

Report on	Mid Ulster District Tourism Development Group
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Mary McGee

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To inform and update members on the work of the Tourism Development Group. The group met on 6 th September 2017 at Blessingbourne, Fivemiletown and hosted John McGrillen CEO, Tourism NI at the meeting.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Tourism Development Group, comprises members from the local authority, tourism business representatives and key stakeholders in the tourism sector. This group is a working group taking leadership and membership from and reporting to Mid Ulster District Council Development Committee.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Minutes of the most recent meeting of the Tourism Development Group dated 6 September 2017 are attached as Appendix 1.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u> Financial: NA Human: NA
4.2	<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u> NA

4.3	<u>Risk Management Implications</u> NA
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	NA
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix A – Minutes of Tourism Development Group Meeting dated 6 September 2017.

MID ULSTER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GROUP**Wednesday 6 September 2017 at 10.30am****In Blessingbourne Estate, Fivemiletown****Attendees:**

Chair Cllr S Clarke – MUDC
 Cllr F Burton – MUDC
 Cllr N Doris – MUDC
 Cllr M Kearney – MUDC
 C Lowry - Blessingbourne Estate
 N Bell - Lissan House
 A-M McFerran - The Old Thatch Inn
 H McDermott – Ashbrook B&B
 T McCrory – Heraldic Craft
 N Somerville – Horses Welcome
 B McCormick – Seamus Heaney HomePlace
 H McCloy – Jungle NI
 J McGrillen – Tourism NI

Apologies:

L Neill – NRC,
 G Mullholland – SWC,

Officers:

A McCreesh – Director of Business & Communities
 M Browne – Head of Tourism
 T McCance – Head of Culture & Arts
 M McKeown – Tourism Manager
 M McGee - Business Engagement
 G Bell - Tourism Officer
 G Major – Tourist Information Supervisor
 S Arbuthnot - Events Officer
 M Beattie – Tourism
 A O’Keefe – Business Support

G Bell – Tourism Officer,
 C Bell- Tourism Officer

1. John McGrillen, Chief Executive Tourism NI

The Chair, Councillor Clarke welcomed J McGrillen, Tourism NI Chief Executive, and thanked C Lowry for her hospitality in hosting the meeting at Blessingbourne.

Mr McGrillen gave a brief outline of his background before delivering a PowerPoint presentation on ‘The Strategic Development of Tourism in NI’ (Appendix 1 attached) giving an overview of tourism’s growth potential, opportunities and challenges to NI tourism and the strategic partnerships with Tourism Ireland (TIL) and Failte Ireland. He encouraged the group, with Tourism NI, to continue to lobby so that tourism be seen as a strategic priority alongside the Industrial Strategy. He noted Seamus Heaney HomePlace as a good example of being imaginative to utilise the product, commercially driven and profitable.

Head of Service, in thanking Mr McGrillen, commented that the MUDC Tourism Strategy echoes what he had presented. He asked how likely it would be that Mid Ulster would have a proposition like the Ancient East within 5 – 6 years. Responding Mr McGrillen advised that Council should look at surrounding assets to generate income and invest in technology to bring sites to life to tell stories in the best possible way. Tourism Manager asked when the TNI Growth fund would be available. Mr McGrillen stated that a request for £70m had been made to government to develop technology, however, it is not known

when budgets will be released. He reiterated the need for a strong industry voice to access greater investment.

Mr Somerville made reference to Mr McGrillen highlighting the work of TIL and Bord Failte. Mr McGrillen acknowledged that following the success of 2 campaigns in N Ireland, spend had increased by 39%. Mr Somerville stated that he felt this was due to the drive of private sector and greater investment is required. Mr McGrillen reiterated the high level of investment TIL and Bord Failte receive in comparison to tourism in N Ireland. He advised that TNI could only support projects which attract out of state visitors.

Chair acknowledged the need for an industry led private sector forum to force the government to take responsibility and provide investment. Mr McGrillen accepted that TNI could facilitate and assist with this issue but reminded them that TNI were answerable to the Minister and could not argue on behalf of the industry.

Director welcomed TNI support. He made reference to the location of Mid Ulster from central government and the lack of infrastructure, such as, broadband. He also referred to government agencies, such as Invest NI, needing to focus on skill shortages and offer Business Support Programme to the smaller rural SME's. He concurred that despite challenges Mid Ulster have developed world-class and innovative products in Seamus Heaney HomePlace and Dark Skies and with TNI support Tourism would continue to grow. Mr McGrillen stated that TNI would be happy to engage with all tourism businesses.

Item 8 was taken at this point – Industry Update

Tourism businesses were invited to give a brief update. Whilst many of the businesses recognised the work opportunities working with MUDC, one business requested more assistance and support for craft producers as it was felt this sector was failing.

Cllr McKearnan left the meeting at 12.20pm.

2. Minutes of Meeting held on 14 June 2017

Having been circulated in advance of the meeting, the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2017 were taken as read and correct.

Proposed: N Somerville Seconded: N Bell

3. Matters Arising

Item 11.3 - Magherafelt Playing Fields

M Browne informed that vending machines are on site and outside catering can be accommodated as required.

4. Cluster Reports

A brief report for each cluster was circulated at the meeting. In addition the Tourism Manager invited members of TDG to the launch of the Carleton Trail in Corick House, Clogher on 15 September.

5. Browne Signage Proposal

No update provided.

6. Mid Ulster Council Tourism Strategy

Head of Tourism stated the MU Tourism Strategy echoed the presentation given by Chief Executive, TNI. He advised that MUDC will look to review the TDG and clusters calling on members to provide feedback on what worked, where it needs to go etc. He informed that he following a recent meeting with South West College they agreed that pressure to address skills shortages needs to be addressed from the top level. He also reiterated the innovative product in Seamus Heaney HomePlace, agreeing that it has put MU on the map and made reference to ongoing projects; heritage and equestrian trails, Sperrins, Lough Neagh. He also made reference to strong outdoor products, such as, Todds Leap, Jungle NI and the proposed race track at Coalisland.

7. Digital Strategy

Due to time constraints this item was held until the next meeting.

8. Industry Update – taken after item 1

9. District Wide Monitoring Results

Due to time constraints this item was held until the next meeting.

10. AOB

None

Meeting ended at 12.42pm.

The next meeting of the Tourism Development Group will be held on 15 November at 10.30am The Old Thatch Inn, Bellaghy.