MSW tourism products is intrinsically linked to overcoming the infrastructure and connectivity barriers to the growth of out-of-state tourism in our region. Indeed, Tourism NI research confirms that the main barriers to out-of-state tourism growth in MSW include the physical accessibility of the region, information and signposting and digital connectivity. Out-of-state visitors to NI, visiting for a short period/ weekend break, often rely on public transport, rather than car hire. Therefore, the absence of rail links to existing 'tourism hotspots' and gateways into NI, is a material accessibility barrier to readily accessing the world class tourism product in our region. For those visitors who do hire a car, the experience of driving also poses accessibility barriers, given the deficiencies in our road network.

Locally, within the MSW region, Tourism is important to the local economy and has enormous potential. Further investment interventions are required to support the tourism sector to recover from the pandemic could include: improving the attractiveness of towns and villages, investing in new visitor experiences, increased marketing of 'staycations', amongst others.

MSW region high streets and town centres are facing significant challenges as a consequence of a lack of competitiveness due to higher operating costs than online competitors (eg property costs), underperformance, evolving economies, developing capability and changing technologies, advancements in artificial intelligence and automation, and the impact of coronavirus. These challenges have been further amplified with the implementation of mitigation measures to ensure customer safety, more precautionary consumer actions and subdued confidence levels leading to further decline in footfall and customer spending. Notwithstanding the coronavirus crisis, now is the time to reimagine, regenerate and transform our high streets and town centres for the future, and indeed shape the 'new normal'. Future investment must ultimately create the conditions that will attract greater numbers of people to live, visit, shop, work, walk and play, which collectively will increase spending in the region.

Affordability for rental properties is a major issue in many parts of the MSW region with extortionate rental prices and expediential increases being imposed on tenants renting within the sector. Such impositions are resulting in immense suffering by many residents who are already enduring rises on restricted or decreasing income levels. In some areas rents are in excess of £650 per month for five person three bedroom houses. Many tenants are faced with significant shortfalls per week between rental charge and housing benefit payable. Consequently, to the affordability issues many tenants are experiencing recurring homelessness and increased poverty. A possible way to tackle this issue would be to review the potential for rental cap or rent pressure zones, where tenants are experiencing homeless due to affordability.

Conclusion

Mid South West Region is the ‘economic engine’ of Northern Ireland.

Notwithstanding the many successes achieved by our region, we have significant challenges that must be addressed including but not limited to poor infrastructure and connectivity (roads, rail, utilities, digital communication capability, industrial land, housing, town centres); lower productivity levels than NI and UK averages; providing more and better jobs; ability to keep our economy open to all levels of international talent in the face of a weaker outlook for population growth; rural isolation and deprivation, greater access to services including health, education and transport; and changing migration policy.

If the UK and NI Governments are serious about their commitments to levelling up and addressing regional imbalances, then they can no longer direct service provision and investment in such a way that only serves to exacerbate imbalances and inequalities.

First Minister Arlene Foster MLA, and deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA (front row) launching the Regional Economic Strategy for the Mid South West Region. Back row: Councillor Robert Irvine, Vice Chair of the Mid South West Steering Group; Roger Wilson, Chief Executive of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Alison McCullagh, Chief Executive of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; Anthony Tohill, Chief Executive of Mid Ulster District Council and Councillor Cathal Mallaghan, Chair of the Mid South West Steering Group.

Supercharging the Mid South West Economy

As the Mid South West launches its Regional Economic Strategy, the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group write for Ambition, outlining how an area already considered the economic engine of Northern Ireland has plans to boost productivity and prosperity.

The commitment of three Councils to work collaboratively to drive economic growth across their areas makes sense. By pooling resources, ideas and status the collective can benefit from economies of scale and the region is much better placed to pursue investment.

The Mid South West is a collaboration between Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council.

In the pages that follow you will read more of the detail of our collective ambition for the Mid South West Region and that ambition is firmly grounded in a place which has been the economic engine of Northern Ireland for quite some time. We're proud of where we've come from, however we know that as a region we are capable of much, much more if we can address the deficits that exist – infrastructure, skills, innovation and tourism – and by doing so, provide the right conditions for those sectors where we are already leading the way – advanced manufacturing, engineering, agri-food, health and life sciences, tourism, construction and others – to excel.

In essence our Regional Economic Strategy is focused on helping companies across the Mid South West supercharge the growth of their businesses which will in turn turbocharge the growth of the Mid South West economy and the Northern Ireland economy.

We will strive to tackle the barriers to growth while also helping companies to become exemplars in their field, capable of competing with the best in the world.

Collaboration is central to achieving this aim, not just across the three councils in the Mid South West but also with the business community which is at the heart of the region's economic future.

We have already benefitted from the insight and expertise of our Business Reference Group, made up of some 18 companies who represent the region's sectoral strengths and who were central to shaping the strategy.

Moving forward, the commitment from all businesses in the Mid South West – startups, SMEs, large companies and every inward investor – will be critical to ensuring that the strategy can be successfully delivered.

We are breaking new ground with our Regional Economic Strategy and together we will be able to boost productivity and prosperity across the Mid South West Region and create an even better place for everyone to live, work and play.

The Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy – What is it?

The Regional Economic Strategy outlines an ambitious and confident way forward for the Mid South West Region and, indeed, the whole of Northern Ireland. It was an important initiative when work first began on it in 2018 and it's even more important now as the region deals with the economic effects of and recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

The strategy has been developed in close consultation with government departments and agencies, Invest Northern Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland, skills bodies, business representative groups, educational institutions, universities and, crucially, businesses from a wide range of sectors – these contributions have been vital.

The key to its success is putting businesses and our economy at the heart of our plans to ensure that funding support – whether public or private – is invested in the most responsible and effective manner.

Significant investment will be required to deliver the strategy with a total commitment to date of £252 million towards a Growth Deal from the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. In addition, we intend to pursue other opportunities, such as investment through PEACE PLUS and the Shared Prosperity Fund to name a few.

The Regional Economic Strategy

The strategy is structured around four intervention pillars:

1. 'Future Proofing' the Skills Base
2. Enabling Infrastructure
3. Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity
4. Building a High-Performing Tourism Economy

Our interventions will be geared towards delivering exponential and long term benefits including:

- Increasing productivity levels and closing the productivity gap
- Driving business growth
- Protecting our unique sectoral advantages and realising sectoral opportunities
- Creating more, better paid jobs
- Rebalancing the regional economy
- Increasing our global impact and underlining the benefits to the Northern Ireland economy.

THE 'ECONOMIC ENGINE' OF THE NI ECONOMY

Contributes
£7.7bn
of GVA

Home to
1/3
of NI firms

Accounts for
1/5
of NI economy

Accounts for
27%
of NI's exports

1/4
of NI population

90%
of local jobs taken by residents

70%
more employment in advanced manufacturing compared to the UK average

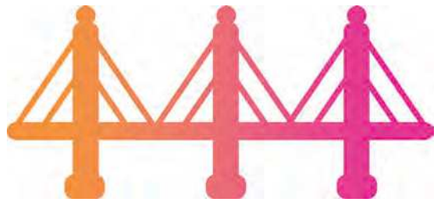
214,000
workplace-based jobs

1. 'Future Proofing' the Skills Base

Future proofing the skills base is becoming ever more important. It's a top priority emerging from our engagements with business. We want to ensure that the requisite skills are available in scale and profile to underpin our region's ambitions and those of our already very successful businesses.

As well as requiring significant financial investment, we are seeking to drive change in four policy areas:

- access to labour/lobbying for a differentiated migration policy
- policy changes to 'Off-the-Shelf' Apprenticeships
- extending the range of Higher-Level Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships available in our region and
- a greater focus on Shared Apprenticeship schemes.



2. Enabling Infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is critical. If we're going to get anywhere we need to have the strategic road infrastructure that enables our businesses to access all areas including ports and distribution points.

We've pinpointed where improvements are needed – the Armagh East Link; the A29 Cookstown bypass, the A4 Enniskillen Southern bypass, as well as the development of the A3 Armagh North & West Link, the A29 Dungannon bypass and the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen.

It's not just roads. Investment must also be targeted at:

- addressing broadband, mobile coverage and reliability
- transforming our high streets to be places of choice for our local communities
- enabling access to available industrial land
- driving investment in electricity supply, and
- supporting opportunites for regeneration and site development.

3. Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity

Advanced manufacturing is one of our big success stories and it has enormous potential. We're placing our ambitions in this area into the NI-wide 'eco-system' and at the centre of what is being discussed within the City/Growth Deals (i.e. the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre in the Belfast Region City Deal and the Centre for Industrial Digitalisation, Robotics and Automation in Derry/Londonderry City Region). Our ambition is to create an innovation and skills academy delivered by the South West College in Dungannon.

In relation to Agri-food our impact is global. We'll support our colleagues in CAFRE in the development of a Northern Ireland Agri-food Robotics Centre at the Loughry Campus and we'll work in collaboration with AFBI to develop a centre for Agri-Tech Innovation. We will develop Agri-food incubation space to support food development for smaller SMEs, an area that's currently being explored by the Southern Region College.

Then there's the digital tech sector. We need to develop a network of Digi-Hubs to support this sector's growth. In addition to exploring a number of potential health innovation proposals with the Region's two leading and acute teaching hospitals, we're also exploring a new-build Health and Care Centre in Cookstown.

4. Building a High-Performing Tourism Economy

Finally, we want to focus on building a high performing tourism economy. Our region has so much to offer – the Fermanagh Lakes, the Sperrins, our literary heritage, the cultural significance of Ireland's oldest city, Armagh, where Patrick established his first church, the Ulster American Folk Park – and more besides. The recent announcement of the commitment to the Game of Thrones Legacy Project from the private sector is a welcome investment.

We want to invest in the development of our tourism product – including cross-border – in actions that stimulate/de-risk and expedite quality hotel investment as well as improving infrastructure for routing/ signposting and visitor engagement.

However, we know from Tourism NI research that the main barriers to growing our visitor economy are accessibility and connectivity.

NEXT STEPS

We've already engaged extensively with our businesses and key sectors, with politicians locally, regionally and nationally, with central government, with education and the wider stakeholder community, and that will continue.

We will also continue to work closely with the other City/Growth Deals to ensure that we complement each other and provide maximum benefit for NI PLC.

We've outlined the scale of our ambition and the need to support investment to demonstrate significant GVA output.

We will continue to welcome the input and guidance of our industry/business base. We need their continued engagement with this initiative as we move through the next stages in development.

The collaboration of our three councils to develop the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy is a model of what can be achieved by people working together for the common good. But we don't want it to stop there.

We are living in truly life-changing times. In years to come, people will look back on 2020 and the Coronavirus pandemic and see it as a challenging experience for us all. We want to make it a positive moment in our history – the beginning of something transformative which builds on the Region's creativity and innovation.

This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to supercharge the Mid South West economy, to boost prosperity for everyone in Northern Ireland and create the right environment for our powerhouse businesses to thrive.

For more information contact info@midsouthwestregion.org or midsouthwestregion.org and on Twitter @MSW_Region

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Collaborating for a strong economic future for the Mid South West Region

How co-operation between the three councils which make up the Mid South West Region led to the development of a Regional Economic Strategy to supercharge the growth of the region's economy.

Pictured at the launch of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy are, from left: Nigel Manley, Balcas; Cormac Diamond, Bloc Blinds; Damian Heron, Heron Bros; Darragh Cullen, Edge Innovate; Roger Wilson, Chief Executive of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Diane Dodds MLA, Minister for the Economy; Alison McCullagh, Chief Executive of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; Anthony Tohill, Chief Executive of Mid Ulster District Council; Adrian McCoy, Severfield; Brian Irwin, Irwin's Bakery; Cathal Mallaghan, Chair of the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group; Liam McCaffrey, Mannok; Kevin Holland, Chief Executive of Invest NI; Ethna McNamee, Regional Manager Invest NI; Councillor Robert Irvine, Vice Chair of the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group.

A new strategy designed to supercharge the growth of the economy of the Mid South West (MSW) will create the right conditions for companies located in the region to flourish in the coming years.

The Regional Economic Strategy is focused on boosting productivity across the three council areas of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council - which make up the Mid South West Region and will require businesses to play their part in helping to realise its ambitious goals.

The strategy, which was developed following extensive research and analysis of the region's economy and was informed by engagement with the region's major employers, identifies challenges and opportunities and sets out four pillars to guide investment and grow the collective economy.

The pillars are: future proofing the skills base, enabling infrastructure, boosting innovation and digital capacity and building a high performing tourism economy.

By focusing on those areas, the overriding goals of increasing productivity, driving business growth, fully realising sectoral strengths and opportunities, creating more and better-paid jobs and ensuring the ongoing internationalisation of MSW can be achieved, Councillor Robert Irvine, Chair of the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group, said.

"Our ambitions for the Mid South West economy are far reaching, but we are confident that with the support of all stakeholders in the region they are wholly achievable. The analysis of the region's economy was honest both in terms of identifying its strengths but also the areas where support and investment in a range of strategic interventions can have the most impact.

"Through the Regional Economic Strategy, we will strive to create the conditions that the private sector needs to grow their businesses, employ more skilled staff and become internationally competitive. We are unashamedly ambitious as are our businesses and so by working together we can raise productivity and create a better future for everyone."

The strategy will enable the Mid South West Region to leverage financial investment from a range of sources - such as the Growth Deal funding announced by the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive, the PEACE PLUS Programme, the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, Innovate UK and other central government funding.

Following the recent launch of the strategy by First Minister Arlene Foster MLA and deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA at a socially-distanced event held at EDGE Innovate near Dungannon, Minister Dodds MLA, who also attended the launch said its overriding aims are more relevant than ever as the region recovers and rebuilds, adding that the support of the business community has been and will continue to be crucial. "This strategy provides an excellent framework to support the identification of Growth Deal projects and the councils are to be congratulated for coming together and working constructively" for the betterment of the region. She said sustained industry engagement will be key to its successful delivery.

The strategy sets out several areas where growth is being impeded and how those impediments can be removed.

Boosting productivity, connectivity and infrastructure, skills and making more of the region's tourism offering are the focus of the strategy, which is structured around four intervention pillars.

1 'Future Proofing' the Skills Base

Future proofing the skills base is becoming ever more important. It's a top priority emerging from MSW's engagements with business and the strategy aims to ensure that the requisite skills are available in scale and profile to underpin the region's ambitions and those of its businesses.

2 Enabling Infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is critical. To boost productivity MSW needs to have the strategic road infrastructure that enables businesses to access all areas including ports and distribution points, as well as better broadband and mobile coverage, access to industrial land for development and improved investment in electricity supply.

3 Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity

We aim to support businesses to be more productive by helping enhance their capabilities in crucial enabling technologies such as data analytics, robotics, automation, Industry 4.0, machine learning, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, advanced materials and production techniques, and to exploit the growth opportunities these technologies hold for our region.

4 Building a High-Performing Tourism Economy

Finally, the strategy is focused on building a high performing tourism economy which capitalises on the region's tourism assets including the Fermanagh Lakes, the Sperrins, Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark, MSW's literary heritage as well as the cultural significance of Ireland's oldest city Armagh to name a few.

The future

MSW has engaged extensively with businesses and key sectors, with politicians locally, regionally and nationally, with central government, with education and the wider stakeholder community, and this engagement, particularly with businesses will continue.

"We will continue to welcome the input and guidance of our industry/business base," Councillor Irvine said. "Their ongoing engagement with this initiative is critical as we move to the next stage of development."

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to supercharge the Mid South West economy and cement the Region's position as Northern Ireland's engine room."

Eye

For further information visit www.midsouthwestregion.org or email info@midsouthwestregion.org

MSW
Mid South West
Economic Engine

Mid South West collaboration lays down plans for a prosperous future

How the input of local and central government can help to deliver on the ambitions of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy

Pictured, from left, are: Councillor Robert Irvine, Chair of the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group, Roger Wilson, Chief Executive of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, First Minister Arlene Foster MLA, Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Robin Walker MP, Minister for the Economy Diane Dodds MLA, Alison McCullagh, Chief Executive of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA, Anthony Tohill, former Chief Executive of Mid Ulster District Council and Councillor Cathal Mallaghan, former Chair of the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group.

A unique collaboration bringing together three Northern Ireland councils and the private, third level and education sectors has produced a strategy aimed at supercharging economic growth across the region in the coming years.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council have joined forces to form the Mid South West (MSW) Region with the primary aim of creating the optimum conditions to attract investment and drive economic growth.

To realise this ambition, they have developed a Regional Economic Strategy (RES) which has identified the areas where funding can be most effectively invested to address a range of challenges and ultimately boost economic growth opportunities.

Launched at a socially-distanced event at Edge Innovate in Dungannon on 9 September 2020 by First Minister Arlene Foster MLA and deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA, the strategy was developed following extensive research and analysis of the region's economy and was informed by engagement with the major employers located in the region.

Further collboaration from both local and central government will be necessary to help make, shape and support the case for change.

"The Regional Economic Strategy has been borne out of collaboration across the councils, across sectors and across geographies," Councillor Robert Irvine, Chair of the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group, said. "Its success relies on the continued input from all stakeholders to help keep our growth trajectory on course and to feed back on the needs of businesses operating in an ever-changing world.

"By working closely together over the next few years we will be able to boost productivity in the Mid South West Region and create more and better jobs. This region has proved itself to be the engine room of the Northern Ireland economy; our aim is to turbocharge the engine and create a more prosperous future for everyone."

The strategy identifies challenges and opportunities for the region and sets out four pillars to guide investment and grow the collective economy. The pillars are: future proofing the skills base, enabling infrastructure, boosting innovation and digital capacity and building a high performing tourism economy. By focusing on these areas, the overriding goals of increasing productivity, driving business growth, fully realising sectoral strengths and opportunities, creating more and better-paid jobs and ensuring the ongoing internationalisation of MSW can be achieved.

Implementation of the RES will enable the Mid South West Region to leverage financial investment from a range of sources, such as the Growth Deal funding announced recently by the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive, the PEACE PLUS Programme, the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, Innovate UK and other central government funding.

"We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create an even better place to live, work and invest across the Mid South West Region," Councillor Irvine adds. "This co-ordinated, bottom-up approach ensures that we will leave no stone unturned in our pursuit for economic growth and we call upon all stakeholders across all sectors including the public, private and education sectors, to join us in putting a shoulder to the region's economic wheel."

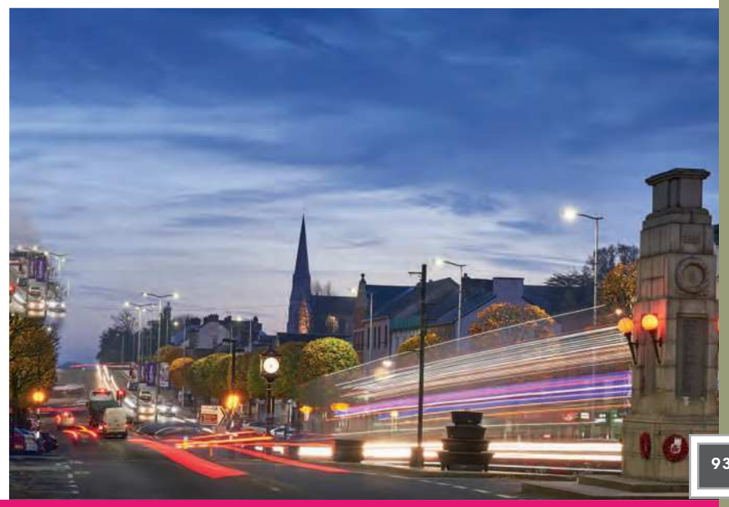
The Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy in detail

The Regional Economic Strategy sets out a path to grow the economy of the Mid South West Region and Northern Ireland. It was an important initiative when work first began on it in 2018 and it's even more important now as the region deals with the economic effects of and recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

"The strategy has been developed in close consultation with government departments and agencies, Invest Northern Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland, skills bodies, business representative groups, educational institutions, universities and, crucially, businesses from a wide range of sectors."

The key to its success is putting businesses and the MSW economy at the heart of plans to ensure that funding support, whether public or private, is invested in the most responsible and effective manner.

Significant investment will be required to deliver the strategy with a total commitment to date of a quarter of a billion pounds towards a Growth Deal



enterprise and economic development report

from the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. As previously stated, MSW will also pursue a range of other funding opportunities, such as investment through PEACE PLUS and the Shared Prosperity Fund, to name a few.

The strategy is structured around four intervention pillars:

1. 'Future Proofing' the Skills Base
2. Enabling Infrastructure
3. Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity
4. Building a High-Performing Tourism Economy

The interventions will be geared towards delivering exponential and long-term benefits including:

- increasing productivity levels and closing the productivity gap;
- driving business growth;
- protecting our unique sectoral advantages and realising sectoral opportunities;
- creating more, better paid jobs;
- rebalancing the regional economy;
- increasing our global impact and underlining the benefits to the Northern Ireland economy.

The MSW pillars

'Future Proofing' the Skills Base

Future proofing the skills base is becoming ever more important and was a top priority emerging from engagements with businesses during the development of the RES. MSW wants to ensure the requisite skills are available in scale and profile to underpin the region's ambitions and those of the successful businesses which already exist there.

As well as requiring significant financial investment, the strategy seeks to drive change in four policy areas:

- access to labour/lobbying for a differentiated migration policy;
- policy changes to 'off-the-shelf' apprenticeships;
- extending the range of higher-level apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships available in the region; and
- a greater focus on shared apprenticeship schemes.

"We want to make it a positive moment in our history. the beginning of something transformative which builds on the region's creativity and innovation."

Enabling Infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is critical to drive economic growth across MSW. Strategic road infrastructure enables businesses in the region to access all areas including ports and distribution points. The strategy has pinpointed where improvements are needed: the Armagh East Link; the A29 Cookstown bypass, the A4 Enniskillen Southern bypass, as well as the development of the A3 Armagh North & West Link, the A29 Dungannon bypass and the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen.

Investment will also be targeted at:

- addressing broadband, mobile coverage and reliability;
- transforming our high streets to be places of choice for our local communities;
- enabling access to available industrial land;
- driving investment in electricity supply; and
- supporting opportunities for regeneration and site development.

Boosting Innovation and Digital Capacity

Advanced manufacturing is one of MSW's big success stories and has enormous potential. The region is placing its ambitions in this area into the Northern Ireland-wide 'ecosystem' and at the centre of what is being discussed within the City/Growth Deals (i.e. the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre in the Belfast Region City Deal and the Centre for Industrial Digitalisation, Robotics and Automation in Derry/Londonderry City Region). The ambition is to create an innovation and skills academy delivered by the South West College in Dungannon. In relation to agri-food, the impact of the strategy is global. The RES will support CAFRE in the development of a Northern Ireland Agri-food Robotics Centre at the Loughry Campus and work in collaboration with AFBI to develop a centre for Agri-Tech Innovation. It will develop agri-food incubation space to support food development for smaller SMEs, an area currently being explored by the Southern Regional College. The strategy also sets out plans to develop a network of Digi-Hubs to support the sector's growth. In addition to exploring a number of potential health innovation proposals with the region's two leading and acute teaching hospitals, MSW is also exploring a new-build Health and Care Centre in Cookstown.

Building a High-Performing Tourism Economy

The MSW has a host of tourism offerings: the Fermanagh Lakes, the Sperrins, our literary heritage, the cultural significance of Ireland's oldest city, Armagh, where Patrick established his first church, the Ulster American Folk Park, Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark and more besides, including the recent announcement of the commitment to the Game of Thrones Legacy Project.

MSW's aim is to invest in the development of its tourism product, including cross-border, in actions that stimulate/de-risk and expedite quality hotel investment as well as improving infrastructure for routing/ signposting and visitor engagement.

The future

MSW has already engaged extensively with businesses and key sectors, with politicians locally, regionally and nationally, with central government, with education and the wider stakeholder community, and that will continue.

"We will continue to work closely with the other Northern Ireland City/Growth Deal regions to ensure complementarity and to take advantage of any synergies which may exist and continue to welcome the input and guidance of our industry/business base," Councillor Irvine explains. "We need their continued engagement with this initiative as we move through the next stages in development.

"The collaboration of our three councils to develop the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy is a model of what can be achieved by people working together for the common good. We are living in truly life-changing times. In years to come, people will look back on 2020 and the Coronavirus pandemic and see it as a challenging experience for us all.

"We want to make it a positive moment in our history. The beginning of something transformative which builds on the region's creativity and innovation."

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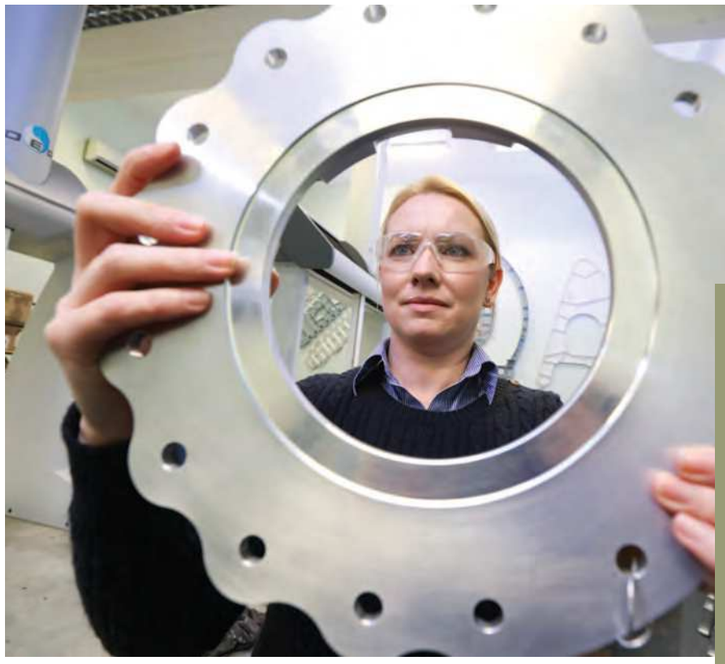

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The Mid South West Region

How the business world is critical in helping the **Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy** reach its aim of supercharging the region's economy

Companies have an important role to play in supercharging the Mid South West's (MSW) economy as part of a unique collaboration between three of Northern Ireland's most dynamic councils.

That's the conclusion of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy which has been developed with the aim of boosting productivity across the three council areas of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council.

The input from businesses across a range of sectors has been instrumental in helping to shape the strategy by identifying areas where investment is needed to allow them to grow unimpeded and their continued input will be vital as the strategy is rolled out in the coming months and years, according to councillor Robert Irvine, chairman of the Mid South West Region Governance Steering Group.

"Business sits at the heart of this strategy and will be fundamental in ensuring that the Mid South West's economy flourishes in the future," he said. "We have geared the actions identified in the strategy towards addressing business needs and areas of deficit in order to provide businesses, that are already proficient, with the optimum conditions for them to maximise their potential, not just locally but internationally. By targeting investment we will reinforce the region's sectoral strengths in manufacturing, engineering, agri-food, health and life sciences, tourism and construction as well as in a fast-growing digital tech sector.

"The Mid South West Business Reference Group has provided invaluable insight into the development of the strategy and will continue to play an important roll in its delivery. Our ambitions for the Mid South West economy are far reaching, but we are confident that with the support of businesses and all stakeholders in the region they are wholly achievable."

The Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy identifies challenges and opportunities and sets out four pillars to guide investment and grow the collective economy. The pillars are: future proofing the skills base, enabling infrastructure, boosting innovation and digital capacity and building a high performing tourism economy.

By focusing on those areas, the overriding goals of increasing productivity, driving business growth and competitiveness, fully realising sectoral strengths and opportunities, creating more and better-paid jobs and ensuring the ongoing internationalisation of MSW can be achieved.

The strategy will enable the Mid South West Region to leverage financial investment from a range of sources – such as the £250m Growth Deal funding committed by the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive, the PEACE PLUS Programme, the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, Innovate UK and other central government funding.

The strategy was launched by First Minister Arlene Foster MLA and deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA at a socially-distanced event held near Dungannon at the premises of EDGE Innovate, one of the companies represented on the Business Reference Group.

For further information: Email: info@midsouthwestregion.org, visit the website at midsouthwestregion.org or check out Twitter @ MSW_Region

THE MSW PILLARS

'Future proofing' the skills base
Future proofing the skills base is becoming ever more important and was a top priority emerging from engagements with businesses during the development of the regional economic strategy. MSW wants to ensure the requisite skills are available in scale and profile to underpin the region's ambitions and those of the successful businesses which already exist there.

As well as requiring significant financial investment, the strategy seeks to drive change in four policy areas:
- access to labour/lobbying for a differentiated migration policy;
- policy changes to 'off-the-shelf' apprenticeships;
- extending the range of higher-level apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships available in the region; and
- a greater focus on shared apprenticeship schemes.

Enabling Infrastructure
Investment in infrastructure is critical to drive economic growth across MSW. Strategic road infrastructure enables businesses in the region to access all areas including ports and distribution points. The strategy has pinpointed where improvements are needed: the Armagh East Link; the A29 Cookstown bypass, the A4 Enniskillen Southern bypass, as well as the development of the A3 Armagh North & West Link, the A29 Dungannon bypass and the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen. Investment will also be targeted at:
- addressing broadband, mobile coverage and reliability;
- transforming our high streets to be places of choice for our local communities;
- enabling access to available industrial land;
- driving investment in electricity supply; and
- supporting opportunities for regeneration and site development.

Boosting innovation and digital capacity
Advanced manufacturing is one of MSW's big success stories and has enormous potential. The region is placing its ambitions in this area into the Northern Ireland-wide 'ecosystem' and at the centre of what is being discussed within the wider City/Growth Deals (ie the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre in the Belfast Region City Deal and the Centre for Industrial Digitalisation, Robotics and Automation in Derry/Londonderry City Region). The ambition is to create an innovation and skills academy delivered by the South West College in Dungannon. In relation to agri-food, the impact of the strategy is global. The RES will support CAFRE in the development of a Northern Ireland Agri-food Robotics Centre at the Loughry Campus and work in collaboration with AFBI to develop a centre for Agri-Tech Innovation. It will develop agri-food incubation space to support food development for smaller SMEs, an area currently being explored by the Southern Regional College. The strategy also sets out plans to develop a network of Digi-Hubs to support the sector's growth. In addition to exploring a number of potential health innovation proposals with the region's two leading and acute teaching hospitals, MSW is also exploring a new-build Health and Care Centre in Cookstown.

Building a high-performing tourism economy
The MSW has a host of tourism offerings: the Fermanagh Lakes, the Sperrins, our literary heritage, the cultural significance of Ireland's oldest city, Armagh, where Patrick established his first church, the Ulster American Folk Park, Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark and more besides, including the recent announcement of the commitment to the Game of Thrones Legacy Project.
MSW's aim is to invest in the development of its tourism product, including cross-border, in actions that stimulate/de-risk and expedite quality hotel investment as well as improving infrastructure for routing/signposting and visitor engagement.

The future
MSW has already engaged extensively with businesses and key sectors, with politicians locally, regionally and nationally, with central government, with education and the wider stakeholder community, and that will continue.

"We will continue to work closely with the other Northern Ireland City/Growth Deal regions to ensure complementarity and to take advantage of any synergies which may exist and continue to welcome the input and guidance of our industry/business base," Councillor Irvine explains. "We need their continued engagement with this initiative as we move through the next stages in development.

"The collaboration of our three councils to develop the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy is a model of what can be achieved by people working together for the common good. We are living in truly life-changing times. In years to come, people will look back on 2020 and the Coronavirus pandemic and see it as a challenging experience for us all.

"We want to make it a positive moment in our history. The beginning of something transformative which builds on the region's creativity and innovation."

Appendix 4

INFRASTRUCTURE/ CONNECTIVITY PAPER

Discussion of 'Key Messages and Asks' with MSW Region Governance Steering Group Meeting

Purpose of Paper

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- To facilitate positive and constructive dialogue with the UK Government and the NI Executive.

- In respect of one ‘core’ ask i.e. flexibility in the financial construct of MSW Growth Deal funding.

- And four other ‘related asks’, relevant to the centrality of ‘infrastructure and connectivity’ investment to achieving the ambitions of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES).

- Word document will be converted to professional brochure format.

Structure of Paper

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Section 1: Purpose of Paper – *which also includes a summary of the 'asks'*

Section 2: Introduction to the MSW Regional Economic Strategy (RES) Development Process – *which outlines the centrality of prevailing infrastructure and connectivity deficits to all of the ambitions and plans within the RES*

Section 3: A short profile of the MSW region as the 'Economic Engine' of NI.

Section 4: 'Headline' Ambitions of the RES

Providing the 'economic evidence' of the growth potential that MSW can deliver not just for NI, but in a wider UK and island of Ireland context….but that this is however contingent on actions to address the serious infrastructure and connectivity deficits in our region

Section 5: Prevailing Infrastructure and Connectivity Deficits – *evidenced-based*

Section 6: The 'Ask' of Government / Next Steps

‘Takeaway’ Points

Prior to the ‘asks’ the paper is seeking to build awareness and understanding of the following points with the audience:-

- *The MSW region is well-behind the ‘baseline’ position in terms of basic infrastructure and connectivity relative to the other City Deal regions in NI.*
- *Actions to address infrastructural and connectivity deficits are both a pre-requisite and ‘rising tide’ for our ambition across all sectors in MSW.*
- *We already have world-leading capacity and evident potential for further growth, that will benefit NI as whole – as well as the wider UK and Island of Ireland economies.*
- *As a region we are now in the very early stages of the new trading environment of the post-Brexit era. Access to effective trade pathways in a North/South (island of Ireland) and East-West (GB mainland) context has never been more critical for our region.*

‘Takeaway’ Points (Cont.)

- *Our region thus far has not sufficiently experienced the benefits of previous policy to ‘regionally-balance’ the NI economy, despite our performance and contribution as the ‘economic engine’ of the same.*

- *Forward UK and NI policy has an increasing focus on ‘levelling-up’ and ‘regional balance’ – which represents an opportunity to significantly improve the benefits that our region can experience in future.*

‘Takeaway’ Points (Cont.)

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- *We are already working positively and collaboratively with the other City/Growth deals across NI, where synergies exist and to prevent duplication of activity at an NI-wide level.*

- *In citing that we are not starting from the same ‘baseline’ position as the other City deal regions, we do not wish in any way to detract from their ambitions and plans, which alongside ours will greatly benefit NI as a whole.*

- *However, it is important that it is recognised that our RES (and Growth Deal) does sit within a different baseline context.*

- *Allied to this, the risk exists that if there is not significant movement on the issues highlighted above, then we may never be able to fully ‘level-up or achieve ‘regional balance’ commensurate with the evident growth potential in our region.*

ASK No 1: Flexibility in the Financial Construct of the MSW Growth Deal Funding

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Contextual Points

- Unlike the other City Deal regions in NI, we did not have an opportunity to influence and negotiate upon the financial construct of the Growth Deal for MSW

- The ethos of a City Deal is intended to give a city/ region, greater powers and freedom to take charge and responsibility of decisions that affect their area. In addition to do what they think is best to help their businesses grow and to create the optimal environment for economic growth. And against all of this potential to input on how best public money aligned to the Deals should be spent.

- We have identified needs bespoke to our region, through a comprehensive industry/ business-led process, that in keeping with the ethos above should have shaped a bespoke financial construct within the Growth Deal arrangements.

ASK No 1: Flexibility in the Financial Construct of the MSW Growth Deal Funding

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Contextual Points

- £126m of Growth Deal funding was pledged by the UK government for the MSW in the 2020 Budget Statement. This is specifically to support investment in 'Innovation and Digital' Activity.

- This will be matched by £126m from the NI Executive which can fund activity across all intervention themes.

- The total confirmed Growth Deal package for MSW is therefore £252m, not with-standing local authority contributions and private sector matched funding contributions.

ASK No 1: Flexibility in the Financial Construct of the MSW Growth Deal Funding

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- A 50/50 balance of emphasis between investment in 'Innovation and Digital' and all other investment areas in the Growth Deal, fails to recognise the critical importance of investment in infrastructure and connectivity in our region for all of our ambitions.

- For instance, if this was shifted to 30/70*, this would enable us to bring forward a prioritised list of some of the infrastructure and connectivity projects within our RES. Which in turn will unlock significant productivity gains and economic growth potential in MSW.

- The above suggested split, is a starting point for discussions and negotiations, and could be further informed by project prioritisation and future business case work.

"One size does not fit all"

** That is 30% of funding for investment in 'Innovation and Digital' and 70% for all other investment areas in the Growth Deal*

ASK No 2: Action to Redress Infrastructural and Connectivity Deficits in MSW in the Forward Programme for Investment in Public Infrastructure

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New Infrastructure Strategy NI

Updating the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTN TP).

Union Connectivity Review

Our 'ask' is that the forward actions that arise from each fully embrace the policy imperatives of 'levelling-up' disparities between UK regions and achieving 'regional balance' within NI.

This focus is critical for us to redress the serious infrastructural and connectivity deficits in MSW and to unlock the productivity gains and economic growth that our region will deliver as a result.

ASK No 3: Broadband Infrastructure Improvements / Partnership Working on Project Stratum Roll-Out in MSW

- As our region is 'furthest behind' in terms of broadband connectivity in NI currently, timely roll-out of Project Stratum is absolutely critical for us.
- We ask DfE to continue to work in partnership with us on the planned roll out of Project Stratum as it relates to the three Council areas in MSW.
- Also, in respect of the actions to include premises that currently are out of scope in MSW

Ask No 4: Targeting of Policy Levers and Investment Approaches to Underpin Growth of World-Leading Sectors

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- *Our 'ask' is that government acknowledge that their sectoral ambitions for NI as expressed in the draft Industrial Strategy/ Economy 2030 will be constrained if the basic deficiencies in our economic infrastructure and connectivity are not addressed – because our region/MSW brings much of the world class capability in NI in four out of the priority six sectors identified.*

- *Consequently, we expect that government will use the various policy levers and investment approaches at their disposal to target resources into the economic infrastructure and connectivity necessary to reinforce these sectoral ambitions.*

Ask no 5: Single Point of Contact / Lead for Regional Balance and Levelling-Up Policy Agenda

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- As a region we have fostered cohesion amongst our industry/business champions, political and civic leaders for the ambitions and proposals within our RES.

- Our governance structures were set out from the outset to facilitate this and as a result we speak 'with a single unified voice' on the needs of our region and ambitions / plans for the same.

- Our experience of working with partners in central government is by contrast often fragmented in that different perspectives and approaches exist, that constrain an optimal approach to delivering upon the evident growth potential of our region.

- Looking ahead our 'ask' is for a single point of contact within both the NI and UK government structures, in respect of the 'regional balance' and 'levelling-up' policy imperatives respectively.

- This would greatly simplify our interaction with both and help co-ordinate plans and approaches across various Government Departments/ agencies necessary to realise the implementation of our RES.

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FEEDBACK / QUESTIONS?