

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tourism Trade and Consumer Shows/Events 2024/2025 2. Hidden Heritage Tours 2024 3. Mid Ulster Brown Signage Audit 4. Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) 2023/2024 Funding 5. Service Level Agreement – Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) 2024/2025 6. MEGA - Progress Report for 2023/2024 and Third Funding Contribution for 2024/2025 via Service Level Agreement
Date of Meeting	10 April 2024
Reporting Officers	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Programmes Tourism Manager

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>Tourism Trade and Consumer Shows/Events 2024/2025</p> <p>The tourism team continue to work in association with Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland, and other strategic partners to maximise tourism promotion of our key attractions, experiences and businesses targeting core ROI, UK, European & US markets.</p> <p>In the aftermath of the covid pandemic, most promotions and events are now back to a fully in-person model, with little to no virtual events. Through research, experience, and stakeholder engagement, the MUDC tourism department have identified key promotions and shows that are a necessity to attend.</p>

2.2 Hidden Heritage Tours 2024

Hidden Heritage Tours are organised annually across the Mid Ulster District to encourage locals and visitors to explore heritage sites and discover the hidden gems of Mid Ulster.

2.3 Mid Ulster Brown Signage Audit

In November 2022, Gerry Darby Consultancy was commissioned by Mid Ulster District Council to carry out an audit of brown signs across the entire district.

The audit was completed between December 2022 and March 2023. Brown tourism signs were surveyed, photographed, geo-located and placed on a google map link. This allows all photos of the signs to be identified at their actual geographic location.

The purpose of the audit is to inform staff and elected representatives of the location of signs, assess and help upgrade the physical condition and visibility of existing signs, identify any redundant signs and assess the present policy and procedures.

2.4 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) 2023/2024 Funding

The Council previously agreed to participate in the development and delivery of a Local Labour Market Partnership (LMP) under the Employability NI Programme led by the Department for Communities (DfC). The Mid Ulster LMP aims to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions locally by working through coordinated, collaborative, multiagency partnerships. The LMP provides a unique opportunity to greatly impact Council's priorities for skills and employability ensuring that an appropriate skills pipeline is available to local industry both now and in the future.

The Council previously received a Letter of Offer (dated 27 July 2023) for £369,005.21 from the Department for Communities to support delivery of the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2023-2024.

2.5 Service Level Agreement – Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) 2024/2025

Over the past number of years, a group of 8 Councils from north and south (as listed below) have provided a financial contribution towards ICBAN to support their work; these are Mid Ulster District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan County Councils.

2.6 MEGA - Progress Report for 2023/2024 and Third Funding Contribution for 2024/2025 via Service Level Agreement

MEGA (Mid Ulster Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement) is an award-winning collaborative growth network formed in 2017 with the support of Mid Ulster District Council and Invest NI to address the immediate and medium-term skills shortages in the manufacturing and Engineering industries in the Mid-Ulster area. MEGA is unique in that it is an industry-led collaborative network of businesses who are working together towards a common goal. Its main aim is to tackle skills and labour issues in Mid Ulster and create and implement ways to attract and retain talent in the engineering and manufacturing industry.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Tourism Trade and Consumer Shows/Events 2024/2025

The key shows and events the tourism team seek to attend are as follows:

Show/ Location	Dates	Cost
Clogher Valley Show	31 July 2024	£1,000 <i>(staff mileage/expenses)</i>
Meet The Buyer (Belfast)	9 & 10 April 2024	<i>(staff mileage /expenses)</i>
World Travel Market (London)	5 - 7 November 2024	Cost to attend £560 approx. Flights approx. £140pp. Hotel approx., £600 for one room 4 nights. Total costs: £1600 approx.
Holiday World (Dublin)	24 - 26 January 2025	£2,500
Celtic Connections (Glasgow)	January 2025	Stand £300 Flights approx £100 Hotel approx £90 Total approx. £500-600
Nordics - Scandinavian Mission	Winter/Spring 2024/2025	Stand £344 +VAT, Flights: £103pp approx., Hotel: £350 approx. Total spend: £1000 approx.
Flavours (London)	October 2024	Stand £300 Flights & Accommodation £150, Hotel 250 Approx £700
Inbound Tourism Operators Association	November 2024	<i>(staff mileage/expenses)</i>

(ITOA)		
Adventure Travel Trade Association (Austria)	May 2024	Stand - £650 Flights & accommodation £1,000
USA Sales Mission	During 2024/2025	£1,500 includes stand, Flights, and accommodation.
Total		£9900

The tourism team will continue to host familiarisation trips for media, influencers, and tour operators to promote our current and new products and newly developed tourism experiences.

Return on investment / outcomes from attending tourism events and shows in 2023/2024:

World Travel Market:

MUDC Tourism Officers and the Loughinsholin Cluster attended WTM London in November 2023 and had a productive three days, with 38 meetings with potential international operators. Generating a number of opportunities.

ITOA:

MUDC Tourism Officers and the Loughinsholin cluster attended ITOA in November 2023 and met with 30 buyers.

Meet the Buyer

Twelve Mid Ulster Tourism businesses attended. A number of industry members from the Tourism Development Group attended MTB in March 2023 – all described the event as successful, presenting good opportunities and leads for follow-up.

Clogher Valley Show

Eight Tourism Businesses attended the show selling to the staycation market. Data capture for tourism ezine via competitions.

Nordics Workshop

Mid Ulster Tourism featured on Tourism Ireland travel podcast. Familiarization Media Trip organised from this workshop. One confirmed booking from attending this workshop to OM Dark Sky Park. International influencer trips have taken place in Mid Ulster with social media coverage and a new audience reached as an outcome.

Increase awareness of Mid Ulster Tourism offering.

3.2 **Hidden Heritage Tours 2024**

This year's Hidden Heritage Programme will look at three heritage experiences, which allows the consumer to step back in time and discover what's on your doorstep, thus increasing visitor spend in the area and encouraging overnight stays in the district. This year will focus on the 'Big Houses' within the Mid Ulster District.

Saturday 8 June 2024

Who lives in a house like this – Ballyscullion Park, Bellaghy, MAGHERAFELT

Ballyscullion Park is the beautiful home of Richard and Rosalind Mulholland and their four children. The estate was bought by Richard's grandparents, Sir Harry, and Lady Mulholland in 1938, and the house was restored to its present state.

You will be taken on a journey to explore this private historic house and estate situated amongst unspoilt countryside, surrounded by ancient woodland and breathtaking views over Lough Beg. Richard (a professional tour guide) gives a fascinating talk about the history of Ballyscullion Park and the Mulholland family, with their long-standing involvement in the linen industry. Richard is descended from Jane Austen's brother Edward Knight, and Rosalind has connections with Charlotte Bronte.

Friday 21 June 2024

The Three Sisters Tour - Springhill, Lissan House and Killymoon Castle, COOKSTOWN

Explore Mid Ulster's amazing collection of historic houses, perfectly maintained and lovingly preserved. Three of these houses, Lissan House, Springhill and Killymoon Castle have a unique link: three sisters - Henrietta, Louisa and Elizabeth Molesworth, the daughters of Richard Molesworth and his second wife Mary Jenney Ussher.

Saturday 21 September 2024

Who lives in a house like this – Blessingbourne Estate, FIVEMILETOWN

A special welcome to the Lowry family home, the award-winning Blessingbourne Estate. A beautiful historic 550-acre Country Estate, nestled in the heart of woodlands, lakes, and wildlife on the edge of the Clogher Valley. Colleen will allow you to delve into the estate's captivating history.

In the coach house Bronagh Duffin from BakehouseNI will demonstrate her traditional baking including her now very famous soda farls.

All tours are £25 per person, which includes coach (departing from the Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre, Cookstown) tour, refreshments, and a light meal. Each tour has a capacity of 25 persons (to accommodate house tours). Booking is essential.

3.3 Mid Ulster Brown Signage Audit

The Tourism Manager will present Mid Ulster's Brown Signage Audit to Members at the start of the meeting.

Previously on 12 March 2024, Mid Ulster's Draft Brown Signage Audit was presented to Mid Ulster's Tourism Development Group to seek their views/comments. The Brown Signage Audit was warmly received and gained the approval of the Group.

Representatives from DFI Roads and Tourism NI have been invited to attend the Development Committee Meeting to answer queries from Members in relation to the existing Brown Signage Policy and Procedures.

The Brown Signage Audit was a comprehensive piece of work which Council commissioned through a public procurement exercise and it took some time to complete with many exploratory journeys and mapping the brown signs on Mid Ulster's road network. The main work completed is as follows;

- Check that every brown sign is pointing in correct direction, reposition if required, and secure to post
- Report any missing signage where a sign is missing but posts are in place
- Cut back vegetation as required to ensure each sign is visible
- Clean each sign using appropriate materials as directed by Transport NI (DFI Roads)
- Photograph each sign or where a sign should be erected
- Submit a report displaying a photograph of each sign and its location noting what remedial action was taken or is required
- A complete set of digital photographs clearly referenced (e.g., Route, Road Name, Junction/Location)
- Prepare and submit a report detailing what replacement or new signage is required in a format that meets Transport NI's requirements

The report also contains a number of Recommendations as regards the way forward.

The full Brown Signage Audit Report is attached on **Appendix 1** for Members to review in advance of the meeting.

3.4 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) 2023-2024 Funding

On 26 January 2024, the Department for Communities (DfC) issued correspondence to all LMPs inviting easement bid submissions as a result of underspend within the Department's programme budget. To this end, a bid was submitted on behalf of Mid Ulster LMP to cover additional salary costs of £17,505.50 incurred in the 2023-2024 financial year. This relates to internal staff who provided support to the LMP secretariat whilst the Project Delivery Officer was on maternity leave as well as a contribution towards the salary of the Strategic Programmes Service Manager for their direct contribution towards the management of the programme.

DfC approved the easement bid for the period 2023-2024 and on 21 February 2024 issued an addendum letter of offer to Council. A copy of the addendum to the letter of offer is contained in **Appendix 2**, and the updated Budget Scheule for 2023-2024 is enclosed in **Appendix 3**.

3.5 Service Level Agreement – Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) (2024/25)

By way of update, ICBAN has provided a detailed account of the work they have completed in 2023/2024 financial year on **Appendix 4** and seeks support to build upon these initiatives going forward into 2024/2025.

ICBAN has also submitted a request to Mid Ulster District Council in December 2023 (**Appendix 5**), seeking a slightly reduced financial contribution from Council, totalling £14,750 for the 2024/2025 financial year.

Last year (2023/2024), Council provided a financial contribution to ICBAN via a Service Level Agreement and subject to Members approval this year, it is recommended to approve a financial contribution of £14,750 funding for the 2024/2025 financial year, via the Service Level Agreement as detailed in (**Appendix 6**). The SLA has been reviewed by Council's Legal Services Team.

3.6 MEGA - Progress Report for 2023/2024 and Third Funding Contribution for 2024/2025 via Service Level Agreement

In 2022, MEGA (Mid Ulster Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement) Network submitted a request to Mid Ulster District Council for a contribution of £15,000 per annum for the period 2022-2025 to support the delivery of their new 3-year Strategic Action Plan.

In May 2022, Council approved a 3-year Service Level Agreement (SLA) with MEGA in which Council agreed to provide a financial contribution of £45,000 for the 2022/2025 term, which equates to £15,000 per financial year.

	<p>Appendix 7 provides a summary of the work MEGA has completed in Year 2 (2023/2024).</p> <p>It is now timely for Council to approve release its third and final payment to MEGA for the 2024/2025 financial year, as per the original Service Level Agreement. This will allow the work of the MEGA Network to continue to build momentum upon the early successes and allow for effective forward planning and project management.</p> <p>Council’s financial support to the MEGA Network will enable the group to deliver against the first three Work Streams of their Strategic Action Plan which include Focus on People, Skills for the Future and Collaborate to Win.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	<p>Financial:</p> <p>4.1.1 Tourism Trade and Consumer Shows/Events 2024/2025 Approx tourism budget of £10,000 earmarked to cover all costs including stand hire, travel, overnight accommodation, and relevant expenses related to staff travelling. An application will be made to Tourism NI for IMAP funding to attend trade shows. Funding allocation will depend on application outcome.</p> <p>4.1.2 Hidden Heritage Tours 2024 Provision has been made in the 2024/2025 tourism budget of £4000.</p> <p>4.1.3 Mid Ulster Brown Signage Cost of audit - £4990 (funded previously from Council’s Tourism budget)</p> <p>4.1.4 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) 2023-2024 Funding Letter of Offer (dated 27 July 2023) from DFC previously received for £369,005.21 to support delivery of the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2023-2024. Further DFC Addendum to Letter of Offer received (dated 21 February 2024), offering additional funding of £17,505.50 in relation to Mid Ulster’s LMP Easement Funding Bid for additional salary costs.</p> <p>4.1.5 Service Level Agreement – Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) (2024/25) Provision of annual financial contribution to ICBAN of £14,750 has been made in Council’s economic development budget for 2024/2025.</p> <p>4.1.6 MEGA - Progress Report for 2023/2024 and Third Funding Contribution for 2024/2025 via Service Level Agreement Council previously agreed to fund MEGA with £45,000 over a 3-year period (2022/2023 to 2024/2025), with £15,000 to be paid per annum. Provision has been made in the 2024/2025 economic development budget for the <i>third (and final) tranche</i> of funding of £15,000.</p>

	Human: Officer time
4.2	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	Mid Ulster Council is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all its activities with a focus on all citizens living within the Mid Ulster.
4.3	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Risk Management: Rural Needs Implications
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members:-
5.1	Tourism Trade and Consumer Shows/Events 2024/2025
	Approve officer attendance at the various Tourism Trade and Consumer Shows/Events in 2024/2025 as detailed in the report, at a cost of circa. £10,000 from Council's Tourism budget.
5.2	Hidden Heritage Tours 2024
	Approve content of the proposed Hidden Heritage Programme 2024 and the associated costs to deliver the Tours, circ. £4,000, to be borne by Council's Tourism Budget in 2024/2025.
5.3	Mid Ulster Brown Signage Audit
	Approve Mid Ulster's Brown Signage Audit Report and Recommendations contained therein.
5.4	Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) 2023-2024 Funding
	5.4.1 Note update report.
	5.4.2 Retrospectively Approve that Council's Chief Executive sign and return the Addendum to DFC's Letter of Offer to Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (2023-2024) providing additional funding of £17,505.50 for internal staff costs.

<p>5.5</p>	<p>Service Level Agreement: Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) (2024/2025)</p> <p>5.5.1 Note ICBAN's 2023/2024 Progress Report outlining actions completed against their 2023/2024 Service Level Agreement Projects.</p> <p>5.5.2 Approve Council's Service Level Agreement with ICBAN for the financial year April 2024 – March 2025.</p> <p>5.5.3 Approve the release of £14,750 from Council's Economic Development Budget (2024/2025), subject to Council being provided with the requisite documentation as detailed in the Service Level Agreement.</p>
<p>5.6</p>	<p>MEGA - Progress Report for 2023/2024 and Third Funding Contribution for 2024/2025 via Service Level Agreement</p> <p>5.6.1 Note MEGA's Progress Report (2023/2024), outlining actions completed against their Service Level Agreement Targets for 2023/2024.</p> <p>5.6.2 Approve release of third and final payment to MEGA of £15,000 for 2024/2025 financial year, from Council's Economic Development Budget, subject to Council being provided with all the requisite documentation as detailed in the original Service Level Agreement (2022-2025).</p>
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Mid Ulster Brown Signage Audit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appendix 1.1 - List of Brown Sign Locations and Photographs across Mid Ulster District - Appendix 1.2 - Interactive Google Map of Brown Signs in Mid Ulster District - Appendix 1.3 – List of Brown Tourist Signs Washed - Appendix 1.4 - DFI Brown Sign Policy and Procedures <p>Appendix 2 - Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership – Addendum to Letter of Offer (2023-2024)</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Mid Ulster LMP - Budget Schedule (2023-2024)</p> <p>Appendix 4 - ICBAN Progress Report as per Service Level Agreement for 2023-2024</p>

Appendix 5 - ICBAN Funding Request for 2024-2025

Appendix 6 - ICBAN Service Level Agreement for 2024-2025

Appendix 7 - MEGA Progress Report (2023-2024)