

Report on	Mid Ulster District Tourism Development Group
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Allison O'Keefe

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 present Minutes of Tourism Development Group meeting held on 9 January 2019 and ratified at Tourism Development meeting held on 12 March 2019.
2.0	Background
2.1	Tourism Development Group (TDG) was established to create a working forum between Council and private sector businesses. The TDG will assist with policy development and support the implementation of Council's Tourism Strategy and associated work in order to create economic growth, increase visitor numbers and create employment. The group meet on a bi-monthly basis and as per the agreed Terms of Reference all business will be reported to Council through the Development Committee.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The ratified minutes of the most recent meeting of the Tourism Development Group dated 9 January 2019 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 9 January 2019.

MID ULSTER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GROUP
Wednesday 9 January 2019 at 10.00am in Council Offices, Magherafelt

Attendees:

Chair N Bell - Lissan House
 Cllr M Kearney – MUDC
 R Mullholland – Ballyscullion Park
 M McGeehan – J&K Coaches
 A M McFerron – Old Thatch Inn
 C O’Neill – Walsh’s Hotel
 S Wiggins – South West College
 G Mullholland - South West College
 C McGrath – Northern Regional College
 B Murphy – Tourism NI
 E Gallogly – RDP
 G Neville – LAG
 E Kearney – LNP Tours

Officers:

M Browne – Head of Tourism
 M McKeown – Tourism Manager
 M McGee - Business Engagement
 G Bell – Tourism Officer
 C Bell- Tourism Officer
 S Arbuthnot – Events Officer
 M Beattie – Tourism
 A O’Keefe – Business Support

Apologies:

Cllr F Burton – MUDC
 G Major – Tourist Information
 Supervisor

Meeting commenced 10.05am. Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of 2019

1. Yellow Frames Report – M Browne

M Browne introduced E Gillogly, RDP, and requested a briefing on the LAG Co-Operative Project. E Gillogly stated that the project, intended to collaborate all 10 LAG’s, sought to take the Yellow Frame concept from National Geographic to iconic sites throughout the north. He added that both DAERA and National Geographic have come on board to identify and brand sites throughout N Ireland. Mid Ulster seek to put forward up to 6 possible locations. E Gillogly to forward outline proposals. Eamon gave a brief outline of the criteria required for consideration of a Yellow Frame on site; Council must make an application through the LAG and sites must be Council owned to avoid planning and development issues.

M Browne discussed potential sites within Mid Ulster rural locations as part of RDP. It was noted that the Mid Ulster sites will be integrated into a wider trail of 50/60 sites around the north.

- Knockmany
- Lough Neagh Ballyronan
- Davagh Forest Dark Sky
- Church Island
- Slieve Gallion carpark

E Gillogly stated that LAGS visited similar projects in Estonia and Scandinavia who have successfully opened sites to a world-wide audience. He informed that a Letter of Offer should be received by September 2019 with frames put in place early 2020. G Neville added that interpretation panels will be included with each frame allowing local buy-in to the history and stories each site has to tell.

M McGeehan raised that it will be vital that sites are located near arterial routes that are accessible and added from a transport prospective he could look at Yellow Frame Tours. M Browne invited Mark to discuss with other LAGs.

Chair thanked E Gillogly and G Neville for attending. They left the meeting at 10.26am.

2. Lough Neagh Partnership – E Kearney

Members welcomed E Kearney, LNP, to present Lough Neagh Tours. She informed that while LNP work with the 5 councils surrounding the Lough, Mid Ulster feature in a number of tours and therefore felt it was vital to build possible collaborations, which include attending large trade/consumer shows with Council and building relationships with tour operators.

Tours featuring Mid Ulster were:

- Food & Drink Tour
- Wilderness Tour (potentially Lough Beg)
- Seamus Heaney & Landscaped Tour (2019)
- Thatches of Lough Neagh
- Lough Neagh Peat Tours

Eimear discussed how tours are tailored to requests by tour operators and further ideas are to be investigated. She welcomed the opportunity to work with tourism businesses and was open to offering advice on planning itineraries.

M Browne raised Lough Neagh's recent high profile media channels featuring Lough Neagh; The Getaways Programme, The Great British Railways Programme and True North –Community Rescue Service. In response to a query E Kearney noted that itineraries are subject to tour operators requirements and she has been working actively to sell to the American market.

E Kearney left the meeting at 10.45am

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 20 November 2018

Having been circulated in advance, the minutes were adopted.

Proposed: Cllr Kearney

Seconded: A M McFerran

4. Matters Arising - None

5. Cluster Reports

In addition to Cluster Reports circulated in advance of the meeting:

5.1 Seamus Heaney Cluster

Business Engagement Officer reported that the cluster are currently preparing an application to Invest NI Phase 2 Collaborative Growth funding of up to £170,000 over a 3 year period. M Browne commended the Cluster in working collaboratively to change their business. He added that the other clusters are learning from the group and look at it as a best practice example.

Cllr Kearney left the meeting at 10.55am. B Murphy arrived at the meeting 10.55am.

5.2 Archaeology, History & Heritage Cluster

Tourism Manager asked members to note in their diaries Mid Ulster's 'Great Days Out Fair', to take place 28 March. Due to GDPR she asked that TNI share the information with their database of groups to assist.

5.3 Outdoor Activities/Events

Events Officer informed that over 40,000 visitor attended Council's 5 strategic events. Following recent roads closure legislation for events she stated that feedback from the public was positive and took pressure from Council staff setting up at events. M Browne added that the legislation has reduced costs to council and premises such as Lissan House are seeing increasing requests from smaller community organisations to hold events on their grounds which will provide opportunities.

An application has been submitted to Tourism NI's National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme for up to £30,000 funding towards the Outdoor Weekend. To apply events must demonstrate visitor numbers greater than 1,000, £50,000 minimum income and £50,000 minimum expenditure. Closing date for applications is 12 January 2019.

5.4 Hoteliers Cluster

C Bell reported that SWC have agreed to deliver an IT mentor programme to the value of £10,000. Tourism are now able to reallocate the budget to deliver a hospitality/hoteliers mentor programme.

6. District Wide Monitoring Results

Tourism Manager informed that due to holidays the figures will be available at next meeting as collated at beginning of each month. She went through Visitor Information Stats Jan – Dec 2018, circulated at the meeting.

7. Mid Ulster District Council Tourism Strategy Review

M Browne stated that the Tourism Strategy was launched 2 years ago this March and as an organic document that allows for growth and change he advised that a full review will take place. He noted that he was satisfied with the thematic groups and sought to continue with the strategy being industry led, adding that the TDG and clusters have proved successful. He stated that the review would look at experiential and digital elements and carried out as a desktop review whilst consultation group, clusters, council and public by the end of March.

Discussion took place as to low figures published by NISRA, M Browne responded that tourism officers met NISRA and found significant deficiencies in data collection. He stated that tourism are working with TNI on a more robust method. B Murphy spoke of a pilot study taking place in Causeway. She added that 2018 saw bed spaces increase to 268 in Mid Ulster with 18 new self-catering and 3 new B&B's properties.

8. Tourism NI Update

8.1 TNI Classification

B Murphy asked encouraged members to partake in the grading classification process. She informed that two Mid Ulster properties excelled in 2018 Tourism NI Awards with Spice Cottages winning NI's Best Stay – Self Catering and Blessingbourne Highly Commended in the same category. Both properties are 5 star rated.

8.2 Golf Open

B Murphy informed that the upcoming Golf Open is spreading throughout N Ireland. She advised accommodation providers not to over-price rooms or exceed expectations of visitors, and to be aware that visitors are on holiday and therefore offer different experiences, tourist information etc.

8.3 Marketing Campaigns

Members were informed that N I Hotel's Federation are recruiting attractions and accommodation providers, on behalf of TNI, to participate in their Say Hello to More marketing campaign, involving TV, radio, press and targeting ROI and domestic visitors. M McGee advised that though Hotelier cluster were not prepared to participate in this campaign they can still upload offers and offer added value rather than cutting prices.

8.4 Meet the Buyer (MTB)

B Murphy announced that 176 tour operators have registered to attend MTB in April and invites have been sent to participating businesses to attend a training workshop on 5 February. She advised members to register on TNI.com/Events for a full listing of events, workshops and programmes organised by TNI.

8.5 Research

In response to a query, B Murphy replied that TNI are working hard to build a business case for Capital Projects funding to be made available again. She said that TNI have looked at potential visitor experiences or destinations to test across consumers in the main markets. TNI will ask consumers to look at 3 key concepts to understand what will work more successfully. The evidence from this research will be provided to organisations, to build a strong positive concept to meet strong market appeal. M McKeown asked that TNI share the results of the research when available.

9. Industry Update

9.1 South West College (SWC)

G Mullholland, SWC, informed that she is working with Michelle McCleary, Springboard, on new ideas to recruit apprenticeships, attract new markets and work with other colleges. She discussed Bridge to Employment in Mid Ulster which has proven more successful in other sectors. It is hope to run with 3 recruitment events across SWC sites in March and look to target schools not offering A-Levels. She was advised that information was sent to Holy Trinity, responding that schools need to encourage pupils by releasing them to attend such events.

9.2 Northern Regional College (NRC)

C McGrath, NRC, reported that students are participating in training to volunteer at the Golf Open event. The skills will be invaluable to further employment opportunities.

- *Jungle NI* – Spoke of the success of Fright Night with a larger number of international visitors having attended. Recruited a marketing company. Applying for Events funding, increase number of open days, events and streamline with Fright Night, co-ordinate a competition with local hoteliers.
- *The Old Thatch Inn* – A M McFerran reported positive feedback from tour operators and has forwarded packages to a number following meetings at trade shows. She

received a booking from a German tour operator she met through Meet the Buyer who brought a group of 16 and now looks to target the German market. She discussed difficulties in running her business due to ongoing road closures.

- *J&K Coaches* – M McGeehan reported continued growth for the 3rd year running with their 2019 target already achieved. He stated there has been apprehension over Brexit with some tour operators showing reluctance in booking and changes to zones within London to reduce emissions, however, added that the company has been investing and preparing for such changes.
- *Walsh's* – C O'Neill reported a successful Christmas period. She added that they had bookings from 35 Chinese and American groups, as well as tour groups, student groups and open bookings.
- *Ballyscullion Park* – R Mullholland informed that Ballyscullion welcomed an American group through CIE tours looking for a Downtown Abbey type experience. He added that Ballyscullion featured in Game of Thrones and they now are looking to develop the site to promote where filming took place. He also stated that Ballyscullion are working with Walsh's Hotel to combine events. He spoke of success at attending TNI Great Days Out fairs and looked forward to Mid Ulster's event. R Mullholland enquired as to the possibility of Bellaghy Bawn opening. M Browne responded that he has been in discussions with HED within Department for Communities and Council are keen to see the building reopened.
- *Lissan House* – Chair reported that events ran over Christmas were sold out. He informed that Lissan House are trying to locate a sketch of Oscar Wilde drawn by Sir Robert Ponsonby Staples ahead of an event taking place 14 February, stating this would be a significant find.

10. Any Other Business

The new edition Mid Ulster Visitor Guide has been circulated across NI and ROI. M McGee reminded members that spaces were still available on the Mid Ulster stand at Holiday World Shows, Belfast and Dublin.

Date of Upcoming Meetings:

Wednesday 5 March 2019 at 10.00am Burnavon, Cookstown

Item 4 – Tourism Cluster Reports dated 9 January 2019

4.1 SEAMUS HEANEY – C BELL/M MCGEE

Seamus Heaney Collaborative Network, 12th December 2018, The Taphouse, Bellaghy

- Scope and identify the market customers, segments and opportunities for the Heaney proposition and how best the Cluster can target and maximise these through a clear roadmap with recommendations for action including required investment and resources.
- Discussion around study trips to Hay and Kinsale. Facilitators to scope out potential funding to subsidize the trip for the members.
- Mark Rodgers shared his journey over the past 3 years. Some key points to remember:
 - There are no competitors in a cluster group
 - There are different markets for us all to play in and we must tailor our offer to meet the desires of the market segment
 - Find compatible business to partner with who compliment your offer
 - Make sure to tell your story through TIL
 - Importance of value to your business – aiming for 30% margin
 - Live chat and book ability and an updated website have transformed his business in 2018
- Esther Dobbin spoke about the importance of community to service the opportunity. Some key points included:
 - The Giants Causeway visitor center is the gateway to wider destination, much like Seamus Heaney HomePlace.
 - Visitor numbers have exploded since 2012, last year 182k people took guided tours.
 - Importance of community and giving something back, there are clear comparisons between Bellaghy and Bushmills. Bushmills was a village dying on its feet and suffering from lack of investment.
 - Visitors from foreign lands do not see council boundaries or parochialism.
 - Challenges for Causeway is matching the visitor's expectations with the reality on visiting an over visited destination such as Carrick-A-Rede and Giants Causeway.
 - Biggest lesson is bringing the community along with you – better places for people to live = better places for people to visit.
 - Alone we can do little – together we can do so much

Actions

- Liesa and Maurica to put a proposal to TNI and TIL re proposed study trips and learning journeys.
- 8 members are planning to attend Meet the Buyer on 3 April and the group are now working on marketing collateral, pre-launch brand identity, budget?

Work In Progress

- Industry Opportunities through Tourism Ireland
- Cruise ship opportunity with operators such as Excursions Ireland and Intercruises
- Meet the Buyer, 3 April, Belfast with follow up fam trip on Tour Operators
- Armchair Fams proposed
- Hay Fam Visit proposed 5-6 Feb and Cork – 24-26 March
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4.2 ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY & HERITAGE CLUSTER – G BELL/M MCKEOWN

TNI Heritage Programme

M McKeown and G Bell met with Rosemarie McHugh, Rosemary Lightbody and Oliver McKeown, TourismNI on Monday 19 November to discuss potential one to one and group mentoring opportunities for the Heritage Group. The meeting was extremely positive with a willingness from TourismNI to support the group. G Bell has forwarded pre-engagement forms from 3 members within the heritage group to TourismNI. We are now awaiting a date for members and officers to meet with TourismNI.

Great Days Out Event

It has been suggested to organise a Great Days Out event, whereby we would look at the offering that we have within the Heritage group and pull out the winning themes. This event would be targeted at the domestic home market. Date and venue to be confirmed.

Date of next meeting, Wednesday 23rd January 2019.

4.3 OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & EVENTS – S ARBUTHNOT/G MAJOR

Momentum is gathering re Outdoor Weekend April 13 – 14 April 2019. MUDC Marketing Officer has joined the Cluster to help promote event and activities. MUDC MARCOM will publish the What's On Guide digitally – a reminder that the WOG is a monthly/weekly publication of what's on locally if any members have events/special offers/offers please forward details and images to Graeme Major as we look to further increase its value and reach. Overall objective of the weekend defined as positioning Mid Ulster as the elite outdoor hub within NI while increasing usage and spend within the Council area.

A separate meeting involving MUDC, Todds Leap and The Jungle NI has taken place and we await final offerings for the weekend. Council contribution still TBC, however, promoting the event is the Clusters main objective with local families confirmed as the target market. To date the Cluster has agreed to work in conjunction with Outdoor Recreation NI so that we can utilise their channels and expertise. We are currently exploring the following possibilities:

- Creating a Facebook and Instagram account for the weekend
- Send out details of the event in a similar manner to the Insider – to every household within district
- Promo video
- Application to Tourism Event Fund for up to £30k
- Voucher booklet that's redeemable throughout the year
- Teaming up with Hotelier Cluster and local accommodation provider re weekend packages
- Internal communication via the Hub

4.4 HOTELIERS – M MCGEE/C BELL

The next meeting of the group is scheduled for Thursday 10 January in Corick House, Clogher. Janice Gault, CEO NI Hotels Federation, will speak at this meeting. We are also planning to run a hospitality mentor programme across the nine businesses.