

<b>Report on</b>	Sperrins Outdoor Partnership
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> November 2023
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Martin Conlan, Recreation & Countryside Officer

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To seek Council approval to contribute £4,000 per year for 2-year period commencing April 2024 up to September 2026 to support continuation of The Outdoor Partnership Project in the Sperrins.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	Previously in October 2023, the Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Programmes department updated the Development Committee on the Sperrins Partnership Project and advised that a further report on a request for additional funding contribution towards the Sperrins Outdoor Activity Development Officer in Years 3 and 4 will be brought back to a future committee for consideration (minute reference: D151/23).
2.2	The Sperrins Partnership Project is a joint collaboration between 4 councils; Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council, who back in 2018 committed to equal financial contribution towards its delivery and have also funded the Sperrins Future Search initiative.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>Council's Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan details that it is essential the Council works in partnership with its neighbouring Councils on projects such as developing walking trails in the Sperrins. Current provision is concentrated in several geographic areas and these are particularly important in determining the area's future outdoor recreation proposition namely; the area that falls within the Sperrins Area of Natural Beauty (AONB).</p> <p>A priority action within this Strategic plan is to develop short and medium distance walks across the northwest of the Council area linking into the wider Sperrins area, the mapping out of walking route and trails i.e. signage/waymarking, and has a budget ring-fenced towards this.</p>

3.2

Council is also a regional partner in the WalkNI Consortium. WalkNI.com is delivered by Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI), a not-for-profit organisation with the vision to create 'a more active and healthy society appreciating the outdoors.' As a partner in the WalkNI Marketing Consortium, council benefits in a number of ways including WalkNI actively promoting several walkways and trails in the Sperrins / Mid Ulster Council area and a new mini website has also been developed for the Ulster Way which passes through the Sperrin AONB and Mid Ulster. This includes interactive mapping, suggested itineraries, trail updates and more. ([walkni.com](http://walkni.com))

### **The Outdoor Partnership (TOP)**

3.3

The Sperrins Partnership in collaboration and with support from Sport NI and Partner Councils, secured funding through The Outdoor Partnership (TOP) to appoint an Outdoor Activity Development Officer for the Sperrins for a 4-year funded period. The Outdoor Partnership is an organisation based in Wales who work to support people across the UK to take up outdoor activities as a life-long pursuit. Their vision is: "Enhancing people's lives through outdoor activity." This means enhancing people's physical and mental health, and wellbeing while improving the economic return and the social value of outdoor activity such as walking, cycling and adventure sports. The Outdoor Activity Development Officer role is to build capacity, identify training and education needs within outdoor sports and recreation in Sperrins Communities.

3.4

The Outdoor Partnership are the main employer and manage the project with input from Partner Councils. Other aims of the project include enabling communities through promoting sustainable use of the environment, enhancing partnership working through local delivery and improving coach and education and opportunities for volunteering. There is also scope to develop existing clubs and create new clubs identified through a needs analysis. The project is very much focused on grass roots and improving outdoor recreation from within communities. The Officer is currently focused on completing an audit across the region which will identify gaps and opportunities. This exercise is being carried out through effective communication with multiple stakeholders including Council Officials/ Community Groups and National Governing Bodies for sport. Projects are currently being identified across a range of sports and recreational activities.

A financial contribution up to 31 March 2024 totalling £12,884.00 has been provided by the Sperrin Partnership budget, this was agreed by partner councils due to some underspend during the early stages of the project, mainly due to the pandemic. Consideration to financial contributions for years 3 and 4 is required. It is suggested that partner councils as a key partner, provide budget provision for these years to ensure the project can continue for its duration.

Broken down, the financial contribution requested from each Partner Council is £4,000 in Year 3 and £4,000 in Year 4. The funding sought requires the agreement of all Partner Councils to contribute the additional funding. Such funding will allow for some programming costs to be included. The draft

3.5	<p>Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is enclosed within the appendix for consideration.</p> <p><b>The Outdoor Partnership – Stakeholder Group</b></p> <p>Council’s Recreation and Countryside Officer will attend quarterly Sperrin’s Outdoor Partnership meetings and will liaise with the relevant stakeholders and projects relevant to the Officers remit as and when required.</p> <p>The stakeholder group composition includes nominated individuals (or organisations) that have signed the Memorandum of Understanding. Other organisations and individuals are able to attend meetings and participate in activities but will not be able to participate in decision making.</p> <p>The Outdoor Development Officer will report to the Stakeholder Group to cover at least the following areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of Actin Plan and activities for the following year</li> <li>2. Progress against action plan</li> <li>3. Budget monitoring</li> </ol>
4.0	<b>Other Considerations</b>
4.1	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p><b>Financial:</b>  The Sperrins Partnership Project is presently funded by 4 Partner Councils at a total annual cost of c£88,000 (£22,000 per Council). Officers are currently looking at options to secure additional funding from external sources for relevant projects. Each Council has committed £22,000 to Sperrins Partnership for the current financial year. As reported by the Economic Development, Tourism &amp; Strategic Programmes department via their report to the Development Committee in October 2023, a similar financial request from Sperrins Partnership will be brought to Committee for consideration early in the new 2024/25 financial year, subject to available budgets, to seek to extend the project (minute reference: D151/23). This funding contribution is via the Economic Development, Tourism &amp; Strategic Programmes departmental revenue budget.</p> <p>The proposal outlined within this paper is to contribute £4,000.00 per year for 2-year period commencing April 2024 up to September 2026 to support continuation of The Outdoor Partnership Project in the Sperrins.</p> <p><b>Human:</b>  Existing staff resources sufficient to coordinate project support. No additional staffing resource required.</p> <p><b>Risk Management:</b>  Considered in line with relevant Council policies and procedures.</p>

<b>4.2</b>	<p data-bbox="268 210 783 248"><b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b></p> <p data-bbox="268 286 1307 324">Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.</p> <p data-bbox="268 362 1118 400">Rural Needs Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	<p data-bbox="268 510 1426 730">To note the contents of the reports, permit the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and give approval for Mid Ulster District Council to make a contribution of £4,000.00 per year for 2-year period (April 2024 up to September 2026) to support continuation of The Outdoor Partnership Project in the Sperrins as outlined within this report and subject to confirmation of the reciprocal financial contribution of all partner councils.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
6.1	<p data-bbox="268 844 655 882">Appendix A: Sperrins MOU</p> <p data-bbox="268 882 903 920">Appendix B: Mid Ulster Future Search report</p>