

Report on	Continuation of Northern Ireland Forest Schools within Council Area
Date of Meeting	Thursday 9 th July 2020
Reporting Officer	Head of Parks
Contact Officer	Anne Reid

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 update Members of the growing success of the Forest Schools programme within the Mid Ulster District Council area and to confirm continuation of the programme from Sept 2020 to June 2021.
2.0	Background
2.1	Northern Ireland Forest School Awards (NIFSA) is an environmental awareness initiative, facilitated by personnel from NIFSA, which encourages pupils in Mid Ulster schools to visit and take on an ownership of a Council Park. It has been operating successfully at Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park since April 2017 as part of the education programme at Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House. The programme is funded - 50% from the Parks budget; 50% from the Ranfurly House budget.
2.2	As part of the NIFSA programme, pupils and teachers identify an area within Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park that they can develop as their own Forest School site. Here they undertake exciting and innovative activities to help them understand the importance of our natural environment and local heritage. Activities can include making a map of the Council Park using only natural resources, den building, as well as the use of trees to help children better understand maths.
2.3	The teachers involved undertake a Forest School Leader qualification (OCN Level 3). This gives them the confidence to continue visiting the Council Park year after year and developing more exciting outdoor activities to complement classroom-led lessons. This qualification also ensures sustainability as Forest School activities are continued within the school and environmental learning becomes embedded within the school curriculum.

2.4	<p>Three Mid Ulster schools have been participated in NIFSA at Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park during the school year 2019-20:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tamnamore Learning Centre, Dungannon • Little Flower Nursery School, Clonoe • New Row Primary School, Castledawson
2.5	<p>In addition to this, four Parks staff have gained their qualifications as Forest School Leaders and have been working with six Mid Ulster Schools across two sites during the school year 2019 – 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Malachy's Primary School, Glencull – attending sessions at Ballygawley Allotments • St Mary's Primary School, Ballygawley - attending sessions at Ballygawley Allotments • St Mary's Primary School, Cabragh - attending sessions at Ballygawley Allotments • Richmond primary School, Ballygawley - attending sessions at Ballygawley Allotments • Holy Family Primary School, Aughamullan - attending sessions at Dungannon Park • Carntall Primary School, Clogher - attending sessions at Dungannon Park
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Interest has been shown in NIFSA by other schools, nurseries and community organisations in the Mid Ulster District Council area and thirty-five have registered an interest in NIFSA by posting on its website.</p>
3.2	<p>Northern Ireland Forest School Awards has proved to be a very popular addition to the education programme at Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House and within Parks sites.</p>
3.3	<p>The continuation of this programme would maintain this connection of environmental awareness and citizenship skills within the Council Parks, while extending the learning of ecological and conservation skills to even more pupils and teachers in the Mid Ulster District Council area. Continuation would be subject to meeting requirements of COVID restrictions.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications

	<p>Financial: Total cost £6,000 £3,000 from Parks budget (50%) £3,000 from Ranfurly House budget (50%)</p>
	<p>Human: Staff time and commitment</p>
	<p>Risk Management: Risk Assessments are continually carried out as part of the activity preparations. Continuation would be subject to meeting requirements of COVID restrictions.</p>
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p>
	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: In conjunction with Council policies and procedures</p>
	<p>Rural Needs Implications: In conjunction with Council policies and procedures</p>
5.0	<p>Recommendation(s)</p>
5.1	<p>To commit to continuation with the Forest School programme within Mid Ulster for 2020-2021 subject to meeting requirements of COVID restrictions.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>For more information search Forest Schools Home Page: https://www.forestschoolawards.org/cgi-bin/main.cgi</p>