

Report on	Mid Ulster District Tourism Development Group
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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 present a review and update members on progress in tourism development projects, funding update, visitor information and business engagement across the tourism section.
2.0	Background
2.1	The tourism team have worked throughout the pandemic to deliver both capital and revenue projects for the tourism sector and worked hard to keep tourism businesses lights on in Mid Ulster. They have continued to profile Mid Ulster both locally nationally and internationally and this report presents a summary of work completed from April 2020 to the present day.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Capital projects
3.1.1	<p>OM Dark Sky Park & Observatory</p> <p>The OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory was due to launch on 4 April 2020. However, unfortunately the doors of the £1.2M facility, located in Davagh Forest, had to remain closed due to Covid until it was formally opened by Minister Poots MLA and the Chair in June 2021.</p> <p>OM is home to an exhibition, observatory and telescope that showcases the unique dark sky and combines technology to allow visitors to explore our solar system and the significance of the stars to ancient life, the seasons and stone circles, linking the landscape, archaeological and, astronomical heritage of the Sperrins, including the nearby Beaghmore Stone Circles. Hence the Embrace A Giant Spirit Experience – Stars and Stones was developed to provide bespoke tours and is proving very successful with international markets, receiving significant exposure through Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland Industry Opportunities, TV and media.</p>
3.1.2	<p>Davagh Solar Walk</p> <p>To further develop and enhance the experience a 3.4km Solar Walk will link the OM Dark Sky Observatory to Beaghmore Stones Circle, with augmented reality bringing the experience alive in an innovative and immersive way. The AR app will provide a digitally immersive scale model of the solar system to connect the sky directly with the surrounding land. DAERA funded 75% of the total project cost of £527,250.</p>

3.1.3	<p>Davagh Archaeology Walk</p> <p>Again, Augmented Reality will allow the story behind the sites and planets and its cultural importance to be presented to visitors to help understand the significance of the sites in human history at local, national and international levels Archaeological Walk. Mid Ulster LAG provided 75% funding of the total project cost £138,720.</p>
3.1.4	<p>US Grants Homestead, Ballygawley</p> <p>The U.S. Grant Ancestral Homestead has been relaunched following an investment of £58K refurbishment works. The beautiful historical site outside Dungannon was officially reopened on Saturday 3 July. The Homestead previously received £30K funding from the Department of Communities in 2017 for new audio and visual interpretation at the site.</p> <p>The latest refurbishment to the value of £33K and 100% funded by The Ulster Scots Agency and the Department for Communities, has further the site with the introduction of welcome signage at the entrances and exits, directional signage to help visitors navigate around the site and brand new interpretive displays within and around the buildings.</p> <p>A further 24K was allocated to refurbish the new play park on the site, this latest revamp was 100% funding from the Department for Communities, making it more accessible and inclusive through the installation of a pod swing, a wheelchair accessible ground level roundabout and a wheelchair accessible in ground trampoline and 4 sensory panels.</p>
3.1.5	<p>Ballyronan Marina</p> <p>Ballyronan Marina Tourism will be significantly enhanced by four on-water floating luxury glamping pods complimented by state-of-the-art interpretive displays to promote the rich heritage and mythology of Lough Neagh. Visitors will be able use Augmented Reality to gain a myths and legends experience of Lough Neagh and learn about the rich cultural and heritage sites that exist around the Lough, and can also be experienced from the comfort of the pods themselves. A viewing platform on the breakwater provides visitors a 360° view of the Lough Neagh. DAERA funded 75% of total project cost £651,293.</p>
3.1.6	<p>Access & Inclusion Projects</p>
3.1.7	<p>Ballyronan Marina & Newferry</p> <p>£26,300 funding received to improve access to water based recreation activities both at: The Lower Bann at Newferry (west) by installing a bespoke lowered pontoon with ramp and non-slip surface, along with a portable hoist, making <i>activity</i> fully accessible to all. Provision of the hoist will also support private enterprises such as the River Bann boat tours, and Portglenone Paddlers.</p> <p>Ballyronan Marina - installation of an accessible hoist at will allow Ballyronan Boat Club to offer Sailability - the RYA's national programme for disabled people who want to go boating regularly. It will also improve accessibility for the new Lough Neagh Boat Tours on Lough Neagh, and the Mid Ulster Canoe & Kayak Club.</p>
3.1.8	<p>Changing Places Facilities Bridewell</p> <p>The Bridewell, located in Magherafelt Town Centre, houses the Visitor Information Centre, library and a community hall on the lower ground floor.</p> <p>In April 2020, the Department for Communities (DfC) Access and Inclusion programme provided £28,172.84 funding to refurb the toilets on the ground floor. The renovation included male and female toilets in addition to an accessible toilet.</p>

3.1.9	<p>In June 2021, a further £38,000 was spend to install a Changing Places facility with the refurbishment of two unisex toilets. Department of Communities (DfC) Access and Inclusion programme provided £30,000. This will be the first Council owned Changing Places Facility located within one of Mid Ulster Councils Town Centres. A corner accessible toilet is already in situ.</p> <p>The changing places facility is a fantastic asset for the Bridewell and Magherafelt Town Centre. The strategic aim for the Bridewell is to develop an Accessible Town Centre based Hub a safe place that caters for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Installation of automated doors to main hall and hearing loop system - £9,450. Completed by March 2022.</p> <p>Sculpture Trail</p> <p>The Sperrins Sculpture Trail is a proposed joint tourism initiative being developed by Omagh & Fermanagh District Council, Mid Ulster Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council acting as led Council for the project.</p> <p>The Sperrin Sculpture Trail project will embed an iconic public artwork installations within the heart of the Sperrins; one that reflects the rich cultural and natural heritage of the region and opens up, for further exploration, this Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).</p> <p>The proposed Sperrin Sculpture Trail project will be developed under the Rural Tourism Scheme as part of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (NIRDP). The aim of the programme's Rural Tourism Scheme is to support investment in natural and built heritage projects that can act as a key driver for encouraging rural tourism and particularly out of state visitors whilst preserving the natural assets of the rural community.</p> <p>Artist of international reputation Thomas Dambo has been appointed to deliver this iconic installation. Total cost of project £581,000 with 75% funding received from DAERA.</p> <p>Appalachian Way</p> <p>The International Appalachian Trail (IAT) is a long distance walking/hiking route which started in the US and Canada and extended to Europe, with the IAT Ulster Ireland section formally launched in 2013.</p> <p>Approximately 9 miles of the proposed trail passes through the Mid Ulster Council area. The concept behind this project is to maximise the use and potential of all existing walks on the International Appalachian Trail that traverse through the Mid Ulster District Council area and potentially add a number of tributary trails which collectively can add value to the trail and entice visitors to stay in the local area for longer. The project activities will include the installation of IAT branded trail head markers, directional way markers and fingerposts (£14,397) as well as a joint marketing Initiative between all six partners namely the LAG's in Derry City and Strabane, Donegal, Fermanagh/Omagh, Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid and East Antrim.</p>
3.2	Revenue Projects
3.2.1	Tourism Marketing, see Appendix 1
3.2.2	Touch Screens

	<p>Tourism NI Tech Refresh scheme awarded £10,000 funding to place the following IT equipment for visitors use: touchscreen at the Bridewell and 4 iPads across VIC sites, Hill of the O'Neill, Seamus Heaney HomePlace, Burnavon and OM Observatory</p>
3.2.3	<p>Mid Ulster Tourism Website</p> <p>The tourism department have availed of Tourism NI 100% financial assistance to develop a new consumer destination website dedicated to mid Ulster, which will also align with discovernorthernireland.com. The website is part of Tourism NI's aspiration for a collaborative and synchronized online presentation of NI tourism across the regions, putting the visitor first.</p> <p>Tourism and communications staff have engaged with copywriters, photographers and film production companies to populate and showcase the tourism product to the highest standard and offer a user friendly experience for the visitor. These will also be shared on dedicated Mid Ulster tourism social media pages and allow greater reach and interaction.</p> <p>Simpleview are a Destination Management System provider, who were contracted with the rollout of the DMS to the strategic partners. The financial assistance provided by Tourism NI is £41,886 and will benefit the wider tourism sector.</p>
3.2.4	<p>Mid Ulster Video & Photography</p> <p>Throughout the Covid pandemic the tourism team have been working with businesses in the development of new market ready product experiences. A suite of short, creative, natural and innovative videos have been developed and produced for use across digital marketing platforms, television campaigns, as well as Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland platforms, to enhance the success of Mid Ulster's tourism product. Aimed at international, regional and domestic markets, video has been found to enhance the tourism product and mid ulster as a must see visitor experience destination. Falling in line with the Tourism N Ireland 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' campaign the following experiences were captured:</p> <p>Stars and Stones taking in OM Dark Sky Observatory, Davagh Mountain Bike Trails, Beaghmore Stone Circles and Sperrinview Glamping</p> <p>Three Sisters Tour focusing on the three ladies from Springhill House, Lissan House and Killymoon Castle.</p> <p>Fed and Watered highlighting Woodlab Distillery, Spice Cottages, Wee Buns Cookery School and Tomneys, Moy.</p> <p>Outdoor and adventure activities at sites throughout mid ulster, including equestrian, angling, mountain biking, watersports and adventure</p> <p>Virtual Tours of hotels in Mid Ulster to promote wedding and conference venues</p>
3.2.5	<p>DAERA Experience Development Programme</p> <p>Council have been successful in securing 100% funding from DAERA to deliver on the Rural Tourism Collaborative Experience Programme. This project comprises to elements</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mid Ulster Heritage 2. Lough Neagh Shoreline in conjunction with Antrim & Newtownabbey Council. <p>The objective of this £66,000 programme is to develop 2 clusters and a series of experiences based around the Embrace a Giant Spirit brand. This programme will run to end of March 2022 and is being facilitated by Taylored Training. The programme will also identify skills and training gaps amongst the businesses, deliver both a marketing</p>

	and action plan and finally identify key stakeholders and partners who can support the clusters and bring the experiences to market.
3.3	<p>Lough Neagh Partnership (LNP) Core Funding</p> <p>Mid Ulster Tourism, along with the 5 Council's around the Lough shore, provided funding of £20,000 towards LNP core running costs. As the main co-ordinating body for delivery of tourism, marketing, recreational, environmental and heritage activities on Lough Neagh and shoreline on behalf of MUDC, LNP has increased visitor experiences and exposure of the L through media, discoverloughneagh.com and television. It has secured major Heritage Lottery funding to deliver a Landscape Partnership project worth £3.5 million together with an Industrial Heritage project in Coalisland attracting over £430,000 into the village. The Partnership has received funding from DAERA to implement two major Environmental Farm Group Schemes and an ASSI shoreline management plan for Lough Neagh.</p>
3.4	<p>Lough Neagh Rescue (LNR)</p> <p>Tourism provided financial support of £12,000 to LNR to assist in operating a 24/7 all year service of search and rescue activities for Lough Neagh and its tributaries. A registered charity, LNR operates on a voluntary basis and has 3 stations around the Lough, with one established at Battery Harbour, Ardboe. Each station endeavours to finance their needs sharing costs, such as, insurance, audit and accounting.</p>
3.5	<p>Business Engagement</p> <p>The Council Tourism Business Engagement programme continues with a high level of engagement from the tourism and hospitality sector.</p>
3.5.1	<p>Webinars</p> <p>The series of webinars in response to the onset of the pandemic commenced on 17th March 2021 and to date we have hosted 45 webinars targeting issues relating to our tourism and hospitality sector, with an average of 25 businesses dial in to each session.</p> <p>We have hosted experts from right across the sector and have on an ongoing basis hosted law experts from Cleaver, Fulton, Rankin (CFR) and accountants from FPK/FPM covered through Tourism NI TED Scheme.</p> <p>Businesses have been encouraged to sign up for the Embrace a Giants Spirit brand with TNI Business Solutions Team.</p> <p>We have also profiled over a series of webinars Mid Ulster Council supports in terms of Covid grants, Economic Development Programmes, Marketing grants and many of our tourism and hospitality businesses have taken advantage of these programmes.</p> <p>An average of 25 businesses dial in to each session and the Q&A to these experts that follows means the sessions last on average 1 hour and 15 minutes.</p>

3.5.2	<p>What's App group</p> <p>This group was established in response to the pandemic and businesses desperately seeking advice and support. Membership of our group currently stands at 140 business representatives, it has proved so successful in highlighting news, updates, and what is new in a fast and convenient manner for businesses.</p>
3.5.3	<p>Mentoring</p> <p>Tourism have also rolled out two mentoring programmes in the past year: Road to Recovery for 14 small businesses focussing of development of experiences. These businesses are now working to develop their experiences, have opened for the summer in some cases or are developing programmes and itineraries. Instagram Programme to upskill businesses on Instagram and help promote their businesses. 19 businesses completed this programme.</p>
3.6	<p>Tourism Development Group</p> <p>The tourism Development group is comprised Council, business representatives and representatives from education and training plus statutory agencies including TNI. This group work with officers to manage the delivery of Council tourism strategy and act as an advisory body for the industry.</p> <p>This group also comprises representatives from the following cluster groups.</p>
3.7	<p>Archaeology, History and Heritage Cluster</p> <p>The Archaeology, History and Heritage Group consists of 32 members from heritage businesses and organisations across Mid Ulster. Members are currently working with Taylored Training in the DAERA Experience Development programme. Examples of projects currently being developed include: Killymoon Castle has opened a GI exhibition at Killymoon Castle. This will open to the public on 13th August Ulster Scots Agency have opened a temporary Orange Museum in the Orange Hall in Magherafelt. Artefacts have been brought together for the first time. Work is continuing at Broughderg and Loup as part of the Irish Language initiative</p>
3.8	<p>Heaney Cluster</p> <p>This group of businesses have been successful in achieving Phase 2 funding from Invest NI Collaborative growth programme. Total support for the next two and a half years of £165,500. The group are currently working on appointing a facilitator to work with them on programme delivery.</p>
3.9	<p>Hotel Cluster</p> <p>The hotel sector have been particularly badly hit by Covid, however the tourism team continue to support them. The group are currently filming promotional videos for their businesses, thanks to the support given by Mid Ulster Council.</p>
3.10	<p>Outdoor & Events Cluster</p> <p>The Events and Outdoor sector have been one of the most affected by Covid. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 the Wild Adventure Weekend cancelled in both 2020 and 2021, however, it is anticipated that the event will be reviewed and revisited next year.</p> <p>To aid the sector's recovery a photographer was appointed to develop a new suite of photography stills, video and drone footage that will be used to promote the variety of Outdoor activates that mid ulster has to offer.</p> <p>Hill Walking events have resumed and prove to be as popular with groups of 15 participating on walks around the Sperrins. The number of events may increase to allow for the rise in demand for such walks.</p>

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u> N/A
4.2	<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u> 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	<u>Risk Management Implications</u> N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	For information.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix 1- Virtual Exhibitions, Sales Calls and Shows 20-21