

Report on	Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership – Update on Local Rural Development Strategy
Date of Meeting	14 March 2019
Reporting Officer	Head of Economic Development

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update members on progress with the Local Action Group (LAG) Rural Development Strategy for Mid Ulster.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership has been allocated £10.16m for the roll out of a local rural development strategy for Mid Ulster funded under the 2014-2020 NI Rural Development Programme. £8.33m will be directed to project spend and the remainder for LAG administration.</p> <p>The Schemes within the local rural strategy are now:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Business Investment Scheme • Rural Services Scheme • Village Renewal • LAG Co-operation
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Schemes update</p> <p>An update on progress against each scheme is shown below.</p> <p>Rural Business Investment Scheme (RBIS) The primary aim of this scheme is to support business creation and development activities within rural businesses which lead to job creation.</p> <p>£2.83m in grant support was allocated to this scheme which is now fully committed with 96 businesses supported.</p> <p>To date, 58 new jobs have been created (57 TF and 1 PT). This is against an overall LAG Strategy target of 100. The overall number of new jobs projected within issued letters of offer is 229 to be created over the next 12-18 months. Monitoring of job creation across all funded RBIS projects will be ongoing.</p>

Rural Services Scheme

The aim of this scheme is to improve access to basic services for those living in rural areas across the district. The scheme offers capital grants for the development of community hubs to serve as a focal point for the local community.

£2.75m was made available for this scheme (inc a transfer of £350k from Rural Broadband) which has now been allocated in full across 20 projects approved by the LAG over two calls of application. 8 letters of offer have been issued to date and the remainder can only be issued after evidence of title checks are completed by DAERA solicitors relating to legal charges for each project. This process is taking considerable time in some cases.

Village Renewal Scheme

This Scheme is being delivered by Council with 37 villages identified for village enhancement works across the district.

£2.15m in grant support was allocated to this Scheme. To date £1.45m in letters of offer have been approved by the LAG to the villages listed below:

Ballygawley	Fivemiletown	Upperlands
Ardboe	Augher	Caledon
Granville	Tobermore	Benburb
Castlecaulfield	Gulladuff	Newmills
Maghera	Swatragh	Glenone
Loup	Ballinakilly	Killyman
Ballinderry/Ballylifford	Desertmartin/Longfield	Clogher
Ballyronan		

Design work on the remaining village schemes is ongoing.

LAG Co-operation

This Scheme provides support for projects developed in partnership with other Local Action Groups. Council will act as the lead applicant with the LAG as co-applicant under these projects.

Projects current being investigated by LAG and Council include:

Lough Neagh Co-operation:

This project includes the LAG's in Antrim/Newtownabbey and ABC Council areas. Within Mid Ulster, the project actions are to focus on the development of angling infrastructure at Portglenone and a wild campsite at Washingbay. Joint marketing of the project is also to be included.

Heart of Ancient Ulster / Achill Island

This project will potentially link into the Heart of Ancient Ulster Landscape Partnership Scheme to improve access to archaeology in the Beaghmore area by developing a trail linking Beaghmore Stone Circles to other local

	<p>archaeology sites. The SW Mayo LAG are looking at a similar themed project on Achill Island.</p> <p>Yellow Frames (NI LAG's): This is being discussed as a potential NI wide project involving all 10 LAG's. The project idea centres on using the iconic National Geographic Yellow Frame border to 'frame' various locations of interest in each LAG area. If the project proceeds, the frames would be situated to capture an iconic background allowing visitors to take 'selfies' and normal photographs through the frames which would be supplemented through the development and publication of maps, brochures, interpretation panels etc. A key feature of the project is the use of a formal contract with National Geographic to promote a Northern Ireland Yellow Frames trail. The aim of the proposal would be to use the marketing power of the Nat Geo brand to raise the profile of rural areas in NI, including those sites identified for Mid Ulster and boost visitor numbers to the area as a result.</p> <p>International Appalachian Trail This project aims to promote the Ulster section of the International Appalachian Trail and involves the LAG's in Donegal, Fermanagh/Omagh, Mid Ulster, Derry/Strabane, Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid and East Antrim. It will support the installation of trail infrastructure, signage and interpretation along the course of the IAT. The Mid Ulster section of this trail is relatively short at approx 14km. A joint marketing campaign will form part of the project actions.</p> <p>Each of the projects listed above are at pre development stage therefore further updates will be brought to Council through the relevant service areas assisting the LAG with this stage.</p> <p>3.2 Update on overall commitment/approval of funds From an overall allocation of £8.33m for project support, the value of grant now committed/allocated to approved projects is £7.26m. The Village Renewal and Co-operation Schemes will utilise the remaining balance of just over £1m which has to be committed by the end of September 2019.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: NA</p> <p>Human: NA – admin costs are recovered in full from the LAG administration budget.</p> <p>Risk Management: Audit and compliance requirement are followed in line with the operating rules for the 2014-20 Rural Development Programme.</p>

4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: The LAG Strategy has been screened for Equality and Good Relations impacts.
	Rural Needs Implications: By its nature, the Rural Development Programme and LAG Strategy aim to promote the development of rural areas.
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	Members are asked to note progress to date with delivery of the LAG Local Rural Development Strategy.
6.0	Documents Attached & References