

Report on	Brantry Forest Development Proposal
Date of Meeting	Thursday 13 th September 2018
Reporting Officer	Head of Parks
Contact Officer	Nigel Hill

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To seek approval for development proposal at Brantry Forest, Caledon in partnership with DEARA and Forest Service NI.
2.0	Background
2.1	In June 2013, Outdoor Recreation NI was commissioned by Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council to complete a Forest Recreation Audit for nine forests within the legacy Council area. This study included the investigation of development potential for Brantry Wood Caledon. The purpose of the audit was to identify current provision of and opportunities for outdoor recreation and outline recommendations relating to future development, investment and management of these forests. This study was included into a wider audit undertaken and subsequently adopted by Mid Ulster District Council in 2015. Development of Brantry Forest is also included in the Council's draft Outdoor Recreation Strategy.
2.2	Caledon Forest is a collective name for a number of Drumlin forests in south Tyrone. It consists of one main block of forest, along with other smaller plantation blocks. The woodland blocks are commonly known as: Scroggys, Greceans, Cumber Glen, Yellow Horn Hill, Derryhaig, Dunmacmay Curlagh, Dromore, Ballagh, Derrycourtney, Knockginney and Kilgowney.
2.3	It is 179 hectares in size and the main forest block is situated approximately 6 miles east of the village of Aughnacloy. It is also referred to as Brantry Forest. Initial development plans identified in the 2013 audit suggested the provision of walking trails and the upgrade of the hunting or game keepers lodge into a visitor service facility. As part of a legacy council capital programme, supported by landfill tax funding the game keepers lodge and site was leased from Forest Service and renovated in 2012. The suggested development of walking trails along with any further development proposals with Forest Service NI did not progress towards a second stage.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 Brantry Forest is used by locals for walking, running and dog walking. Brantry Lough which is adjacent to the main forest block is used for angling as well. There is a large car park present adjacent to Brantry Lough, along with a slipway and a jetty. Lough Macronan situated within the forest block is also used for angling purposes and has some fishing stands present, although these have fallen into disrepair.
- 3.2 There is a car park to facilitate access to Caledon Forest on the Brantry Road. This car park would allow parking for approximately 15 cars. The game keepers lodge is adjacent to this car park. There are currently no formal outdoor recreation activities taking place in this forest at present. Shooting and walking both happen on an informal basis. The shooting rights to the main sections of the forest are owned by private individuals. FSNI own the shooting rights to five out of 24 pockets of forest that make up Caledon Forest.
- 3.3 Brantry Forest was identified as a priority two development proposal by the Forest Recreation audit in 2013. The audit suggested the creation of trails on existing forest roads, the refurbishment of game keepers lodge to a visitor facility and the provision of picnic, barbeque and seating facilities and associated visitor infrastructure.
- 3.4 The following SWOT analysis details the strengths and weaknesses in Brantry Forest and the opportunities and threats that have the potential to influence the future development of tourism and recreation. These were identified through fieldwork, consultation and desk research undertaken at the time of the audit in 2013. The current position remains relatedly unchanged in terms of access however some opportunities and improvements have been achieved in relation to potential funding streams and the Game Keepers Lodge and the visitor facilities it provides.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong community support for the development of the forest. - Could be used to develop multi-use trails – walking and off road cycling. - Basic infrastructures present to be built upon – forest roads, car park and Hunting/Game Keepers Lodge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little investment to date - Limited natural features within the forest - Nothing to attract visitors to the forest - Very basic activities and attractions - Basic facilities present with no services - Signage non existent
THREATS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Licence Agreement in place between Council and FSNI - Perceived lack of investment within the forest to date - Lack of open, and suitable funding streams to take forward any proposed developments. 	
OPPORTUNITIES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To develop the forest in partnership, for example FSNI and DAERA - Could be used to develop multi-use trails – walking and off road cycling - Create a ‘welcome’ for visitors to the forest - Create visitor facility to entice visitors to the forest at the Hunting/Game Keepers Lodge and bespoke play facilities. - Install picnicing and bin facilities - Link Caledon Forest to Brantry Lough through a waymarked trail 	

- Potential for activity tourism in partnership with DEARA
- Installation of appropriate waymarking and interpretation

3.5 Recommendations for Future Development

The development potential of Brantry Forest, Caledon provides an opportunity to provide a valued local resource. Simple improvements such as waymarked trails can make a marked difference to the recreational value of the forest, for a relatively modest investment. The presence of the asset in the form of the recently restored Game keepers Lodge could also be capitalised upon in order to increase the recreational value of the forest. Developing new facilities and activities is recommended, given that existing activities are informal and are concentrated on adjacent land, and that on site facilities are limited. The existing car park could be upgraded and expanded if necessary.

The overall development of Brantry Forest, Caledon should include the provision of bespoke childrens play experiences, visitor welcome signage, interpretation, waymarked multi-use trails suitable for passive leisure walking and off road cycling, the consideration of provision of picnic/barbecue facilities, as well as further development of the Game Keepers Lodge for community use.

A potential funding opportunity exists this financial year (2018/19) through Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework. The scope of the project would be £250,000 (Excl VAT) with a possible split of 80% provided by DEARA and a MUDC contribution of 20%. This has yet to be verified and agreed.

Mid Ulster District Council will be required to develop a Licence Agreement with Forest Service NI to enable development of the forest to proceed and engage appropriate ICT and contractors to progress the development proposal.

4.0 Other Considerations

4.1 Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications

Financial: Development of Brantry Forest is included in the Council's draft Outdoor Recreation Strategy which is referenced in the Council's Capital works programme. Match funding requirement of 20% (£50k) from MUDC capital programme (yet to be finalised).

Human:
Existing staff resource available to assist proposal development supported by internal Capital Programmes function and external ICT.

Risk Management:
In conjunction with Council policies and procedures.

4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: In conjunction with Council policies and procedures.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: In conjunction with Council policies and procedures associated to rural proofing.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
<p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p> <p>5.3</p> <p>5.4</p> <p>5.5</p>	<p>Establish a Licence Agreement/Lease with FSNI for Council approval.</p> <p>Engage with DEARA to seek and draw down funding package.</p> <p>Approval to seek through P&R committee match capital funding contribution, 20% of total project costs (estimated £50k)</p> <p>Permission is sought to proceed with development of the proposal and undertake procurement and completion of a tender exercise for the project subject to the confirmation of funding from DEARA.</p> <p>Approval to engage with the community and seek to develop community partnership proposals and agreement for sustainable management solutions.</p>
6.0	Documents Attached & References
<p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>Appendix 1 Brantry Forest map</p> <p>Appendix 2 Game Keepers Lodge Renovation</p>