

<b>Report on</b>	Northern Ireland Forest Schools Scheme
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Head of Parks
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Nigel Hill

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To seek approval to register and engage with Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association (NIFSA) to develop a schools programme in Mid Ulster District Council area for a second year 2018-19.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	<p>Northern Ireland Forest School Awards is an environmental awareness initiative which encourages local schools to visit and take on an ownership of their local 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 &amp; Ranfurly House.</p> <p>As part of the NIFSA programme, pupils and teachers identify an area within the local Council Park (Hill of The O'Neill) 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.</p> <p>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 replace classroom led lessons.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>Three local schools have been participating in NIFSA at Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dungannon Primary School</li> <li>• Gaelscoil Aodha Rua</li> <li>• St. Patrick's Primary School</li> </ul> <p>Classes from two of the schools, Dungannon Primary School and St Patrick's Primary School, have completed their programmes, and a class from Gaelscoil Aodha Rua will begin its programme in January 2018. The feedback from the participant schools has been excellent and the staff and pupils have thoroughly enjoyed the NIFSA activities. The staff from Dungannon Primary School have already made plans to return to the park</p>

	<p>to undertake a second programme of Forest Schools, and on this occasion it will led by the teacher who was trained.</p> <p>Interest has been shown in NIFSA by other local schools in the Mid Ulster District Council area and seven have registered an interest in NIFSA by posting on its website.</p> <p>Northern Ireland Forest Schools Awards have proved to be a very popular addition to the education programme at Hill of The O'Neill &amp; Ranfurly House. The continuation of this programme would maintain this connection of environmental awareness and citizenship skills with this Council Park, while extending the learning of ecological and conservation skills to even more pupils and teachers in the Mid Ulster District Council area.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<p><b><u>Financial &amp; Human Resources Implications</u></b></p> <p>Financial: Year two programme cost £6,000 subject to available funding.</p> <p>Human: Existing staff resources sufficient to coordinate project support.</p>
<b>4.2</b>	<p><b><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></b></p> <p>Community ownership and civic responsibility will be positive outcomes of the programme with participating schools adopting an area within their local Council Park. This will become their Forest School site. They will visit their Forest School site on a regular basis every year. Here they will learn about civic responsibility and help manage the site. This will include regular litter lifting, opportunities to help improve its biodiversity, for example, wildflower planting, tree planting for example.</p>
<b>4.3</b>	<p><b><u>Risk Management Implications</u></b></p> <p>N/A</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
	<p>Register Mid Ulster District Council with Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association and initiate a year two programme to engage local schools and youth groups to embrace local parks and greenspace where feasible across the district.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	<p>N/A</p>