

Report on	Mid Ulster District Tourism Development Group
Date of Meeting	Thursday 7 July 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Allison O'Keefe

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 the minutes of the Tourism Development Group meeting held on 24 February, approved at the Tourism Development meeting held on 28 April.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Tourism Development Group (TDG) was established to create a working forum between Council and private sector businesses. The TDG will assist with policy development and support the implementation of Council's Tourism Strategy and associated work in order to create economic growth, increase visitor numbers and create employment. The group meet on a bi-monthly basis and as per the agreed Terms of Reference all business will be reported to Council through the Development Committee.
3.0	Main Report
	Presentation of the Tourism Development Group minutes dated 24 February. (Appendix A).
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u> N/A
4.2	<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u> Mid Ulster Council is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all its activities with a focus on all citizens living within the Mid Ulster.
4.3	<u>Risk Management Implications</u> N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)

5.1	N/A
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix A – Minutes of Tourism Development Group Meeting dated 24 February 2021 and Officers Cluster Reports

MID ULSTER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GROUP
Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 10.00am via Teams

Present

Cllr Francis Burton (Chair)

Cllr Walter Cuddy

Cllr Martin Kearney

Cllr Niamh Doris

Cllr Sean Clarke

Tanya Purvis

S Wiggins

Shauna McElhone

Dermot Friel

Hugh McCloy

Martin Graham

Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council

Education & Skills SWC

Education & Skills SWC

Coach Operator

Vintners

Tourism Services

TNI Destination Manager

Michael Browne

Mary McKeown

Mary McGee

Charmain Bell

Genevieve Bell

Sharon Arbuthnot

Martha Beattie

Allison O'Keefe

Anne Reid

Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council

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	DISCUSSION	ACTIONS
1.	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Terry McCrory Craft Sector</p> <p>Colleen McGrath Education & Skills NRC</p> <p>Sarah Cox Education & Skills</p> <p>Tony McCance MUDC</p> <p>Brian McCormick Seamus Heaney HomePlace</p> <p>Chair welcomed everyone. She applauded staff who have been at the forefront of assisting and supporting businesses during the pandemic. The Chair informed that Captain Lowry, father-in-law of Colleen Lowry, Blessingbourne Estate, passed away at the weekend. Chair asked that sympathies are extended to the family on behalf of the group.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes of Meeting held on 9 December 2020</p> <p>C Bell asked that the minutes at Item 6 be changed to reflect the following:</p> <p><i>C Bell responded explaining that the number of landowners can effect the classification and that OM Dark Sky Park was as high a classification as a Reserve.</i></p>	

	<i>Proposed: H McCloy</i> <i>Seconded: D Friel</i>	
3.	Matters Arising - None	
4.	<p>Cluster Reports In addition to Officers report circulated in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>4.1 <u>Seamus Heaney Cluster</u> M McGee informed that the Cluster submitted an application for Phase 2 of Invest NI Collaborative Growth Programme totalling £170,000 over two and a half years. This application is going forward for panel review on 22 April. She thanked D Friel for taking the lead in the application.</p> <p>It was reported that Mid Ulster had the highest number of businesses attend the Irish Tour Operators Association workshop and many will attend the Britain and Ireland Marketplace (BIM) event where they will have the opportunity to sell to Ireland and UK based tour operators. She added that operators report 2022 will see a bumper year of bookings and many businesses are working on product development to promote domestically and internationally.</p> <p>4.2 <u>Archaeology, History and Heritage Cluster</u> 4.2.1 <u>DAERA Collaborative Experiential Programme</u> G Bell reported that a quotation exercise has begun to appoint a facilitator for delivery of the programme and to collaborate with participants with a heritage background. TNI has provided £33,000 funding for this programme. Tourism Manager added that currently 19 businesses with very strong experiential products are working with TNI's Embrace a Giant Spirit brand to get them market ready.</p> <p>4.2.2 <u>US Grants Homestead</u> Ulster Scots Phase 2 Visitor Experiences is nearing completion with an exhibition and new play park. Chair informed that she attended a meeting with DEA to discuss future projects and queried if a Phase 3 would follow. Head of Tourism responded that the site has undertaken a great deal of work and is ready for market. He added that officers are working in collaboration with TNI, Ulster Scots and Eastern Seaboard, USA, to grow opportunities.</p> <p>4.2.3 D Friel stated that he is keen to develop a Ring Fort, located in his field in Swatragh, as either a private or a community project and has contacted agencies to look at an explorative dig. He is seeking Council involvement to market the project once developed.</p> <p>4.2.4 Cllr Cuddy raised concerns that Clogher Valley, as a main arterial route, was unsightly at the Ballygawley Roundabout</p>	<p>M Browne to meet Roads Service to discuss issues and</p>

	<p>expressing disgust at amount of littering. He requested if it were possible to put in place something similar to the entrance of Cookstown Roundabout. Cllr Burton responded that she was in regular contact with Roads Service regarding such issues. Head of Tourism added that tourism is currently going through a new branding exercise and could possibly look at opportunities through it.</p>	<p>challenges at Ballygawley Roundabout. To feedback to Property Services department.</p>
<p>4.2.5</p>	<p><u>Carleton Cottage</u> G Bell reported that officers are following up with the owner of the cottage to address the issue of the cottage's dilapidation. She informed that whilst the property is in private ownership as a listed building, the owner has a duty of care to not let the building fall into disrepair. Head of Tourism replied that a conversation needs to take place with NIEA to enforce the upkeep of the property. H McCloy added that there should be a cross departmental/agency approach to work with landowners in the responsibility of protecting historic monuments/sites. Tourism Manager raised that in the past it has been raised with HED to address Ardboe Cross and a 9th century abbey located nearby. Cllr Cuddy added that due to lack of resources and financial capital should concentrate on priority sites on main routes spread across the district and seek to maintain annually. Head of Tourism added that archaeology is one of the main strands for tourism and a great asset to tourism within the district. He went on to say that with Growth Deal there may be an opportunity to work collaboratively with departments and agencies to preserve heritage sites in the right way.</p>	<p>M Browne to raise concerns with NIEA over the state of Carlton Cottage and seek clarity on ownership. Also to include other monumental sites across mid ulster.</p> <p>List of monumental sites to be brought to next meeting.</p>
<p>4.3</p>	<p><u>Outdoor and Events Cluster</u> S Arbuthnot reported short videos are being developed to showcase and market Mid Ulster's rural, open spaces as safe to visit. Cllr Doris requested a list of walking trails and added that it was important to consult with local people on local trails. Head of Tourism informed that this was currently underway and cross referencing with Walk NI is taking place. Tourism Manager informed that a list of walks are currently promoted on the Council website and welcomed more promotion to stay local. In response to H McCloy's issue of car parking at Iniscarn. A Reid responded that she has spoken to local landowner and Roads Service to apply TRPSI funding for additional car parking. In the interim, signage has been added for existing carpark and work continues with the landowner for a short-term solution.</p>	<p>M Browne to present audit of Mid Ulster walking routes.</p>
<p>4.4</p>	<p><u>Hotelier Cluster</u> C Bell reported that the cluster are currently working on a recovery plan in preparation for when restrictions will be eased.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Business Engagement Programme M McGee reported that there are over 130 businesses receiving support, advice and assistance within the Mid Ulster Tourism What's App group and added that Hospitality Ulster, TNI and NI Hotel's Federation provide a big contribution. She added that in</p>	

	<p>addition, businesses have benefited from mental health webinars, industry workshops and accountants sharing a wide range of financial support available. She thanked M Graham, Destination Manager TNI, for the continued support received.</p> <p>She added that businesses have begun a Get Recovery Ready programme that will provide mentors to develop a new suite of experiences for market and with the possible opportunity to move onto the Embrace A Giant Spirit Ambassador programme. M McGee added that a number of businesses have also availed of current Economic Development programmes and industry shows.</p>	
6.	<p>District Wide Monitoring</p> <p>M McKeown presented the District Wide Monitoring Results, circulated in advance of the meeting, up to end of December 2020. She reminded members that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some facilities had to close and therefore figures reduced. She informed that new monitors would be installed at Seamus Heaney Openground, Roundlake, Fivemiletown and Pomeroy Forest. In response to Cllr Kearney, A Reid informed that figures are collated at Molloy's Fjord and fishing points at Glenone and will be shared at the next meeting.</p>	<p>A Reid to present monitoring figures at next meeting.</p> <p>M McKeown to enquire about a monitor at Washinbay Walkway.</p> <p>M McKeown to contact D Friel with regards to a monitor at Carntogher.</p>
7.	<p>Industry Updates</p> <p>Sector representatives gave an update on their business developments and sectors.</p> <p>Head of Tourism welcomed M Graham, Destination Manager TNI, to the meeting and invited him to give an update. M Graham began with thanking members for their positive comments and continued co-operation. He informed that Mid Ulster has taken up TNI's Website Development programme provided £40,000 funding for destinations to update their websites. He briefly discussed other programmes on offer to tourism businesses as part of TNI's Recovery Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid Recovery & Financial Programme – up to £8,000 • 4 Step Recovery Plan – draft at present, hoping to roll out April/May • £2 million Voucher Scheme – hoping to relaunch early Spring • Co-operative Marketing Fund • Visitor Charter to set guidelines and good practice for businesses to operate responsibly and sustainably • Growth Programme • Contact Centre remains open 9am-5pm Monday to Friday • Push on Good to Go campaign to help consumers feel safe and secure 	

	Head of Tourism thanked TNI for their continued work, support and the opportunities made available through collaboration projects, such as, updating destination websites and branding exercises.	
8.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p><u>Funding Opportunities</u></p> <p>M Browne briefly informed members of the secured funding for development within Mid Ulster:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAERA Rural Tourism Programme offered up to £10 million financial assistance across 10 council areas and that Mid Ulster secured £3 million of this. • Ulster Scots Agency • TNI Marketing Fund, £29,000 to produce experiential videos • TNI NI Day Planner £10,000 – rollout of touchscreens at VIC's 	

Meeting ended at 11.38am.

Date of next meeting Wednesday 28 April at 10am.

1. SEAMUS HEANEY CLUSTER – M MCGEE/C BELL

The group met on 15 April and attendance in this cluster continues to be very strong.

1.1 Elections

Richard Mulholland, Ballyscullion Park, was re-elected Chairman and Dermot Friel, Friels Bar & Restaurant, Treasurer. The group welcomed Ruth Flynn as the new representative for River Bann Boat Tours. Cathy Chauhan is continuing in her new position but will mentor Ruth in her new role.

1.2 Updates

The group have recognised collaboration and cross selling as a key strength. Seamus Heaney HomePlace noted that they will include cluster businesses in their new website and requested that other businesses reciprocate.

A member has been asked to participate in a series of films by NITGA and will feature other cluster businesses in this also.

1.3 Invest NI Phase 2 Application

Confirmation was received that the group's Phase 2 application to Invest NI was successful. Funding of £165,500 was awarded to cover facilitator support over 2^{1/2} years plus marketing support. Mid Ulster Council will also match the support for marketing activity with a £12,500 contribution over the duration of the programme.

This work will cover five distinct areas for the group:

- 1. Recruitment of Facilitator, Governance & Initial Project Planning**
- 2. Branding & Marketing**
- 3. Commercialisation & Business Development**
- 4. Internationalisation**
- 5. Upskilling**

Dermot Friel, Friels Bar & Restaurant, will take the lead on this Phase 2 application. The group thanked him for taking on this role on their behalf.

Eight of the fifteen member businesses were represented at TNI Meet the Buyer last week, with feedback from the group very positive and members reporting a positive outlook for hopefully late Autumn 21 and a very positive 2022. One member reported generating strong leads for their business and leads for seven fellow cluster businesses. Two of the cluster businesses have been asked to join with Dalriada Kingdom Tours in their newly launched luxury brand So Sirecht. These businesses are been invited to sell in partnership with Custom Crafted Ireland a luxury DMC based in Dublin.

2. OUTDOOR & EVENTS CLUSTER – S ARBUTHNOT / A O'KEEFE

The Outdoor Cluster met on Tuesday 09 March. Due to the uncertainty around relaxations at this time, Marketing was talked at extensively. Funding has been secured to acquire videos highlighting what Mid Ulster has to offer concerning outdoor activities, including walking, golf, fishing, cycling, canoeing and outdoor activity providers. Once completed, the videos will be used on various channels targeting the different market segments to showcase the variety our district has to offer.

Officers have also met with a Digital Partnerships and Influencer Marketing Officer with Tourism NI. All the industry is encouraged and recommended to ensure they are "Good to Go" accredited. Building the confidence and safety aspects for our residents and

visitors alike to the district is paramount. Over the next number of months, engaging/interactive posts have been suggested which will also encourage visitors to visit multiple sites, for example: Where is your top five places to Golf or Fish; Top five viewing locations or Top five places to enjoy a coffee?

Relaxation dates were published to enable the industry to prepare for the summer months and staycations will be strong on marketing messages. These dates also mean the popular Hill Walking events can resume shortly, showcasing the beauty of the area in a safe manner.

3. ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY & HERITAGE CLUSTER – G BELL/M MCKEOWN

The cluster group met on Thursday 22nd April 2021.

3.1 DEARA Collaborative Experiential Programme – Rural Tourism

The group were updated on the DAERA Experiential Programme. Applications received from tourism/hospitality businesses are now being assessed and those successful in getting through to the next phase will be notified by mid-May.

3.2 Road to Recovery

The cluster were informed World Host training will be available through TNI. Training is suitable for frontline staff, in a 60 min session focusing on the current working environment, people's behavioural changes, health, safety and hygiene.

3.3 European Heritage Open Days

The group were reminded to submit their registration forms before 5 May if they wish to participate in European Heritage Open Days. This year marks the 24th year of European Heritage Open Days (EHOD) in Northern Ireland and is an annual celebration of local architecture, history and culture. The physical events are on 11-12 September 2021 whilst digital offerings run from 6-12 September 2021.

3.4 Update on Branding/Website

The cluster were informed that work is continuing on a new tourism brand and website. It is anticipated that this should be completed by June 2021.

3.5 TNI Marketing Collateral – Mid Ulster Videos

An update was given in relation to filming of the first suite of videos by Corish Studio Productions. Three videos will be produced in the first phase which includes Stars and Stones, Fed and Watered and The Three Sisters.

3.6 Tourism Recovery Skills Support Programme

The cluster group were encouraged to participate in the Hospitality and Tourism Recovery Training Programme delivered through HATS in conjunction with the F.E. Colleges. This is a free programme which has been designed to provide a skills-led approach to support managers as they move through the pandemic restrictions into recovery in the year ahead.

3.7 US Grant Homestead

New DDA compliant play equipment has been installed at U.S. Grant Ancestral Homestead, which includes an accessible inclusive pod swing, a wheelchair accessible inclusive ground level roundabout, a wheelchair accessible in ground trampoline and four sensory panels. The work completed at the end of March 2021. Work on the new exhibition panels etc. is ongoing with a view for completion by mid May 2021.

4 HOTELIERS CLUSTER – CBELL/M MCGEE

The cluster met on Tuesday 13 April.

Margaret Finnis from J&K Coaches was invited to update the cluster on the developments of Mid Ulster Tours. She also provided feedback received from attending recent Tour Operator events and the changes in the market place. NI is now seen as a destination of choice, providing hotels the opportunity to pivot their business from the business/corporate sector to tour bookings. With the development of fantastic tourism experiences within the district, accommodation is required at the forefront. Business tourism may not return immediately and there is an opportunity to pivot business to get visitors to stay in Mid Ulster. Hotels will be encouraged to support tours with accommodation.

The group were updated on the fully funded Tourism Recovery Skills Support programme announced by HATS, working in collaboration with Tourism Northern Ireland and encouraged members to attend the webinars and book staff onto the training workshops.

As an action from the previous meeting officers are working up a series of clinics/workshop/webinar proposals in preparation to showcase packages to key Tour Operators, covering:

1. Post COVID Pivot Your Business – clinic on the market post COVID.
2. Digital/Virtual Tours – storyboard and filming.
3. Workshops- selling/upselling skills, negotiation skills, creating packages working in collaboration with mid ulster key tourism experiences.
4. Tourism Ireland Industry Opportunity training. This will offered to other cluster groups to attend.
5. Signature Experience Familiarisation – This will offered to other cluster groups to attend.