

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021 2. Tourism Active Travel Projects 3. Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme 4. DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre 5. Request from the Workspace Group 6. All Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation
Date of Meeting	13 January 2022
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes

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	<p>High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Executive Office sought views on its initial findings and potential solutions for key issues facing our high streets. The High Street Task Force (HSTF), a group formed by The Executive Office has identified the challenges and issues that our high streets face. The HSTF has been seeking views on solutions to support our high streets and to contribute to the development of thriving and sustainable city, town and village centres.</p>
2.2	<p>Tourism Active Travel Projects</p> <p>In June 2021, Greenway and Active Travel Projects wrote to Council to advise of a funding initiative through Department of Infrastructure (DfI) to install active travel pods on existing or potential Greenway sites. An application was submitted in July 2021 to look at installing 6 active travel pods along the old railway lines, which take in our 6 main towns in the district. Following assessment of the application, a business case for the project was submitted to the value of £24,480 (excl. Vat). Council is currently awaiting the Letter of Offer.</p>

<p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p> <p>2.6</p>	<p>The Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme Members were informed of the Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme at the November 2021 Committee meeting. Council has received further correspondence from the Department for Communities (DfC) requesting submission of a draft Small Settlements Regeneration Plan by 12 noon on 21st December 2021. (See Appendix 2a).</p> <p>This Programme is being jointly funded by three government departments – DfC, DAERA and DfI and aims to realise a range of benefits including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical regeneration of small settlements in order to improve place making and aid recovery from Covid-19 • Improvements that encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the area by 2022/23 • Improvements that enhance walking, cycling and other associated facilities within the scheme area by 2022/23. <p>DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre The Department for Communities (DfC) had approved the Revitalisation scheme for Coalisland Town Centre to the value of £250,000, which followed after the completion of Coalisland Public Realm Scheme. DfC will provide 100% funding towards the scheme, with the proviso that all projects must be completed by 31st March 2022.</p> <p>Request from the Workspace Group Correspondence was received on 14 December 2021 from Ms Georgina Grieve, CEO, Workspace Group requesting Council support in relation to match funding for the 12-month extension to the ESF Programme starting April 2022 and running until March 2023.</p> <p>All Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is consulting on a document titled “All Island Strategic Rail Review”. The consultation document considers and focuses on how the rail network on the island of Ireland can improve to promote sustainable connectivity into, and between, the major cities, enhance regional accessibility and support balanced regional development. This is a joint consultation with the Irish Government’s Department of Transport.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021 The High Street Task Force (HSTF) is seeking views on solutions to support our high streets and to contribute to the development of thriving and sustainable city, town and village centres.</p>

The vision is “Sustainable city, town and village centres which are thriving places for people to do business, socialise, shop, be creative and use public services as well as being great places to live.”

As part of this process, the Executive Office launched a Call for Evidence, which is available on **Appendix 1a**. The Call For Evidence opened on 25 October 2021 and closed again on 6 December 2021.

Six workshops were held across NI, including one in the Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre, Cookstown on Tuesday 9th November 2021 at which a number of Council’s economic development staff attended.

The HSTF identified 14 key thematic areas to which they sought feedback on in their Call for Evidence, these are; Partnerships, Investment, Planning, Public Realm, Fiscal (including rates), Capacity, Energy, Climate Change & Sustainability, Housing the Other Infrastructure, Getting to and from the High Street, Tourism, Digital High Streets, Rural Settlements and People, Localism & Well-being.

The HSTF will create a draft report from all the responses received, and provide recommendations, which will be subject to consultation and equality considerations before a final report is presented for agreement by the Executive by Spring 2022.

Council officers undertook a series of Traders meetings to obtain their views on the issues above after which they engaged with the respective Town Centre Forums.

The feedback received was collated and a Council response formulated and submitted before the deadline of 6 December 2021. Retrospective approval is sought for Council’s consultation response on **Appendix 1b**. If any Member wishes to include additional comments, these should be forwarded to the Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes by 20 January 2022 after which they will be forwarded to the HSTF.

3.2 **Tourism Active Travel Projects**

The application was based on the provision of 6 main stop off points with secure parking, repair stations and cycle shelters along the Greenway. These new active travel sites will allow Council to link in with the objectives of the Northern Ireland Changing Gear Bicycle Strategy and create a new modal shift in the cultural view in which cycling is seen providing a new innovative stop off and service facility.

The new shift will aim to make cycling safer, more comfortable, healthy, and enhance the local economy and tourism sector. The focus is to;

- Improve opportunities for social interaction and allow people to interact and engage within their area and with other local people.

- Improve public health by providing opportunities for increased levels of personal fitness and reducing the number of cars on the roads.
- Increase safety for people using bicycles by providing safe places to park and make repairs on their bicycle therefore enhancing the 'feel safe' factor for cyclists.
- Provide opportunities for new cycling services through the development of linked cycle hubs with shelter, safe parking, and repair facilities.
- Connect people to other cultural heritage and tourism facilities in the area, increasing visitor numbers to other sites and spend in the local economy.

Under this proposal, Mid Ulster Council wishes to provide 6 cycling service hubs along the Dungannon to Coleraine Greenway running north to south and vice versa. This follows the old railway line, but the proposal will also ensure sites are intersected with the other lateral greenways identified in the Northern Ireland Greenway Strategy.

The cycle service sites will be located at;

- Maghera - Maghera Leisure Centre
- Magherafelt - Magherafelt Meadow Bank Leisure Centre
- Cookstown - Mid Ulster Sports Arena
- Coalisland - Gortgonis (beside canal)
- Dungannon - Dungannon Park or Castlecaulfield
- Fivemiletown – Round Lake

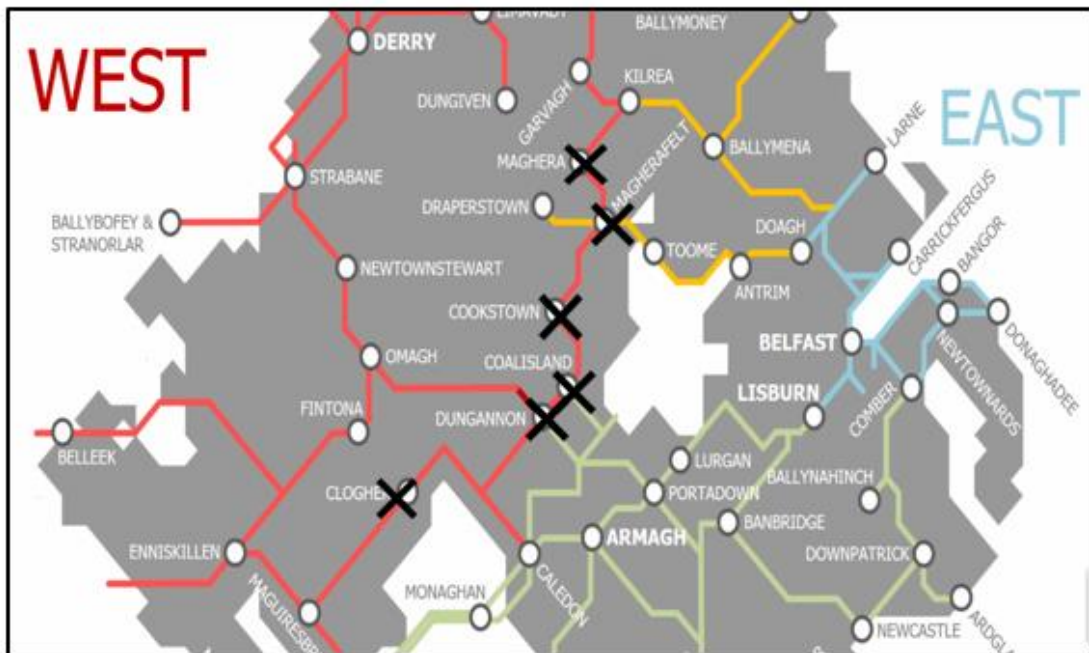
Each of the hubs will be sited within Council land or facilities and will provide three main elements:

- 1) A Cycle Repair facility
- 2) A Cycle Shelter
- 3) A Secure facility

This is an innovative proposal as it combines 3 elements of active cycle travel into one site: security, maintenance, and shelter. Each site will also be close to existing sports and changing /showering facilities and mainly at points where primary and secondary potential greenways meet. It provides an all-in-one cycle travel site.

Location of Mid Ulster Service Cycle Sites

✕ = Site Location



Approximate cost of £24,480 (excl. Vat) and is 100% funded by DFI subject to business case approval.

3.3

Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

Council was required to submit a draft Regeneration Plan to DfC by 12 noon on 21st December 2021. DfC has recognised that this timescale may not allow for normal Council approval processes to be followed prior to submission therefore there will be opportunity for refining draft Plans as they are being delivered.

The objectives of this Programme necessitate full completion of all projects included within the Regeneration Plan by **31st March 2023**. As such deliverability is the primary driver for project selection within this Programme period predicated on a number of other critical factors:

- current state of readiness with concrete design concepts agreed;
- location on Council owned property to avoid lengthy land tenure / lease processes;
- the need for planning and other statutory requirements and,
- a full and inclusive engagement process with local stakeholders.

In addition, full consideration will be given to achieving geographical spread in the selection of projects and to previous levels of funding for village regeneration activities across all settlement throughout the district – but within the context of the deliverability factors listed above.

A copy of Council's Small Settlement Regeneration Plan is attached at **Appendix 2b**.

This includes projects to be delivered in 2022/23 but also lists potential projects to be further developed to a state of readiness in preparation for delivery in 2023/24. A further commitment of funding for 2023/24 will be needed from DfC therefore discussions are ongoing.

3.4

DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre

At the July 2021 Development Committee approval was granted to the Chief Executive to be awarded delegated authority to accept any Letter of Offer from the Department of Communities (DfC) for the Revitalisation Project.

This project is 100% funded by DfC and contains the following initiatives: -

- **Festive Lighting Campaign (Approx. £80,000)**
The purchase of reusable Christmas Tree that will be designed and installed and associated festive light motifs, including one for each of the 47 newly erected lampposts throughout the town.
- **Marketing & Branding (Approx. £25,000)**
Developing a new brand for Coalisland and subsequently purchase of new branded merchandise to promote and reinforce the new brand.
- **Lineside Environmental Improvement Scheme (Approx. £145,000)**
This new project will link up the town centre with the soon to be redeveloped Gortgonis Recreation Centre. The area is located at the start of the towpath to Gortgonis entrance and caters for much pedestrian footfall, yet there are no pedestrian rest areas readily available for the public to use to encourage them to spend more time in the town.

Council's application to DfC for £250,000 funding has been successful and a letter of offer was issued to Council on 17 September 2021.

By way of update, the Lineside Environmental Improvement Scheme was tendered as per Council procedure and the winning tender submitted was £24,000 over the available budget. Rather than reduce the scheme, DfC were approached to find out if they would meet the funding shortfall and they agreed to do and have since issued Council with a Letter of Variance to include the uplift in funding.

The Letter of Variance enclosed on **Appendix 3** was issued to Council for signature, with the new funding included, now totaling £274,000. DfC required the letter to be signed and returned as soon as possible, hence retrospective approval is sought for the Chief Executive to sign and return the Letter of Variance to DfC to allow work on this initiative to progress.

3.5

Request from the Workspace Group

The correspondence from Ms Geogina Grieve (on **Appendix 4a**) outlines the match funding crisis facing voluntary and community organisations, from across Northern Ireland, who are currently in receipt of European Social Fund (ESF)

funding. The letter is supported by a briefing report (on **Appendix 4b**) produced by NICVA on behalf of the ESF Users Group - a representative group of voluntary and community organisations, from across Northern Ireland, who are currently in receipt of ESF funding.

The EU agreed to extend the life of the programme by a further year until March 2023 (ESF Call 3), pledging £20 million but this is dependent on approximately £14 million match funding from NI government departments and agencies, which is currently not all secured. The current ESF funding will end in March 2022.

Network Personnel, have been successful in securing c £2.3 million of Call 3 ESF funding. This funding is for extending the provision of three employability programmes, across five council areas (Mid Ulster; Mid and East Antrim; Antrim and Newtownabbey; Fermanagh and Omagh; and Causeway Coast and Glen) throughout 2022/23. Members will be aware that these Programmes are aimed at supporting the most vulnerable families, young person's not in employment, education or training, unemployed and economically inactive.

To be able to draw down the c £2.3 million of ESF funding, Network Personnel need to secure £804k of match funding. Historically, DfE have provided between 29% and 35% of the match funding required for these three projects totalling c £700k per annum, with the remaining c £100k being funding by other sources such as local councils. At present DfE are advising that they no longer have that level of funding available. Specifically, in Mid Ulster this would equate to the loss of £748k in support to local people via programmes delivered by Network Personnel.

The correspondence requests Council support to ensure that DfE and DfC, are in a position to provide the match funding required to facilitate the ESF projects in 2022/23 and subsequently draw down and prevent the loss of c £20 million in ESF funding to NI.

3.6

All Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation

Members were notified of the All Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation at the December 2021 meeting of Council and it was agreed that a draft response be developed by officers for consideration at the next available Development Committee. It was noted that the closing date for submissions is 21 January 2021, before the next Council meeting, and as such Members delegated authority to Development Committee to agree the final response.

The Strategic Rail Review Consultation paper is available at www.strategicrailreview.com

Mid Ulster District Council's draft response to the Consultation is available on **Appendix 5**.

	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial:</p> <p>Tourism Active Travel Projects This project is 100% funded by Department of Infrastructure subject to business case approval.</p> <p>Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme A minimum 10% match funding from Council is needed on an overall allocation of £2.547m (capital and resource) – as stipulated within the Programme guidance notes – approval for match funding will be sought through Council's P&R Committee in February 2022.</p> <p>DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre Revised funding offer of £274,000 from DfC, which is 100%, funded.</p> <p>Human:</p> <p>Tourism Active Travel Projects Officer time to co-ordinate, implement and monitor the planned project in conjunction with the Department of Infrastructure. Ability to deliver within existing staff resources.</p> <p>Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme Officer time to co-ordinate, implement and monitor delivery of the Regeneration Plan conjunction with the DfC. Ability to deliver within existing resources.</p> <p>DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre Officer time to co-ordinate, implement and monitor delivery of the Revitalisation scheme in conjunction with the DfC. Ability to deliver within existing staff resources.</p> <p>Risk Management:</p> <p>Tourism Active Travel Projects Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.</p> <p>Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.</p>
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme NA</p>

	<p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p>Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme This Programme is specifically targeted at rural areas of the District.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <p>5.1 High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021 Retrospectively Approve Council's response to the High Street Task Force - Call for Evidence, which had to be submitted before the deadline of 6 December 2021. If any Member has further comments they wish to add, these should be forwarded to the Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes by 20 January 2022, who will forward them on to The High Street Task Force.</p> <p>5.2 Tourism Active Travel Projects</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Note the contents of this report; b. Approve the project subject to DfI signing off the Business Case. c. Subject to the business case being approved, and DfI issuing Council with a letter of offer, grant authority for the Chief Executive to sign and return the letter of offer and permit staff to initiate the relevant procurement process. <p>5.3 Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Retrospectively approve Council's draft Covid19 Small Settlements Regeneration Plan submitted to DfC on 21st December 2021; b. Approve that delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to accept and sign a Letter of Offer from DfC to allow the projects to be progressed as soon as possible, given the tight timeframes for delivery; c. Note a report will be brought to the P&R Committee in February 2022, to seek the necessary approvals for Council's match funding towards the schemes. <p>5.4 DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre Retrospectively approve for permission to be granted to the Chief Executive to sign the Letter of Variance from Department for Communities for £274,000, which includes the additional funding of £24,000.</p> <p>5.5 Request from the Workspace Group To consider correspondence from Ms Georgina Grieve, on behalf of the Workspace Group, requesting Mid Ulster District Council support to ensure that DfE and DfC provide the match funding required to facilitate ESF projects in 2022/23 and subsequently draw down and prevent the loss of c £20 million in ESF funding to NI.</p>

5.6	<p>All Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation</p> <p>Consider Council's draft response to the All Island Strategic Rail Review and provide commentary as necessary to inform the final response to be submitted on behalf of Council by 21 January 2022.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>Appendix 1a - High Street Task Force 2021 Consultation Document</p> <p>Appendix 1b - Mid Ulster Council's Response to High Street Task Force Call for Evidence</p> <p>Appendix 2a - Letter from DfC to Mid Ulster Council re Small Settlements Scheme</p> <p>Appendix 2b - MUDC 2022/23 Small Settlements Regeneration Plan</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Coalisland Revitalisation Scheme Letter of Variance</p> <p>Appendix 4a - Letter to Chief Executive from the Workspace Group</p> <p>Appendix 4b - NICVA ESF User Group Briefing Paper Nov 21</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Draft Council Response to the All Island Strategic Rail Review Consultation</p>