

Report on	Tourism Department Update
Date of Meeting	Thursday 11 th June 2020
Reporting Officer	Adrian McCreesh
Contact Officer	Michael Browne

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 inform and update the Council regarding the Tourism departments current work streams.
2.0	Background
2.1	Since Monday 16 th March a WhatsApp group has been up and running in response to the onset and predicted impact of Corona Virus on local businesses. The Group now has 122 participants representing business from every sector of hospitality and tourism across Mid Ulster.
2.2	The forum has been posting regular updates on supports for businesses in the sector including financial, human resource, legal and is attempting to be a one stop shop for up to date information in an evolving situation for businesses.
2.3	This group have held 25 webinars on Zoom. To date with the support of Tourism NI (TNI) we have hosted law experts from Cleaver, Fulton, Rankin (CFR) and accountants from FPK/FPM, experts from Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland (TIL), Invest NI, Innovation programmes, workshops on Instagram, LinkedIn, Movie Making and many others. An average of 30 businesses continue to dial in and participate in these sessions every week. Many people have described the webinars as a lifeline over the last number of weeks and months.
2.4	The weekly webinars continue to add excellent speakers to the calendar, Tina O'Dwyer, The Tourism Space with Maura Bell, Manager of the Irish National Heritage Park, Wexford with thoughts on reopening the Heritage Park and Co Wexford domestic tourism promotions. On Friday we will host Janice Gault, CEO NI Hotels Federation, who will address accommodation reopening and the steps to get there. NIHF have just released a comprehensive reopening strategy.
2.5	Mr Niall Gibbons, CEO Tourism Ireland will join a webinar on 17 June and currently confirming a date with Mr John McGrillen CEO from Tourism NI. We are keeping responsiveness to our sector front and centre of our communications,

	<p>which we hope will provide them with the best and most immediate advice on our WhatsApp group, webinars and Mid Ulster Council Tourism Hub.</p>
2.6	<p>The frequency and topics for the weekly webinars and the WhatsApp group are being review currently. The tourism department have been reviewing the COVID-19 responses around the world and learning from other countries and as such are repurposing and publishing models of good practice on the Mid Ulster Council Tourism hub as a COVID-19 response portal for our tourism and hospitality businesses. This involves adding material presentations and links to this garnered from the webinars and WhatsApp and making it a one stop shop for all support and advice.</p>
2.7	<p>The Tourism department are pulling together communications resources for our tourism cluster businesses including imagery, hashtags and other materials aligned to Tourism NI 'Embrace a Giant Spirit' and we will make these available on our portal.</p>
2.8	<p>Tourism NI with the Minister have set up a steering group, working group and task and finish groups working towards tourism recovery. Michael Brown has been invited to sit on the Tourism NI Council COVID-19 group and Events Task and finish group, while Mary McKeown sits on the attractions task and finish group and Mary Mc Gee on the Trade task and finish group. First meetings of these groups are just getting underway and the advice and guidance from these groups will help shape the recovery of the tourism sector.</p>
2.9	<p>The tourism and hospitality sector has remained upbeat and strong in the face of the current situation, they were the first to close and many will be the last to reopen. Through the Council's work we continue to deliver the latest updates to them and support. This will be enhanced with the delivery of safe spatial planning mentoring to our businesses, this mentoring will give our businesses advice on safely reopening to maximum capacity whilst adhering to all approved guidelines issued.</p> <p>The tourism department are currently working on the following capital projects: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davagh Forest Solar Walk project. • Davagh Forest Archology Walk project. • Ballyronan Tourism project. • Sperrins Sculptures.
2.10	<p>We are currently reviewing the Councils corporate events programme with a view to making recommendations and proposals to the Council in July for a programme of events that will be appropriate and safe for later in the year.</p>

3.0	Main Report
	Davagh Forest International Dark-Sky
3.1	<p>The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) is non-profit organization based in Arizona, USA. The IDA is the recognized authority on light pollution and is the leading organization combating light pollution worldwide.</p> <p>The mission of the IDA is "to preserve and protect the night-time environment and our heritage of dark skies through quality outdoor lighting."</p> <p>Light pollution is the result of outdoor lighting that is not properly shielded, allowing light shine into the eyes and night sky. Direct light that shines into the night sky above the horizon causes sky glow. IDA was the first organization in the dark-sky movement, and is currently the largest.</p>
3.2	<p>The IDA define an International Dark-Sky Park (IDSP) as...</p> <p>"a land possessing an exceptional or distinguished quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment, and that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, and/or cultural heritage resources, and/or for public enjoyment."</p>
3.3	<p>Davagh Forest has extremely dark skies and a wealth of natural and built heritage. Located beside Davagh Forest are Beaghmore Stone Circles. It is widely believed that the circles were constructed in relation to the midsummer sunrise, or to record the movements of the Sun and Moon acting as calendrical markers to identify particular lunar, solar or stellar events. The boundary for the proposed Dark Sky Park includes Davagh Forest and Beaghmore Stone Circles.</p>
3.4	<p>Following IDA Guidelines, a candidate Dark Sky Park (DSP) must meet a number of specific requirements as well as providing a quality Light Management Plan (LMP), evidence of its commitment to dark skies and lights cape management, and a commitment to ongoing public education and outreach events associated with the DSP. It must also put in place a measurement programme to determine the baseline level of the night-sky brightness, and maintain this programme on an ongoing basis to confirm that light pollution does not increase and degrade the status of the DSP's approved designation.</p> <p>A fundamental element of the application is scientific data collection. Included in the IDA application are the measurements of the sky brightness (<i>or darkness</i>) at Davagh Forest and Beaghmore Stone Circle since the time of the legacy Cookstown District Council using Sky Quality Meters (SQM's). Having continuous data extending over three years, it provides an unprecedented number of sky surface brightness measurements, sampling all seasons, all phases of the Moon and all weather conditions at the Davagh Dark Sky Park. This collection of data provides strong evidence of the unique darkness of the sky at Davagh.</p>
3.5	<p>The IDA application also includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a detailed background to the project • a light management plan with lighting inventory, • details of public engagement and community involvement • letters of support from statutory organisations and other stakeholders

3.6	<p>In November 2019, a final copy of the Davagh Dark Sky Park application was submitted to be assessed by the IDA committee.</p> <p>On the 4th March 2020 notification was received from the IDA Project Manager that after the IDA Board Review, the Davagh Dark Sky Park application was endorsed, thus, confirming that Davagh was the first accredited Dark Sky Park in Northern Ireland. Details of the accreditation will be officially announced to the public during the official opening of OM Dark Sky Park & Observatory.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: Within existing budget.
	Human: 5 members of staff from the Tourism Department have been furloughed.
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	For information.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Mid Ulster Council Tourism Hub</p> <p>http://www.midulstertourismhub.com/</p>