

Report on	Northern Ireland Forest Schools Awards Scheme
Reporting Officer	Head of Parks
Contact Officer	Nigel Hill

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 seek approval to register and engage with Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association (NIFSA) to develop a schools programme in Mid Ulster District Council area for a third year 2019-20.
2.0	Background
2.1	Northern Ireland Forest School Awards is an environmental awareness initiative which encourages local schools to visit and take on an ownership of their local Council Park. It has been operating successfully at Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park since April 2017 as part of the education programme at Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House.
2.2	As part of the NIFSA programme, pupils and teachers identify an area within the local Council Park (Hill of The O'Neill) that they can develop as their own Forest School site. Here they undertake exciting and innovative activities to help them understand the importance of our natural environment and local heritage. Activities can include making a map of the Council Park using only natural resources, den building, as well as the use of trees to help children better understand maths.
2.3	The teachers involved undertake a Forest School Leader qualification (OCN Level 3). This gives them the confidence to continue visiting the Council Park year after year and developing more exciting outdoor activities to replace classroom led lessons.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	During the period September 2018 to March 2019, three local schools are participating in NIFSA at Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moy Regional Primary School • Bush Primary School Nursery Unit • Windmill Integrated Primary School, Dungannon
3.2	Classes from two of the schools, Moy Regional Primary School and Bush Primary School Nursery Unit, have completed their programmes, and a class from Windmill Integrated Primary School will begin its programme in January 2019. The feedback from the participant schools has been excellent and the staff and pupils have thoroughly enjoyed the NIFSA activities.

<p>3.3</p> <p>3.4</p> <p>3.5</p>	<p>Staff from Dungannon Primary School who participated in NIFSA in 2017 returned to the park in October/November 2018 to undertake a second programme of Forest Schools with one of this year's P2 classes. On this occasion the Forest Schools programme was led by the teacher who had been trained the previous year, thus demonstrating the sustainability of this NIFSA education activity.</p> <p>Interest has been shown in NIFSA by 28 local schools and community groups in the Mid Ulster District Council area: these have all registered expressions of interest on the Mid Ulster District Council section of the NIFSA website. The Parks & Countryside Development Officer and the Education Officer (Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House) are currently examining ways in which this demand for environmental activities across the Mid Ulster District Council area can be met.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Forest Schools Awards is definitely a very popular addition to the education programme at Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House. The continuation of this programme will maintain this connection of environmental awareness and citizenship skills with this Council Park, while extending the learning of ecological and conservation skills to even more pupils and teachers in the Mid Ulster District Council area.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Other Considerations</p>
<p>4.1</p>	<p><u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u></p> <p>Financial: Year three programme cost £6,000 subject to available funding being approved in 2019/20 Parks and Arts & Culture budget. Programme costs shared equally between Parks and Arts & Culture Services.</p> <p>Human: Council's Education Officer and Countryside Development Officer coordinate and delivery the project in conjunction with NIFSA.</p>
<p>4.2</p>	<p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>Community ownership and civic responsibility will be positive outcomes of the programme with participating schools adopting an area within their local Council Park. This will become their Forest School site. They will visit their Forest School site on a regular basis every year. Here they will learn about civic responsibility and help manage the site. This will include regular litter lifting, opportunities to help improve its biodiversity, for example, wildflower planting, tree planting for example.</p>
<p>4.3</p>	<p><u>Risk Management Implications</u></p> <p>In line with Council policy and procedures.</p>
<p>5.0</p>	<p>Recommendation(s)</p>
<p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p>	<p>Register Mid Ulster District Council with Northern Ireland Forest Schools Association and continue with a year three programme to engage local schools and youth groups to embrace local parks and greenspace where feasible across the district.</p> <p>To provide a contribution of £6,000 towards programme support costs (subject to available resources) in 2019/20 budget setting process.</p>

6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	N/A