Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

16 September 2021

Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Development Committee to be held in The Chamber, Dungannon and by virtual meansCouncil Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon, BT71 6DT on Thursday, 16 September 2021 at 19:00 to transact the business noted below.

A link to join the meeting through the Council's remote meeting platform will follow.

Yours faithfully

Adrian McCreesh
Chief Executive

AGENDA

OPEN BUSINESS

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest
   Members should declare any financial and non-financial interests they have in the items of business for consideration, identifying the relevant agenda item and the nature of their interest.
3. Chair's Business
4. Deputation
   Achadh Lú Ui Neill CLG (Aghaloo O'Neills)

Matters for Decision

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Matters for Information

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Items restricted in accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. The public will be asked to withdraw from the meeting at this point.

Matters for Decision

18. Brookmount to Spring Road Alleged PRoW
19. Mid Ulster Gift Card Tender Report

Matters for Information

20. Confidential Minutes of Development Committee held on 7 July 2021
21. Leisure Facilities Café Operations

Report on	Visitor Safety Group Membership
Date of Meeting	Thursday 16th September 2021
Reporting Officer	Head of Parks Nigel Hill
Contact Officer	A H Reid

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 Members approval to become a member of the Visitor Safety Group (VSG). The VSG provide a focal point of knowledge, expertise and proven good practice for managing visitor safety.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The VSG aim is to both protect our historic buildings and landscapes, and encourage public access, within levels of risk acceptable to society. Group members follow a consistent approach to visitor safety management and are committed to applying our guiding principles in their work. The group, set up in 1997, was originally called the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group (VSCG). It includes organisations that own and manage land and property, with day-to-day experience of visitor management, as well as national policymakers and specialist safety advisers. They work together in order to: • identify and share good practice • promote the application of consistent management principles • develop a model approach to risk assessment that incorporates valuing benefits • encourage consistency in the choice and application of risk control measures • seek a balanced and pragmatic approach to dealing with the many and varied factors that affect visitor safety management • produce sound interpretation of legislative requirements and court decisions. The guiding principles and practical risk management techniques have been developed and implemented by VSG members over many years. They were first published in 2003.

	They have proved their worth in practice and have been recognised by enforcing authorities and courts as the basis for sensible risk management. The guiding principles have been adapted for use by the National Water Safety Forum and the National Tree Safety Group. Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside' will help anyone who invites or allows members of the public into: • moors, mountains and open countryside • parks and gardens • footpaths and waymarked trails • forests, country parks and nature reserves • canals and rivers • coastlines • reservoirs and lakes • urban green space • visitor centres.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Future planning and the delivery of current Parks and Outdoor Recreation strategies will seek advisory guidance, knowledge and experience from the VSG group forums, workshops and publications, which are invaluable assets.
3.2	The annual cost of membership to the VSG is £1,000.00. This will provide Council with: - a focal point of knowledge, expertise and proven good practice for managing visitor safety. - information available through seminars, site visits, newsletters, e-zines and publications. - Have access to sharing of problems and solutions through a powerful networking group. With a broad spread of members, it is likely to find someone else who has dealt with the issues you might encounter. By working as part of this group, the VSG can offer a consistent approach, which helps visitors, and present a coherent view to government and its agencies, like the Health and Safety Executive. The VSG can support members to find expert witnesses and provide precedents, if they face claims or litigation. The VSG is a group run for and by its members to meet their needs.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Annual Membership £1,000.00 which can be funded from existing Parks revenue budget allocations.

	Human: A valuable learning resource for staff linked to research information and industry data associated to visitor and facility management.
	Risk Management: The knowledge gained will assist with operational and strategic Parks and Outdoor Recreation Risk Management.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: In conjunction with Council Policy and procedures
	Rural Needs Implications: In conjunction with Council Policy and procedures
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	Members are asked to approve the annual membership to the VSG for one year at a cost of £1,000.00.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	N/A

Report on	Forest Recreation Development Programme 2021-2030
Date of Meeting	Thursday 16th September 2021
Reporting Officer	N Hill Head of Parks
Contact Officer	A Reid Parks & Countryside Development Officer

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 for Council approval completed Forest Recreation Scoping Studies for Drumcairne, Altmore and Dunmoyle Forests.
1.2	To seek Council approval to progress with the phased recommendations presented and to seek all necessary Licence and Lease Agreements with relevant stakeholders in order to progress development plan outcomes for Drumcairne, Altmore and Dunmoyle Forests, subject to available funding.
1.3	To further, progress the approved Action Plan of Mid Ulster District Council Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan, March 2020.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	In June 2013, Outdoor Recreation NI were commissioned by Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council to complete a Forest Recreation Audit across the Council area.
2.2	With the merging of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, Cookstown District Council and Magherafelt District Council to become Mid Ulster Council in April 2015, Mid Ulster District Council approved to extend the audit to include all those forests in the former Cookstown and Magherafelt District Council areas.
2.3	Mid Ulster District Council's Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan, approved in March 2020, identified a selection of forest projects for recreational development.
2.4	Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) were appointed to deliver Forest Scoping Studies for Drumcairne, Dunmoyle and Altmore/Cappagh in February 2021. The three scoping studies have been completed after six months of work undertaken by the ORNI consultancy team with support and contributions from council officers, elected members, public/private and voluntary sector stakeholders, local community groups and general public.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	**Altmore Forest** The Study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Altmore Forest as a 'local multi-activity hub'. In addition to Altmore Forest, the Scoping Study has been strongly influenced by the recreational opportunities associated with Northern Ireland Water lands. Therefore, the Study area of Altmore embraces all lands reaching as far east as Cappagh Village, rather than just the forested area.
3.2	**The Need for Development** Despite an abundance of publicly owned lands in Altmore there is no formal provision for outdoor recreation within the Study Area. Altmore Super Output Area falls within the top 10-20% band of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland, and with such limited existing recreational opportunities, the public lands have the potential to be a valuable community asset for people from the nearby villages of Cappagh, Galbally, Carrickmore, Pomeroy, and Donaghmore. 92% of people who responded to a public survey (focused on the Forest area only at the early stages of the project) indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Altmore is 'very important' to the local community. Notably, much of the feedback within open survey comments emphasised the importance of looking at assets beyond just the forest, to include the reservoirs and NIW lands, and this has strongly influenced the direction of this Scoping Study.
3.3	**Development Proposals** Development proposals reflect Community sentiment, high-level technical feasibility, and assessment of need. They have been developed in consultation with key landowners including FSNI and NIW, and also FODC. These relationships must continue throughout all proposed stages of planning and development to ensure deliverability of proposals and alignment with each organisation's aims and objectives. Development proposals are presented across three Zones: - Zone 1: The Lower Pond and Cappagh Village *(refer to Executive Summary Map 1 in appendix report)* - Zone 2: The Upper Pond *(refer to Executive Summary Map 2 in appendix report)* - Zone 3: Altmore 1 *(refer to executive Summary Map 3 in appendix report)* Further to this, opportunities for connectivity across the zones have been considered, as Connecting Links *(refer to Map 4 in appendix report)* Planning is proposed to start in late 2021, with visitor infrastructure delivered across three phases between 2023 -2030. Phasing is independent of Zones. Phasing of key actions is summarised as follows: An investment of £243,000 for the 'planning' element of works is a high-level estimate for external professional fees required to work up all phased of proposals to a shovel-ready stage. It is plausible that some of this could be delivered 'in-

	house' by MUDC staff, and that the full investment will not be required within single year budgets. Phase 1 2023-2025 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery Costs are estimated at £349,900 Phase 2 2025-2027 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery Costs are estimated at £401,000 Phase 3 2027-2030 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery Costs are estimated at £422,100
3.4	**Social Return on Investment** Using an evaluation methodology that considers sustainability, health and wellbeing, and social benefits, and taking account of the population of the area, the estimated Social Return on Investment is estimated to be capped at £11M over 25 years.
3.5	**Drumcairne Forest** This Scoping Study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Drumcairne Forest as a local multi-activity hub.
3.6	**The Need for Development** There is a renewed community interest in seeing Drumcairne's visitor assets restored and enhanced, no doubt amplified by recent demand for local access to outdoor spaces as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drumcairne has recently benefitted somewhat from the re-opening of the car parking area, and some limited trail works carried out by FSNI in response to increased use. The local Stewartstown Community Group has been pro-active in keeping historic trail corridors in use, cleared back, and informally waymarked. With Stewartstown village falling within the top 20-30% of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland, Drumcairne Forest is a valuable community asset. 84% of survey respondents indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Drumcairne Forest is 'very important' to the local community. Five key development priorities for Drumcairne forest have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from the public survey results, and summarised as follows: Development Proposals Development proposals resulting from the scoping study are focused around three key themes: • Restoration • Preservation • Enhancement These themes reflect community sentiment and the assessment of need, with planning proposed to start in 2021 and visitor infrastructure delivered across two phases between 2023 and 2026, as follows: By the end of proposed delivery Phase 1 in 2024, Drumcairne will be a welcoming space providing community trails and visitor servicing to a standard and scale such that a good level of its potential as a multi-use activity hub has been met. Community momentum after Phase 1 is likely to accelerate demand for Phase 2 delivery that would see the site's potential fully realised. Development Costs

	An investment of £96,500 for the 'planning' element of works reflects external professional fees required to work up all phases of proposals to a shovel-ready stage. It is plausible that much of this could be delivered 'in-house' by Mid Ulster District Council staff, and that the full investment will not be required within single-year budgets. Notably, the cost includes professional fees for conducting a Heritage Feasibility Study to assess the social value of a full restoration the Italian terraced Gardens. Phase 1 2023-2024 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at £126,650. Phase 2 2024-2026 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at £190,700, increasing to £340,700 if full heritage restoration of the former gardens is implemented.
3.7	**Social Return on Investment** Using an evaluation methodology that considers sustainability, health and wellbeing, and social benefits, the Estimated Social Return on Investment for Drumcairne development is estimated at £10.4M over 25 yrs.
3.8	**Dunmoyle Forest** This Scoping Study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Dunmoyle Forest as a local multi-activity hub. Initial scoping has proposed one of the five blocks for viable development as a local multi-activity hub. Referred to as Dunmoyle 1 throughout the study, this forest block covers an area of 160Ha and sits wholly within MUDC area. It is a hilly site, offering elevated views, and with some steep-sided terrain and ravine-like site drainage. There is established infrastructure associated with forestry activity including a well-maintained stone access lane with a steel forestry gate and entrance at Todd's Leap Road, and similar access at Greenhill Road from the direction of Ballygawley.
3.9	**The Need for Development** There is clear community interest in developments at Dunmoyle from residents within surrounding areas, including the nearby village of Ballygawley. There is also interest from local third-party experience providers who recognise the added-value forest developments could bring to economic operations within the area. Largely, however, developments at Dunmoyle will focus on community provision to provide improved local access to outdoor spaces, particularly in light of recent increased demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ballygawley is ranked in the 10-20% bracket of most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. Dunmoyle has the potential to be a valuable community asset in helping overcome deprivation issues. 82% of survey respondents indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Dunmoyle Forest is 'very important' to the local community. Several development priorities for Dunmoyle Forest have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from the public survey results, and are summarised as follows:

3.10	**Development proposals** Development proposals reflect community sentiment, high-level technical feasibility, and assessment of need, with planning proposed to start in 2021 and visitor infrastructure delivered across two phases between 2023 and 2026. These are shown in Map 1 and summarised as follows: Development Costs An investment of £70,000 for the 'planning' element of works reflects external professional fees required to work up all phases of proposals to a shovel-ready stage. It is plausible that much of this could be delivered 'in-house' by Mid Ulster District Council staff, and that the full investment will not be required within single-year budgets. Phase 1 2023-2024 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at £157,300. Phase 2 2024-2026 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at £249,200
3.11	**Social Return on Investment** Using an evaluation methodology that considers sustainability, health and wellbeing, and social benefits, the Estimated Social Return on Investment for Dunmoyle development is estimated at £11M over 25 yrs.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Subject to funding under MUDC Capital Programme 2021-2030 and external funding streams. • Drumcairne Forest Two Phase Development 2021-2027 **Estimated Project Cost £563,850** • Dunmoyle Forest Two Phase Development 2021-2026. **Estimated Project cost £476,500** • Altmore Forest Three Phase Development 2021-2030. **Esitmated Project Cost £1,416,000** Refer to appendix for detailed breakdown.
	Human: The appointment of suitably qualified Integrated Consultancy and Supply Teams (ICT and IST) will be required to support current council staff resources.
	Risk Management: In conjunction with Council policies and procedures.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: In conjunction with Council policies and procedures.

	Rural Needs Implications: In conjunction with Council policies and procedures.
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	Council approval is sought to adopt the broad recommendations presented in the scoping studies for Drumcairne, Dunmoyle and Altmore Forests and to progress a phased approach to the devolvement objectives subject to stakeholder approvals, partnership agreements and successful sourcing of capital match funding streams.
5.2	Council approval is sought procure and appoint suitably qualified Integrated Consultancy and Supply Teams (ICT and IST) to develop all necessary designs, specifications, procurement documentation and project manage agreed schemes associated to Drumcairne, Altmore and Dunmoyle Forests, subject to available funding.
5.3	To seek P&R committee approval for all identified capital expenditure associated to the Drumcairne, Altmore and Dunmoyle Forest development proposals , subject to sourcing available match funding.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendices Scoping Study – Drumcairne Forest Scoping Study – Dunmoyle Forest Scoping Study – Altmore Forest Summary Capital Cost/Delivery Matrix

Scoping Study for the Development of Drumcairne Forest, Stewartstown

August 2021

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI

on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council

Executive Summary

The Site

Drumcairne Forest was originally part of a landscaped demesne associated with the early 19th Century Drumcairne House. Garden landscape features such as the remains of a steep terraced Italian garden and ponds, with Irish yews, sequoia trees, and ornamental shrubs, and a degraded network of compacted gravel trails throughout the Forest, are owned by Forest Service Northern Ireland (FSNI) across a 70Ha area.

Drumcairne is a unique and diverse woodland with a range of specimen tree species and woodland floor cover, with much to contribute towards preservation and protection of habitats and engaging people with nature. Its landscaped Georgian gardens have been 'left to nature' and are overgrown such that terraces and ponds within it are barely distinguishable as built landscape features.

Drumcairne has been open to the public since it came into public ownership around the mid-late 20th Century, with car parking, trails, gardens, and ponds providing recreational value to surrounding communities, and visitors from further afield, across many years. However, in recent decades site maintenance of visitor servicing and recreational facility has been minimal, leading to anti-social behaviour, car park closure, and limited use of the space for outdoor recreation due to its unwelcoming and often inaccessible environment.

The Scoping Study

This Scoping Study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Drumcairne Forest as a local multi-activity hub.

The Need for Development

There is a renewed community interest in seeing Drumcairne's visitor assets restored and enhanced, no doubt amplified by recent demand for *local* access to outdoor spaces as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drumcairne has recently benefitted somewhat from the re-opening of the car parking area, and some limited trail works carried out by FSNI in response to increased use. The local Stewartstown Community Group has been pro-active in keeping historic trail corridors in use, cleared back, and informally waymarked.

With Stewartstown village falling within the top 20-30% of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland, Drumcairne Forest is a valuable community asset. 84% of survey respondents indicated that

the development of recreation facilities at Drumcairne Forest is 'very important' to the local community.

Five key development priorities for Drumcairne forest have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from the public survey results, and summarised as follows:

Development Proposals

Development proposals resulting from the scoping study are focused around three key themes:

- Restoration
- Preservation
- Enhancement

These themes reflect community sentiment and the assessment of need, with planning proposed to start in 2021 and visitor infrastructure delivered across two phases between 2023 and 2026, as follows:

By the end of proposed delivery Phase 1 in 2024, Drumcairne will be a welcoming space providing community trails and visitor servicing to a standard and scale such that a good level of its potential as a multi-use activity hub has been met. Community momentum after Phase 1 is likely to accelerate demand for Phase 2 delivery that would see the site's potential fully realised.

Development Costs

An investment of **£96,500** for the 'planning' element of works reflects external professional fees required to work up all phases of proposals to a shovel-ready stage. It is plausible that much of this could be delivered 'in-house' by Mid Ulster District Council staff, and that the full investment will not be required within single-year budgets. Notably, the cost includes professional fees for conducting a Heritage Feasibility Study to assess the social value of a full restoration the Italian terraced Gardens.

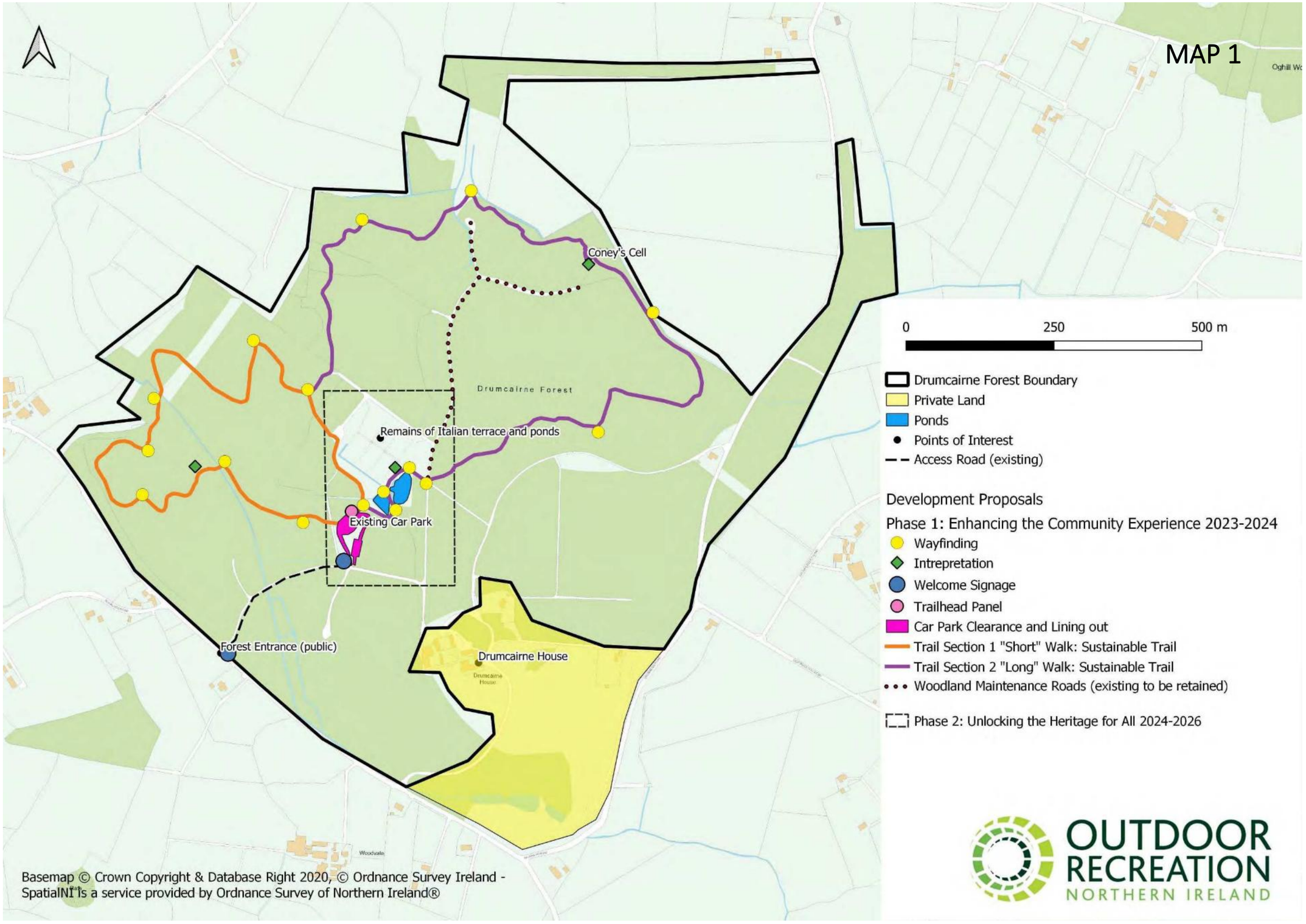
Phase 1 2023-2024 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at **£126,650**.

Phase 2 2024-2026 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at **£190,700**, increasing to £340,700 if full heritage restoration of the former gardens is implemented.

Social Return on Investment

Using an evaluation methodology that considers sustainability, health and wellbeing, and social benefits, the Estimated Social Return on Investment for Drumcairne development is estimated at **£10.4M over 25 yrs.**

MAP 1


Coney's Cell
Drumcairne Forest
Remains of Italian terrace and ponds
Existing Car Park
Forest Entrance (public)
Drumcairne House
Woodvale
0
250
500 m
Drumcairne Forest Boundary
Private Land
Ponds
Points of Interest
Access Road (existing)
Development Proposals
Phase 1: Enhancing the Community Experience 2023-2024
Wayfinding
Intrepretation
Welcome Signage
Trailhead Panel
Car Park Clearance and Lining out
Trail Section 1 "Short" Walk: Sustainable Trail
Trail Section 2 "Long" Walk: Sustainable Trail
Woodland Maintenance Roads (existing to be retained)
Phase 2: Unlocking the Heritage for All 2024-2026
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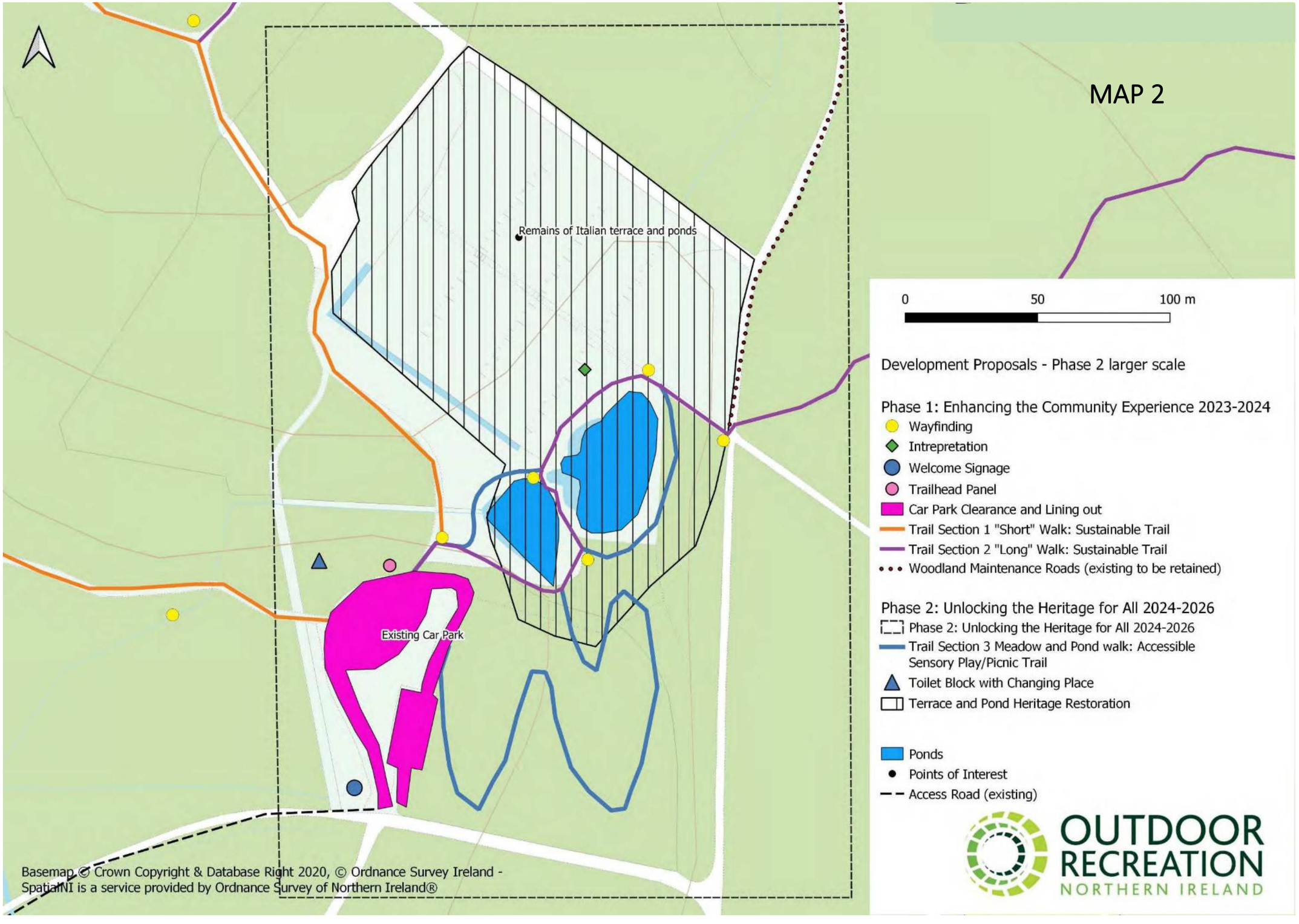
OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND

MAP 2


Remains of Italian terrace and ponds
Existing Car Park
0
50
100 m
Development Proposals - Phase 2 larger scale
Phase 1: Enhancing the Community Experience 2023-2024
Wayfinding
Intrepretation
Welcome Signage
Trailhead Panel
Car Park Clearance and Lining out
Trail Section 1 "Short" Walk: Sustainable Trail
Trail Section 2 "Long" Walk: Sustainable Trail
Woodland Maintenance Roads (existing to be retained)
Phase 2: Unlocking the Heritage for All 2024-2026
Phase 2: Unlocking the Heritage for All 2024-2026
Trail Section 3 Meadow and Pond walk: Accessible Sensory Play/Picnic Trail
Toilet Block with Changing Place
Terrace and Pond Heritage Restoration
Ponds
Points of Interest
Access Road (existing)
OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND
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1 Introduction

In February 2021, Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) appointed Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) to undertake a scoping study for the proposed development of Drumcairne Forest, near Stewartstown, in County Tyrone (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

This study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Drumcairne Forest as a local multi-activity hub.

Mid Ulster District Council defines a local multi-activity hub as a site developed primarily for the local community, to include a range of outdoor recreation and environmental products, accompanied by appropriate visitor servicing.

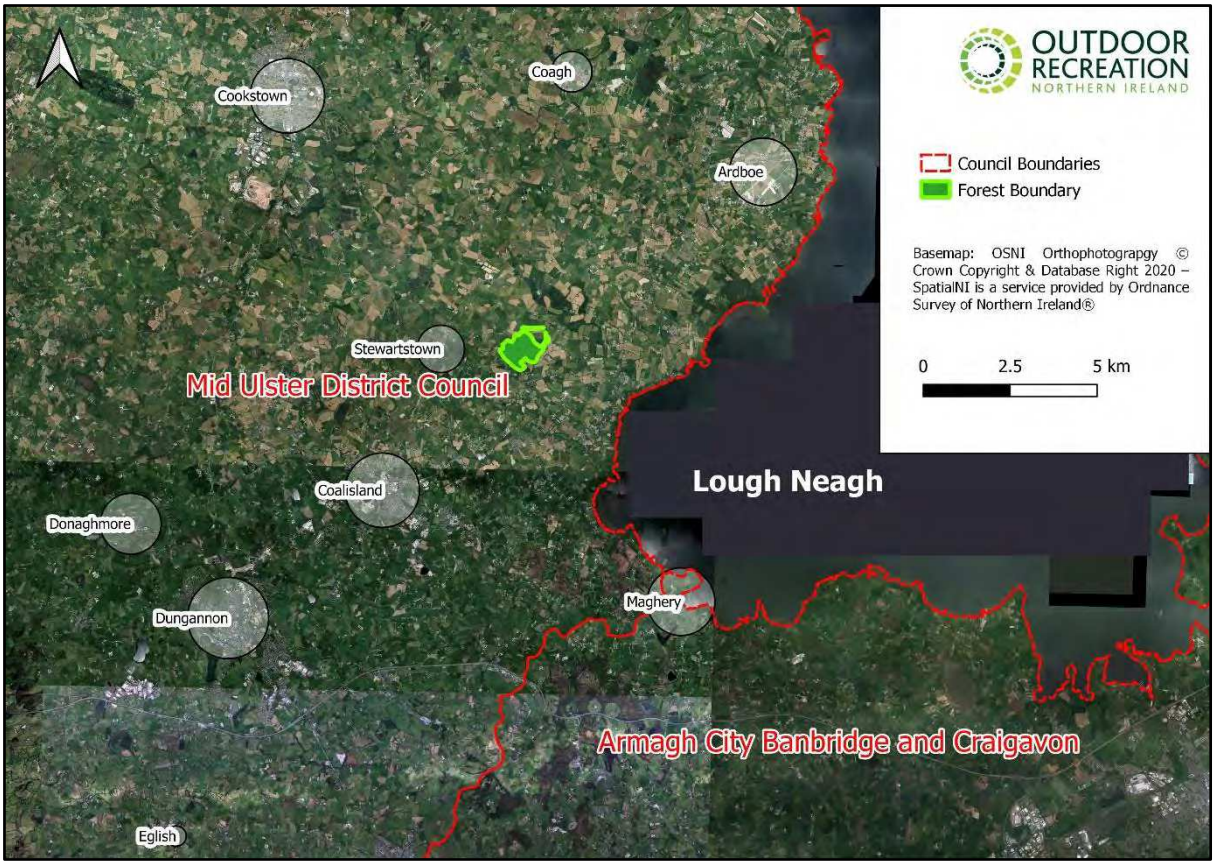

Figure 1 - Drumcairne Forest Location

1.1 Scope of Study

The Scoping Study has been approached in two stages:

Stage 1

- Desktop review of existing strategies applicable to the region.
- Consultation with agencies/stakeholders, local community, Council staff and Councillors to ensure incorporation of ideas and feedback.
- SWOT Analysis
- Identification of land ownership and land management status and opportunities.
- Exploration of a sustainable balance between the economic, environmental, and social functions of the forest.
- Current infrastructure and condition audit.
- Exploration of the opportunity for linkages and routes within and external to the forest. Explore how the forest offers access to the village, local landscapes, and other neighbouring visitor attractions.
- Identification of any potential barriers to development.
- Determination of what is currently available within the site for outdoor recreation, to include any visitor data, and explore what capacity there is within the site to accommodate further outdoor recreation and educational activities.

Stage 2

- Identification of phased, viable and sustainable recreational, educational, and social activities which could be delivered within the scope of the Development Plan. Proposals aim to enhance user/visitor experience, whilst supporting biodiversity and local heritage.
- Exploration of potential local business/social economy options to use the site.
- Recommendation and Actions.
- Detailed Development Plan costs and profiled timetable of expenditure.
- Identification of suitable funding streams and timetables.

1.2.1 Approach

Table 1 summarises ORNI's approach to undertaking the Scoping Study, with key dates provided where relevant.

Table 1 – Scoping Study Approach and Key Dates

	Activity	Status
Stage 1	Desk-based assessments of population demographics, strategic context at Council and Regional scale, geography and geology, environmental and heritage opportunities and constraints, land use opportunities and constraints, forest planning and zoning.	Throughout
	Initial site walkovers.	18th March, 9th May 2021
	Bespoke engagement with select individuals representing themselves, a community group, or club within the surrounding community.	Complete (Ongoing as required)
	Promotion and marketing of scoping study, public survey, and virtual public meeting (Zoom).	Public meeting 14th April. Formal public engagement for 6 weeks concluded 18th April 2021.
	Meetings with key stakeholders including Forest Service NI to facilitate clear decision-making around future planning.	Complete (ongoing as required)
	Interim presentation to Council Officers and feedback period	Virtual Presentation 10th June 2021
Stage 2	Detailed site walkover survey	22nd June 2021
	SWOT analysis, conclusions and recommendations, and final reporting	July 2021
	Presentation to Elected Members	Pending

2 The Site

Drumcairne Forest is a well-defined 70 Hectare woodland on the outskirts of Stewartstown Village, in County Tyrone, approximately 2km from the western shores of Lough Neagh. The woodland consists of a mix of coniferous and broad-leaf species, and the remains of formal landscaped gardens. It sits within a rural drumlin landscape and has been accessed to varying degrees of formality by the public for many years for walking, educational activity, licensed shooting, and mountain biking.

Drumcairne Forest is accessed from the B160 Stewartstown to Coagh Road leading onto the Castlefarm and Ballygrittle Road. A well-maintained shared access lane leads to a car park, and beyond to an occupied forester's residence and the rear gate to Drumcairne House.

2.1 Landownership and Land Management Status

Drumcairne Forest was originally part of a wider landscaped demesne associated with the early 19th Century Drumcairne House. The Forest is now owned, managed, and maintained by Forest Service Northern Ireland (FSNI). Drumcairne House and some surrounding ground is now under private ownership. See Figure 3 for land ownership boundaries.

Garden landscape features associated with Drumcairne House and demesne, such as the remains of a steep terraced Italian garden and ponds, with Irish yews, sequoia trees, and ornamental shrubs, sit within the FSNI ownership boundary.

Figure 2 - Pre-WW1 postcard image of Drumcairne House. The house is now privately owned but some of its former gardens are in FSNI Ownership.

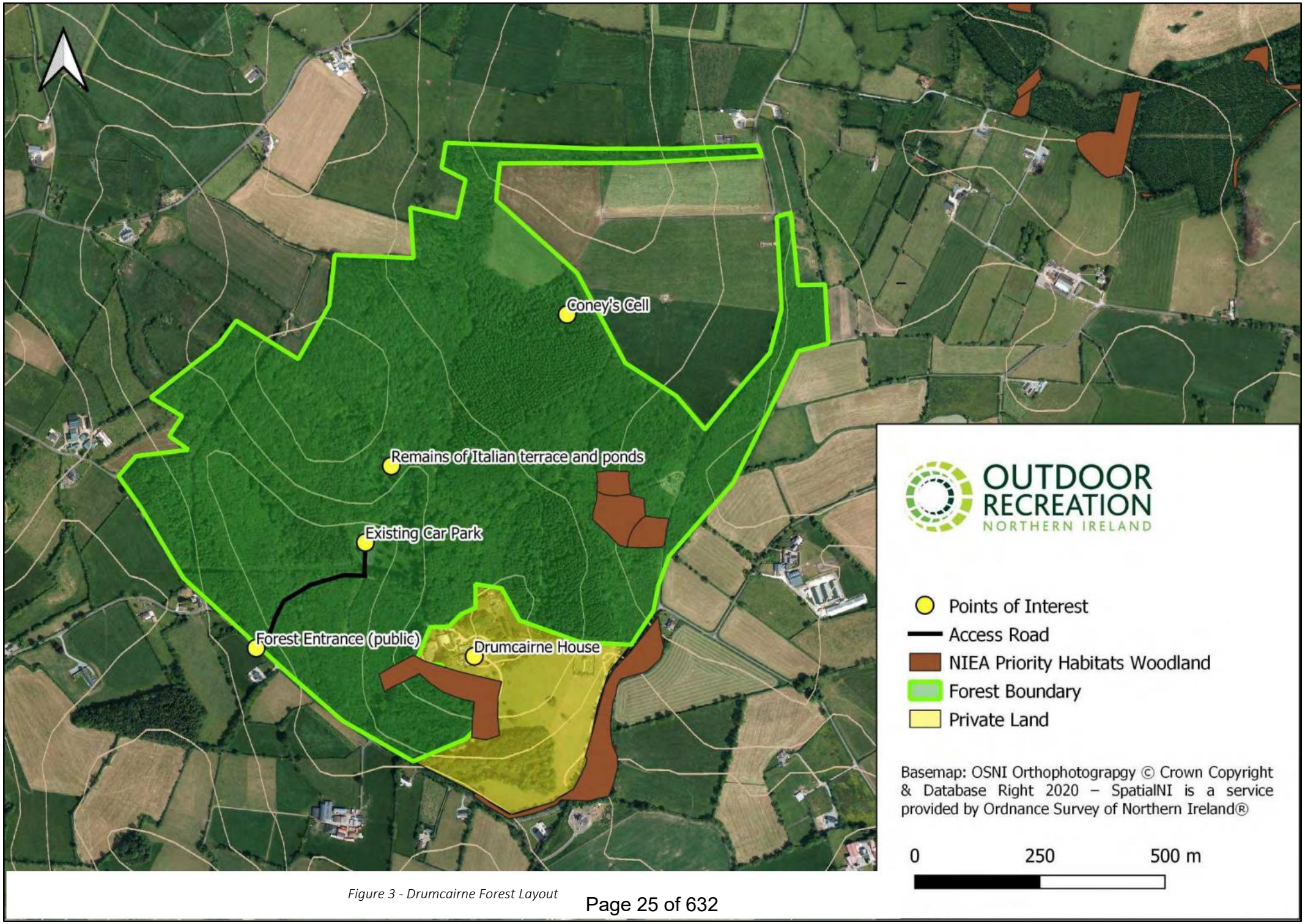

Figure 3 - Drumcairne Forest Layout

2.2 Heritage Designations and Potential

2.2.1 Environment

Drumcairne Forest does not sit within a designated Environmentally Protected Area and there is no registration of priority species at the site. Some small pockets of registered priority woodland habitat exist within and immediately surrounding the site (extents shown in Figure 3).

Despite the relatively limited 'registered' environmental significance within or surrounding Drumcairne Forest, this is a unique and diverse woodland with much to contribute towards preservation and protection of habitats and engaging people with nature. A range of tree species and woodland floor cover is shown in Figure 4.

There are some small areas of the former demesne with uncontrolled growth of rhododendron. No other high-risk invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed or giant hogweed have been observed during high-level site walkovers, though any future ecological surveys should specifically aim to rule this out.

Figure 4 - Diverse woodland and habitat within Drumcairne Forest

2.2.2 Built Heritage

There is one Scheduled Monument Record within Drumcairne Forest, recognising a '14th century hermit's cell' (though this appears registered with a Question Mark) known as Coney's Cell (*SMR: TYR039:003*). Information provided by the Heritage Environment Division (HED) describes the feature as follows:

Situated in an area of low-lying, flat ground the site is now surrounded by a mature pine forest. Although now lying beneath a recently constructed ornamental summer house the foundations of a sub-rectangular structure are still visible… The summer house is built within the limits of the cell remains… An unlikely setting for a hermit having lived in the area has influenced the interpretation of what is more likely to be the slight remains of a small secular building[1].

Recent site visits have visually observed the summer house in a good structural state, but with evidence of vandalism through fire in its interior. It is understood that representatives from within the local Stewartstown community have maintained the structure over the past few decades.

Figure 5 - (left) Image from an old postcard pre-dating WW1 showing the summer house, and (right) The summer house in the present day (June 2021)

The whole estate extent, including the privately owned Drumcairne House and the FSNI owned forest, is registered with Department for Communities (DfC) under Historic Parks, Gardens, and Demesnes (*Register T-017*).

The Early 19th Century Drumcairne House (Listed Building) is not accessible to the public. However, the forest that used to form part of the formal gardens associated with the house offers the public a glimpse into this fine residence's history, with the remains of steep Italian terracing and ornamental ponds sited near the public car park.

[1] https://apps.communities-ni.gov.uk/NISMR-public/docs/TYR/TYR_039/TYR_039_003/Public/SM7-TYR-039-003.pdf

This Georgian garden-scape has been 'left to nature' and is overgrown to the point that the terraces and ponds are barely distinguishable as built landscape features. Any designed landscape and deliberately designed features will be a key consideration for planning any future development.

Figure 6 - Clockwise from top left: Pre WW1 postcard image of the Italian-terraces, pre WW1 postcard image of the pond, Present day photo of the pond (June 2021), Present day photo of terracing (June 2021)

2.3 External Site Linkages

Drumcairne Forest is surrounded by private land and is only accessible via public roads. Stewartstown Village, 1 mile away from the Forest entrance, is the closest population centre and the one with closest community links to the site. The Lisaclare, Aghalarg, and Ballygittle Roads linking Stewartstown to the Forest are on-road sections of National Cycle Network Route 95[2], which also forms the Section of EuroVelo 1 touring route that passes through Northern Ireland. National Cycle Network Route 94 which 'laps the Lough' (Lough Neagh) also diverts directly past the site. These designations have the

[2] https://www.sustrans.org.uk/find-a-route-on-the-national-cycle-network/route-95

potential to draw in a small level of sustainable tourism to the area in the form of long-distance touring cyclists.

2.4 Existing Outdoor Recreation Provision

2.4.1 Walking Trails

Recreational walking across the whole of Drumcairne Forest has seen various states of formal provision throughout its history since Georgian times as Drumcairne House's Demesne. A network of trails, pathways, and gardens is recorded in historical mapping within the site since as far back as early-mid 19th Century, evolving into what is seen today as a mixture of Forest Service NI and community-maintained routes for walking, totalling approximately 5km of a network. The local Stewartstown Community Group has recently installed waymarkers to define routes within the forest. Although relatively informal, often attached to trees and existing infrastructure, this waymarking goes a long way to improving legibility of routes for users.

Relatively early in the COVID pandemic, beginning ~March 2020, Forest Service NI recognised an increase in people seeking access to the forest for local walking, so they undertook some basic but effective site maintenance and general 'tidying' across the site, including re-opening access to the car park and refreshing a small (~1km) section of trail with coarse stone. Until this time, the car park at the site had been closed for a significant period, estimated at 15 years, in part due to anti-social

Figure 7 - Clockwise from top left: Trail upgraded with coarse stone, car park, community-installed wayfinding, typical trail surface.

behaviour. During this time the public accessed the site by foot or by parking along the access lane. Since re-opening the car park the anti-social behaviour has not returned

Existing walking trail surfaces are typically defined by a compacted stone surface. Many of these routes have deteriorated through years of vegetation deposition and weathering/erosion, tree-root growth, and lack of general maintenance. Most routes are sound underfoot with good drainage and relatively even surface, meandering pleasantly through the woodland. Gradients are relatively favourable throughout the trail network and a basic level of fitness and sure-footedness can be accommodated. The minimum effective width of the existing trail surface is approximately 1 metre.

There are occasional sections of trail where the surface has deteriorated to mud and where poor vegetation clearance and management obscures the path, but these areas are not widespread, and community-installed infrastructure is often in place to help overcome these issues.

Figure 8 - Clockwise from top left: Poor drainage in occasional spots, poor forestry vegetation clearance, trail surface with tree roots, stone/gravel sub-base across most trails obscured by build-up of organic debris

2.4.3 Signage, Interpretation and Wayfinding

Drumcairne Forest is represented at its entrance by roadside signage and a Forest Service entrance sign. These have been present for quite some time, and despite public access to the car park having been shut off for many years up until 2020, these signs have offered confirmation/indication that the area was still open to the visiting public to an extent.

Figure 9 - Signage at the entrance to Drumcairne Forest Park (nb. The spelling of Drumcairn/e varies)

There is no interpretive experience at the site, despite historic links and features that many people are likely to have an interest in.

There is no trailhead panel or detailed pre-visit information available that might help visitors plan their time in the forest.

The Stewartstown Community Group has recently installed waymarkers to assist visitors to navigate routes within the forest. Although relatively informal, often attached to trees and existing degraded infrastructure, this waymarking goes a long way to improving legibility for users.

Figure 10 - Community waymarking

2.4.4 Mountain Biking

Mountain biking (MTB) activity is noted across the site, though there is no formal provision for this, it is long established. Its impact on existing walking trails appears minimal with no in-line features, obstacles, signs of erosion on existing trails, or user conflict reported during public consultation. In fact, mountain bikers have been credited to an extent for keeping trails 'open'. Publicly observable digital 'Strava' tracks indicates occasional use of the site for MTB from a small number of people, reportedly from within the local surrounding community.

Forest Service NI acknowledges mountain biking and other 'wheeled' activity on the site through attention signage close to the site entrance, stating:

No cycling, mountain biking, or motorised vehicles permitted on waymarked pedestrian footpaths.

Figure 11 - Attention signage from Forest Service relating to use of waymarked trails, and an off-track route used by MTBs with some built features along a 'natural' trail surface.

2.4.5 Shooting/Gun Club

It is understood that FSNI have issued a license for shooting activity on the site to a gun club, valid until 2024.

Figure 12 - 'Shooting Preserved' sign close to Drumcairne Forest entrance

3 Assessment of Need

3.1 Strategic Context

The development of outdoor recreation and local community facilities, in general, fulfils the aims and agendas of a variety of several government departments, agencies and strategic organisations. Outdoor Recreation NI has taken care to ensure that the consideration of any proposed developments at Drumcairne aligns with these policies and strategies at a regional, sub-regional and local level.

Table 2 outlines those strategies having the most strategic relevance to o developing Drumcairne Forest fully and appropriately as a local multi-activity hub. A detailed assessment of Strategic Context is presented in Appendix 1.

Table 2 - Relevant policies and strategies for Drumcairne Forest

Theme	Policy / Strategy
Overarching Strategies	– Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 (NI Executive, 2016) – Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD 2010) – Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 (MUDC, 2020) – Our Community Plan: 10-year plan for Mid Ulster (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)
Health & Well-being	– A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022 – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)
Economy & Tourism	– Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	– Outdoor Recreation Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Parks and Play Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland (2014) – A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021) – Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025 –
Natural Environment & Heritage	– Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050 – NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 – Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2012) – Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006 – The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011) – Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021) – Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)

Equality	– Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006)
Community Planning	– Village Plans for Galbally & Cappagh, Ballygawley and Stewartstown.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of each of these documents, identifying their specific relevance to this Scoping Study and any proposed development at Drumcairne.

In summary, this strategic review highlights the importance that the Northern Ireland Executive and government departments (at a regional level) and the Council (at a sub-regional level), place on outdoor recreation and access to forests and quality greenspace for the social, economic, physical, mental, and environmental well-being of our local communities.

Outdoor Recreation NI considers that proposed developments/enhancements within Drumcairne offer a strong fit with each of the strategies outlined in Table 2, because the recommendations have the potential to:

- Contribute to, or kick-start in some cases, the regeneration of rural communities through the investment in and provision of quality outdoor activities and experiences.
- Improve the health (mental and physical) and wellbeing (including social inclusion) of local people and visitors through the development of sports, leisure, and recreation infrastructure within the area in order to provide formal and informal opportunities for people to engage in physical activity and to better access green spaces.
- Protect our natural environment through the development of environmentally sensitive trails and components with an educational dimension.
- Conserve and enjoy the unique built heritage of Mid Ulster.
- Contribute to the development of a strong and shared community by unlocking the potential of the leisure sector as an instrument for positive change.
- Encourage active citizenship through volunteering and social enterprise opportunities.
- Contribute to long-term economic growth through the development of the tourism industry of the Council area, offering a distinct and complementary sustainable outdoor recreation product to that is currently under-developed in the Council area.

3.2 Drumcairne Public Survey

A Public survey was rolled out in March 2021, advertised within local press and across relevant social media outlets, to obtain public feedback and sentiment in a consultative manner. The survey remained open online and in hard copy format for a six-week period, concluding on 18th April 2021. Survey questions and the full suite of results is presented in Appendix 3. Output from the survey is used to support statements in Section 3.3-3.5 to inform the assessment of need for development at Drumcairne Forest.

There were 704 responses to the public survey.

3.3 Local Access to Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Local opportunities for outdoor recreation around the Stewartstown area are currently limited. Besides embracing the existing informal offer at Drumcairne, the closest off-road walking opportunity can be found 4 miles away from the village at the Washing Bay where a short (1km) perimeter trail of a football grounds is cited as proving popular, with a wide catchment area. Further walking opportunities exist along Coalisland Canal (trailhead 4 miles away) Drum Manor Forest Park in Cooktown (9 miles away), and Peatlands Park (8 miles away).

> *"It has become very apparent during the pandemic that we are very restricted in this area to developed outdoor spaces. The recently developed walkway at Washingbay has proven successful. However, it has a very high footfall and another area for locals to walk would be greatly appreciated".*
>
> - *Public survey respondent*

The Drumcairne public survey indicated that besides Drumcairne Forest, 76% of respondents walk/run/cycle on local roads for outdoor recreation and outdoor leisure time. Regular travel to other forest parks and trails is common, within (65% of respondents) and outside (50% of respondents) their council area, including places like Peatlands Park, Cabin Wood, Loughry, Washingbay, Drum Manor, Gosford, North Coast beaches, Pomeroy Forest, Davagh, Lough Fea, and the Mourne Mountains.

Regionally relevant evidence exists[3] to support the need for improved ***local*** access to spaces for outdoor recreation in general, citing sustainability benefits, health, and wellbeing benefits, and improved social benefits. For example, Darkley Forest in Co. Armagh launched a 5km network of multi-use trails in 2018 on a site of similar scale and setting to Drumcairne, located approximately 1km from a local village centre. Using a robust Social Return on Investment methodology to assess its impact, **the total social value generated over the lifespan (25 years) of Darkley Forest Community Trail will see a £10 return on investment for every £1 spent to create the trail.** Further detail on this specific study is included in Appendix 2.

Figure 13 - Social Return on Investment 1:10 for Darkley Forest, Co Armagh

A Village Plan for Stewartstown drafted by Mid Ulster District Council Stewartstown has identified several development opportunities relevant to outdoor recreation provision in the area, summarised in Table 3. Drumcairne Forest has been highlighted as a valuable asset within this community.

Table 3 - Stewartstown Village Plan Outdoor Recreation Summary

	Key characteristics	Development opportunity
Stewartstown Village Plan	– Within the top 20-30% most deprived wards in NI. – Drumcairne Forest is avaluable asset. – Crieve Lough – significant link to Hugh O'Neill.	– Enhanced play provision building on existing play park for younger and older children. – More leisure facilities and opportunities for employment of youth – Redevelopment of Crieve Lough: improve access from village, develop lough area with seating, enhance wildlife and create new walks. – Develop Drumcairne Forest: new walks, trails, parking and wildlife, playpark, stock ponds with fish, toilets, and signage. – Development of a Trim Trail at GAA Club with play facilities and signage – Map walking and cycling routes around village.

[3] https://mcusercontent.com/4dc93b5ea821bcdbd4cfd748e/files/2e0da6ff-abb9-4f10-82a1-f33dcd77e4d3/People_Nature_and_Health_NI_March_2021_report_1_.pdf

		– National Cycling Route at Drumcairne – Henderson's Park – develop play for older age group of children (10+), enhance community links and improve signage

3.4 Drumcairne Visitor Profile

Data from counters or user intercept surveys does not currently exist for Drumcairne Forest. At the beginning of the COVID-era in 2020, Forest Service responded to an observed increase in demand and use by providing small elements of upgrade and provision at the site, such as re-opening the gate to the car park and installing some fresh coarse surface dressing on a short section of trail. However, no objective usage data is known to have been used in decision-making.

Of those who responded to the public survey, 93% said they have visited Drumcairne Forest before. The reported frequency of visits across the past year is shown in Figure 14.

Walking or hiking is recorded as the recreation activity by far most undertaken within the forest (71% of visits). Cycling makes up 14% of reported visits, with running, picnicking, and observing wildlife making up most of the remaining recreational pursuits. "Other" forest recreation activity makes up 5% of responses and includes horse riding, shooting, photography, and enduro moto.

On a typical visit to Drumcairne Forest, the majority of respondents report that they visit with family (56%). 12% visit on their own, and 1.5% visit as part of an organised group. Dog walking and football team training has been cited within survey notes as other reasons for visiting Drumcairne.

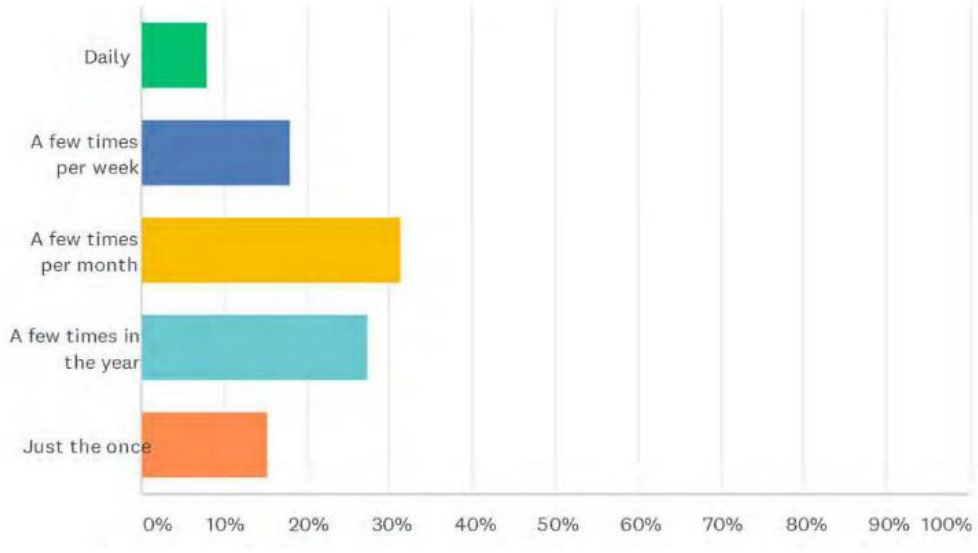

Figure 14 - Frequency of visits to Drumcairne Forest in the past year

3.5 Community Demand

84% of survey respondents indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Drumcairne Forest is 'very important' to the local community. Just 2% of respondents indicated they did not see development as important for the local community.

The responses captured within the public survey reflects existing sentiment observed within local press[4] and on social media, even pre-pandemic, for Drumcairne to have a level of investment that will help unlock its potential.

> *"Drumcairne Forest is a wonderful asset to the local community and those visiting the area. It has massive potential. However, it has been left unmaintained and underdeveloped for far too long"*
>
> - *Councillor Ronan McGinley, July 2019, Mid Ulster Mail*

Five distinct key priorities have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from the public survey results, and are summarised in Figure 15.

Figure 15 - Priority Themes for Drumcairne Development from the Community Perspective

[4] E.g. https://www.midulstermail.co.uk/news/environment/drumcairne-forest-wonderful-asset-people-stewartstown-2031187

Several respondents indicated that an inclusive and accessible experience is very important to them. 8% of survey respondents, representing 55 individuals, indicated that they have reduced/limited mobility or another disability.

> *If the pathways were more accessible for wheelchair users… the terrain is stoney and difficult for me to push my wheelchair through, took all my strength to get around the pathway. People in wheelchairs like a good walk in the forest too. I wish this would be taken into consideration when planning walks. I have to travel to Peatlands or Gosford to get a decent walk.*
>
> - *Public survey respondent*

There is a small proportion of demand for mountain biking access to the site. Engagement with local mountain bikers has indicated that a natural trail surface is preferred over a formally built sustainable surface.

A small demand for horse-riding trails has been indicated.

Survey respondents were asked how frequently they would envisage themselves visiting Drumcairne Forest, should facilities be developed, with most responding that they would visit a few times per week (Figure 16).

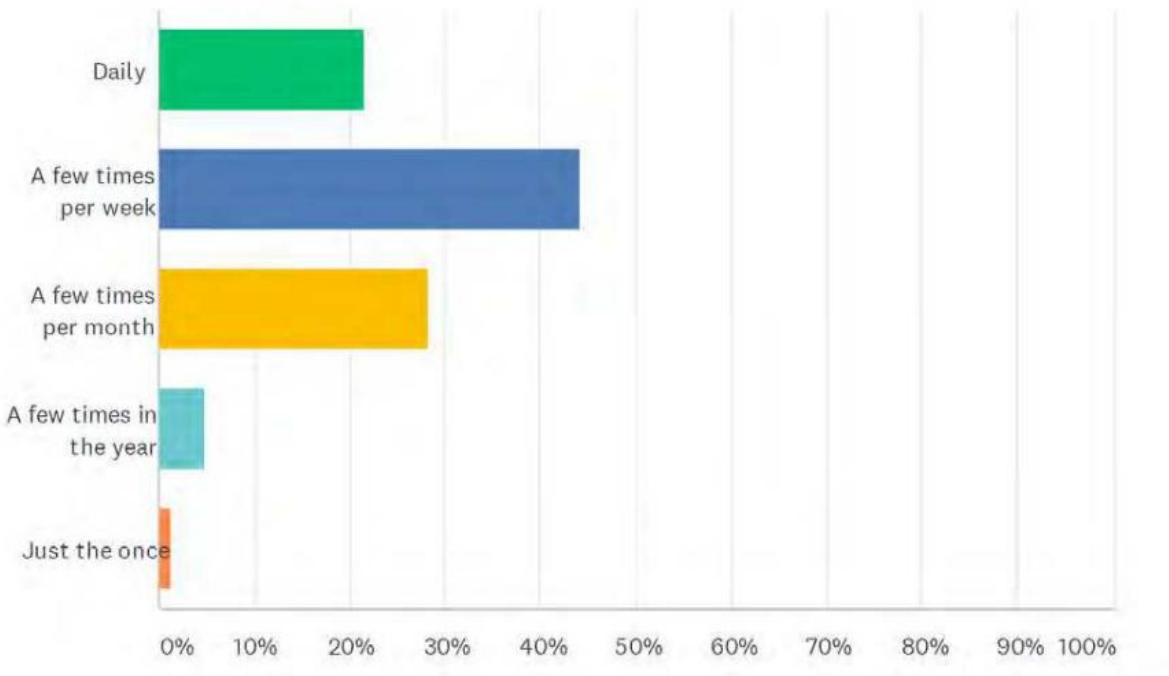

Figure 16 - Anticipated frequency of visits to Drumcairne Forest should developments happen.

3.6 Regional and International Tourism

For Mid Ulster, Tourism Northern Ireland Visitor Attitude Survey (2018)[5] reports a much higher proportion of leisure visitors from within Northern Ireland (NI), particularly day-trippers, compared with other Council Districts. Great Britain is the area's largest out of state source market, followed by North America and the Republic of Ireland but makes up a small proportion of visitors.

Visitors to Mid Ulster are most likely to be visiting to see a particular attraction, with historic monuments/sites and forest parks/gardens especially popular.

Note that statistics are not available to reflect a post-COVID-19 era but it is assumed that the proportion of leisure visitors from within NI is likely to have increased, with a more local catchment than ever.

> *"Drumcairne Forest is a wonderful local resource which has unfortunately been left neglected for some years. Modest investment would really encourage those unfamiliar with the forest, as well as locals, to avail of the facility. There is a real opportunity for creating a resource which could add to the health, economic, and tourism benefits using an existing space of local and historical interest".*
>
> - *Public survey respondent*

[5] Tourism Northern Ireland: Visitor Attitude Survey 2018, Cognisense Ltd. Base: n=138

4 SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Representation from a constituted community group (Stewartstown Community Group) with a strong interest in Drumcairne enhancements.
- Strong community support for site-appropriate development/enhancements.
- Site is already publicly accessible and in use as a recreational space.
- Existing trail network.
- Unique woodland demesne with a variety of habitats and tree species.
- Easy gradients.
- Existing car parking facilities are considered site-appropriate in scale.

Weaknesses

- Lack of ongoing maintenance has led to degredation of site landscape features that will require a committed level of investment to reinstate.
- Reported anti-social behaviour (though this could be attributed to lack of formality of site).
- Limited visitor servicing e.g. no toilets.
- no accessible trails.

Opportunities

- Restoration, preservation, and enhancement of woodland habitat and built landscape features.
- Immediate 'easy win' in upgrading existing trail surfaces.
- Provide an immersive inclusive experience for people with mobility issues - favourable gradients increase across the site reinforce the potential of this opportunity.
- Increase community value and involvement.
- Increase educational value of site.
- Define and highlight the natural and cultural significances of the site through community engagement and interpretation.
- Contribute to regional tourism development, including directly or indirectly supporting private sector business development.

Threats

- 'Overdevelopment' would detract from visitor experience and conservation aims.
- Site designations to be considered
- Relatively small site means capacity and visitor load needs carefully considered
- There may be some conflicting demand from existing users of the site e.g. walking, gun club, mountain biking, equestrian.
- Forestry operations to be considered.
- Poor public awareness of the site outside the region.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Target Market and Segments

Mid Ulster District Council, through the commission of this Scoping Study, has already indicated an awareness of the need to develop Drumcairne Forest as a local multi-activity hub; a site developed primarily for the local community.

The need is indeed greatest within the local community, and that is where the greatest Social Return on Investment (SRoI) lies. Similar in scope and setting to Darkley Forest in Co. Armagh (see Appendix 2), a SRoI of £10 for every £1 spent on developing trails and associated visitor services for the local community is very likely to be achieved.

Drumcairne Forest is unlikely to be a major regional or international tourism generator, nor arguably is it appropriate to create the visitor capacity to be able to accommodate this. However, incidental tourism benefits are likely to arise by increasing the area's offer and so increasing the value of local providers of accommodation, food, etc.

Existing and anticipated use of the site indicates that the largest user segment is **local people visiting a few times per week for walking, engaging with nature, and enjoying the Demesne landscape**. This includes:

- Family groups and lone parents with children.
- Friends meeting up.
- People of retirement age.
- Regular dog walkers.
- People enjoying purposeful exercise e.g. running or family cycling.

5.2 Engaging the Local Community

Development proposals presented within this Scoping Study are supported by the Stewartstown Community Group. Notably, this community group grew out of a now-defunct separate group called 'Friends of Drumcairne'. Stewartstown Community Group is now a fully constituted group representing the wider Stewartstown area but continues its work within Drumcairne, campaigning for its restoration and taking direct action to waymark trails and carry out minor site management.

Engagement with Stewartstown Community Group should continue throughout all phases of development/enhancement of the Forest. The local community are a significant asset to the good custodianship of the Forest and are amenable to being engaged in a more formal set of agreed

parameters to help manage and maintain the site through a future voluntary or SLA arrangement with the Council.

5.3 Management Model

It is recommended that Mid Ulster District Council lease Drumcairne Forest in its entirety from Forest Service Northern Ireland. The scale of the Forest and the nature of its heritage mean that to isolate specific areas or activities under a variety of licences would lead to ambiguity in management systems. ORNI recommends that full Council control, with agreed parameters of community support, is the most appropriate approach.

5.4 Drumcairne Development Proposals

Overview maps of development proposals are shown in Figure 19 and Figure 20. Proposals focus on the **restoration, preservation, and enhancement** of the existing offer across two delivery phases, offering the most sustainable and site-sympathetic solution to satisfy community need.

Planning	Phase 1: Enhancing the Community Experience	Phase 2. Unlocking the Heritage for All
•Starts now with a Pre-Application discussion with MUDC Planning Department to identify which elements sit within permitted development and which require full Planning approval. •The majority of this phase will be achieved in advance of or concurrently with Phase 1, but will continue throughout all phases of delivery as necessary. •Should always involve close engagement with the surrounding community, including Stewartstown Community Group.	•Delivery in 2023-2024 •Focus on restoration of existing trails and visitor service infrastructure. •Create a sense of 'welcome'. •Site vegetation clearance as a pre-cursor to Phase 2. •SLA with Stewartstown Community Group to assist with site management and maintenance.	•Delivery in 2024-2026 •Aims to further enhance the Phase 1 experience with a strong focus on inclusivity and accessibility, and restoration/enhancement of built heritage. •Proposals include accessible play trail, accesible ponds trail, and a toilet block •Planning, design, and engagement for this phase will require more in-depth consideration. •SLA with Stewartstown Community Group to assist with site management and maintenance.

5.4.2 Restoration

5.4.2.1 Trails

Drumcairne Forest benefits from a generous network of existing, though degraded, trails. A coherent two-loop option network of trails, highlighted in the proposals map (Figure 19), should be restored as multi-use trails as an 'easy-win' priority. A gently undulating terrain and some localised narrowing through established trees mean even when upgraded, existing trails are unlikely to be accessible to all. However, an improved surface and a least-restrictive access approach to trail restoration will widen its reach to as many people as possible from within the surrounding communities. A proposed two-loop multi-use trail system means visitors can choose a short (1.5km) or a longer (3.25km) option to suit their abilities and needs.

5.4.2.2 Car Parking and Existing Site Entry

The footprint of the existing car park is considered site-appropriate in scale, but will benefit from a formal layout plan, white-lining, and one-directional entry/exit instruction. The existing entry road is considered appropriate for the site but could benefit from the addition of a passing point. The above items should be formally considered and designed through the commissioning of a traffic/car park engineer, architect, or similar.

5.4.2.3 Built Heritage

Following discussions with HED and MUDC Planning, a key first-step in any heritage restorative work at Drumcairne is site vegetation clearance to reveal the former features and geometry of the terraced gardens, and the true outline of the ponds, to aid subsequent decision-making and more accurate costing of next restorative steps. Much of the clearance will be of long grasses and low-lying scrub and could be carried out by the local community with some council guidance and parameter-setting. However, more significant consideration must be given to dealing with over-grown rhododendron, laurels, and other ornamental planting associated with the former Demesne. It is recommended that any vegetation management other than grasses is undertaken according to recommendations arising from a specifically commissioned vegetation, tree, and habitat management plan, with consideration for responsible preservation, and with an eye on future site enhancements.

5.4.3 Preservation

A key objective of Council and community management of Drumcairne Forest should be to preserve, by doing no harm and by preventing any further harm, to the natural and built heritage value of the site, ensuring it remains a place to locally immerse in nature, and ensuring future generations can

enjoy the gardens and ponds in a safe, welcoming, and sustainable way. Carrying out works in a fully consultative manner with HED and the Natural Environment Division (NED) of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency will be key to achieving this objective.

5.4.4 Enhancement

5.4.4.1 Creating an Inclusive Experience

Drumcairne's setting and relatively favourable gradients has the potential to offer an inclusive nature and heritage experience through a combination of developing new accessible play and picnic trail and restoring and enhancing paths around the pond areas. Inclusive play integrated into the accessible trail, including water's edge access via an accessible pond platform, and a step-free environment, means that people of all abilities and their families and social circles can enjoy what the site has to offer.

5.4.4.2 Interpretation, Play, and Creating a Sense of 'Welcome'

The Association for Heritage Interpretation defines interpretation as 'a communication process that helps people make sense of, and understand more about, a site, collection or event'. It can:

- Bring meaning to a cultural or environmental resource, enhancing visitor appreciation and promoting better understanding. As a result, visitors are more likely to care for what they identify as a precious resource.
- Enhance the visitor experience, resulting in longer stays and repeat visits. This will lead to increased income and create employment opportunities.
- Enable communities to better understand their heritage, and to express their own ideas and feelings about their home area. As a result, individuals may identify with lost values inherent in their culture.

It has also been described by Freeman Tilden, one of the founders of modern interpretation, as 'an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships using original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information'.

Drumcairne Forest should be subject to a whole-site Brand and Signage Plan and Interpretation Framework, the implementation of which should be delivered across all phases of development with a key objective of creating a sense of welcome.

All trail and site furniture including wayfinding, interpretation, play features, bench seating and picnic benches, should fall within the site Brand and Signage Plan and Interpretation Framework

that ties the whole experience together, and should aim to maximise accessibility.

Integrated play in the form of an accessible trail with 3-5 key feature points using natural materials and nature-engaging methods is ideal for Drumcairne, rather than focusing on a stand-alone play park that does little to draw visitors into the key forest areas.

Figure 17 - A fully immersive interpretive experience offered through a consistent brand image for Drumcairne should include 'natural' and accessible play, engagement with the water of the ponds, benches, picnic tables and sculptures.

5.4.4.3 Visitor Servicing

A toilet block with male, female, and disabled toilet will complement the aim of creating a more inclusive experience, the design of which should fit within the whole-site visual brand and interpretive experience.

Figure 18 - Toilet Block example

5.4.4.4 Community Enterprise

Mid Ulster District Council should consider the licensing of site-appropriate mobile catering, e.g. coffee cart, to be based within or adjacent to the car parking area. Where possible within Council procurement processes, priority for this commercial opportunity should be given to providers that create an employment opportunity from within the immediate surrounding community.

5.5 Summary and Outline Cost of Development Proposals

Visitor Infrastructure proposals are presented in maps in Figure 19 and Figure 20. A Phased Implementation Plan showing a breakdown of costs is provided in Section 6 of this Scoping Study report.

Planning 2021-2024	Phase 1: Enhancing the Community Experience 2023-2024	Phase 2. Unlocking the Heritage for All 2024-2026
•Visitor infrastructure planning and design actions = **£96,500**	•Visitor infrastructure delivery = **£126,650**	•Visitor infrastructure delivery = **£190,700**, *(*increasing to £340,700 if full heritage restoration of former gardens is implemented.)*
•Management actions initial outlay **= £33,000**	•Management Actions = **£15,000 P/A**	•Management Actions increase to = **£25,000 P/A**

Visitor Infrastructure Development Costs Total	£413,850 *(*£563,850)*
Management costs over 25 yrs.	£623,000
Estimated Social Return on Investment over 25 yrs[6]	£10.4M

[6] Based on anticipated 1:10 SRoI modelled for Darkley Forest, Co. Armagh – See Appendix 2

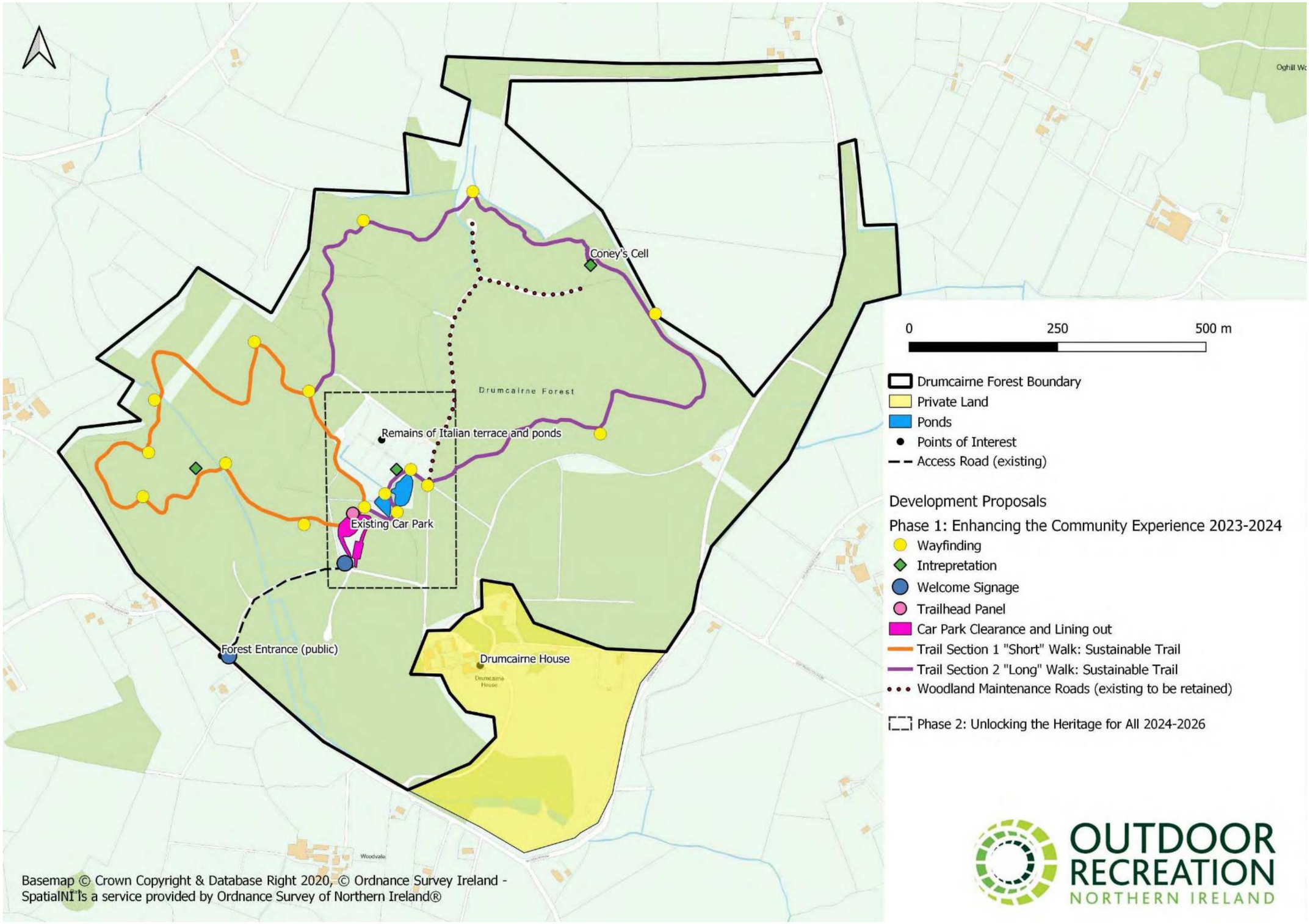

Figure 19 - Overview Map of Development Proposals

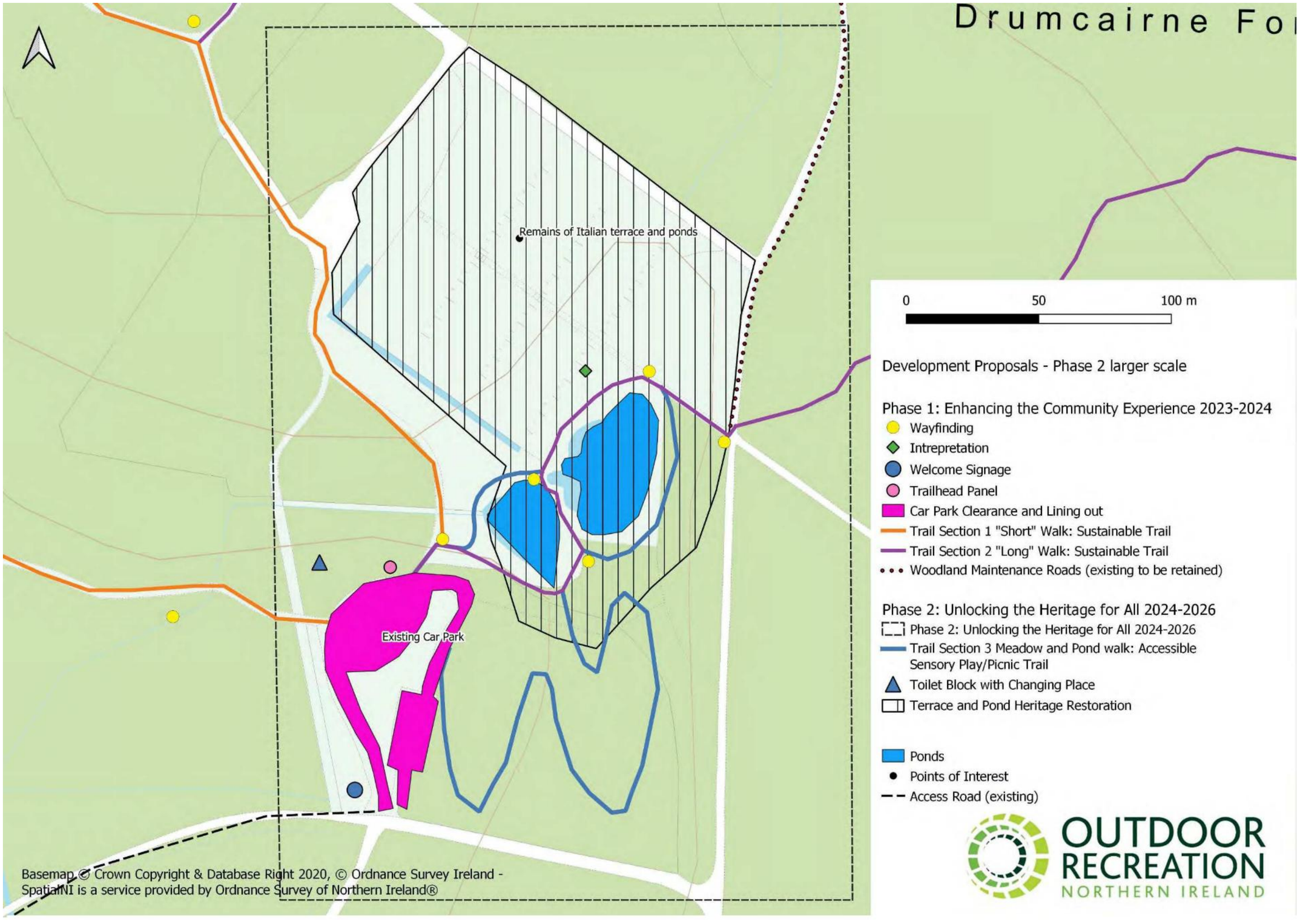

Figure 20 - Larger Scale Overview Map of Phase 2 Development Proposals

6 Drumcairne Phased Implementation Plan

DRUMCAIRNE VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE ACTIONS & COSTS

CATEGORY		Item	PLANNING 2021 - 2024	PHASE 1 : Enhancing the Community Experience 2023-2024	PHASE 2: Unlocking the Heritage for All 2024-2026
Brand and Interpretation	1	External Navigation Signage (Brown Signage)	Brand and Signage Strategy Interpretation Framework The above may be applied across multiple forest sites as a value-for-money exercise and to deliver consistency across the Council area. They must consider the proposed two-phased development and delivery, and should identify opportunities for community co-curation. To align with respective infrastructure items and proposed phases. £20,000	Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000	-
	2	Welcome Signage		Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000	-
	3	Interpretation		Design, production, and installation x 2 £5,000	Design, production, and installation x 2 £5,000
Trail Network	4	Visitor Counter	Professional fees for advancement of development concept for upgrade of existing trails: - Planning Approvals PAD dependent (not costed, assumed permitted development as outcome pf PAD for existing trails upgrades) - Applications for funding - Trail prescription for contract specification - Contractor procurement - Project management of trail build £15,000	Installation x 2 £6,000	Installation x 1 £3,000
	5	Trailhead Panel		Design, production, and installation £2,000	Design, production, and installation £2,000
	6	Trail Build Section 1 “short” Walk: 1.5km		Trail upgrade Cat 3 Multi-use trail 1500m x £30/m £45,000	-
	7	Trail Build Section 2 “Long” Walk 1.75km		Trail upgrade Cat 3 Multi-use trail 1750m x £30/m £52,500	-
	8	Wayfinding		Post & Disc Est. 25No @ £150 £3,750	Post & Disc Est. 10 No @ £150 £1,500
	9	Trail Build Section 3 Meadow and Pond Walk: Accessible sensory Play/Picnic Trail	Professional fees for advancements of development concept for new build trails: - Refined cost estimate - Application for funding - Commissioning of ecological, heritage impact surveys. - Planning Approvals - Trail prescription for contract specification - Contractor procurement £30,000	Vegetation clearance (community scale) and mown grass path. Community-led	Vegetation clearance (capital scale). New Trail Build 500m x £80/m, wheelchair accessible surface and gradients. Recommended bound gravel surface. This further includes accessible ‘pads’ for trail furniture (items 12-15) @ 50m^2. £45,000
Trailhead Infrastructure and Visitor Services	10	Car Park	Professional fees for design associated with upgrade to existing car park. Commission engineer for layout plan within existing footprint for maximum capacity ~40 spaces. £1,500	Car Park Upgrade: grass cutting, edging, and car park markings. £6,000	N/A. Monitor capacity.
	11	Toilet Block	Professional fees - Refined cost estimate - Detailed architectural and technical design	-	Toilet Block Build

			- Planning Approvals - Contractor/supplier procurement £5,000		£100,000
Trail Furniture	12	Play	Specification to be fully incorporated into whole site brand and interpretation plan. Professional fees for commissioning of site-appropriate play trail features consistent with Brand and Interpretation Plan: £5,000	-	Natural play features to be integrated into Meadow and Pond Walk (item 9) £25,000
	13	Picnic Tables		-	5No. wooden picnic tables @ £600 each Integrated into Meadow Walk, to include wheelchair accessible tables and base/surface. £3,000
	14	Bench Seating		8No. wooden benches throughout trail system @ £300 each £2,400	4No. wooden benches throughout extended trail system @ £300 each £1,200
	15	Accessible Pond Platforms			2No. Boardwalk-style resin-grip coated pond platform graded to conform to accessible path specification £8,000
Heritage Restoration	16	Pond and Terrace Restoration	Professional Fees: Heritage feasibility Study engaging a heritage architect/landscape architect to assess the social heritage value of a full restoration of built landscape features, to include recommendations on future management and maintenance of a fully restored site, with appropriate consultation with HED Applications for heritage restoration funding as appropriate. £20,000		Full restoration of Drumcairne Demesne built landscape features £150,000
		Phased Totals	**£96,500**	**£126,650**	**£190,700 without full heritage restoration** (£340,700 with heritage restoration)
		Grand Total			**£413,850** (£563,850 with heritage restoration)

DRUMCAIRNE MANAGEMENT ACTIONS & COSTS

CATEGORY		Item	PLANNING	PHASE 1 : Enhancing the Community Experience 2023-2024	PHASE 2: Unlocking the Heritage for All 2024-2026
Third Party Agreements	1	Forest Service	Council to adopt a whole-forest management approach. Agree a whole-forest Lease arrangement between Forest Service and Council. Cost: Nominal	-	-
	2	Stewartstown Community Group	• Convening of community group to relay Councillor-ratified outcome of the scoping study. • Engagement and participation with planning process and elements of co-design as appropriate. • Community-involved interpretation research. Professional fees for externally delivered community engagement: £8,000	SLA and/or volunteer agreement for: • Waste/Litter Collection. • General visitor facilities – issues reporting. • Opening/closing gates. £5,000 P/A	SLA/volunteer agreement extension for: • To include a mowing/strimming regime on mown grass trails/areas. • Management of Toilet Facilities Increased to £10,000 P/A
	3	Private Enterprise	Seek expressions of interest for site-appropriate third-party mobile catering e.g. Coffee cart.	Grant third party license for mobile catering – trading begins.	Review & extend third party license for mobile catering.
Community Engagement	4		Press releases to announce planned investment.	Launch event and community volunteer recruitment.	Launch event and community volunteer recruitment.
Future Site Management	5	Site Management Plan	Develop an over-arching site management plan with respective constituent parts 5-7 corresponding to the phase of development. £25,000	Implementation of Site Management Plan (in addition to SLA): £10,000 P/A	Implementation of Site Management Plan (additional) Increased to £15,000 P/A
	6	Vegetation, Tree, and Habitat Management		Ongoing implementation of Vegetation, Tree, and Habitat management Plan following initial capital clearance works. Included in item 5	Ongoing implementation of Vegetation, Tree, and Habitat management Plan Included in item 5
	7	Built Heritage Management		Implementation of Built Heritage Management Plan Included in item 5	Implementation of Built Heritage Management Plan Included in item 5
		Phased Totals	**£33,000**	**£15,000 P/A**	**£25,000 P/A**

7 Funding Streams

Several funding options may be available for a project of this kind, including the following:

Initiatives to Tackle Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

DAERA TRPSI fund has the potential be a good fit for developments such as those proposed within this Scoping Study.

For example, over the past 4 years DAERA has committed £5.7m from its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme to 17 Forest Park Enhancement Schemes. This significant financial commitment has levered in a further £3.9m through partnerships formed with Councils and other grant aiding bodies. These projects contribute to the health and well-being of the residents of the surrounding areas to the Forests/Trails by developing safe, way marked, off-road cycling/walking trails that will accommodate a wide range of users and helping locals and visitors alike to stay healthy and happy, both physically and mentally.

Successful application for funding would be dependent on MUDC securing match funding of (currently 15% for 2021/22 funding programme).

Further detailed information can be found at https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/initiatives-tackle-rural-poverty-and-social-isolation-trpsi

DAERA Environmental Challenge Fund

DAERA's Environmental Challenge Fund aims to support projects that will deliver outcomes in at least one of their strategic priorities, including Implementation of actions that are essential to delivery of DAERA's strategic outdoor recreation priorities, to increase sustainable public enjoyment and understanding of land and seascapes including: a) Delivery of core path networks and strategic routes, primarily in partnership with councils; b) Promotion of environmental responsibility and good practice; c) Projects on NIEA sites, particularly for those for whom access is currently difficult.

Overarching factors that will be taken into account in shortlisting and allocating funding to projects include;

- Scale
- Evidence of need
- Environmental impacts
- Value for money (including match funding options)

- Sustainable impact

Further detailed information can be found at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/ef-environment-fund-2019-22-overarching-criteria-environmental-impact

National Lottery Heritage Fund

National Lottery funds projects that connect people and communities to the national, regional, and local heritage of the UK. They provide different levels of funding to heritage of all shapes and sizes, with grants ranging from £3,000 up to millions of pounds. The Heritage Fund prioritises heritage projects that meet six of their outcomes as follows:

- A wider range of people will be involved in heritage.
- The funded organisation will be more resilient.
- People will have greater wellbeing.
- People will have developed skills.
- The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit.
- The local economy will be boosted.

All projects are also expected to demonstrate that they are building long-term environmental sustainability and inclusion into their plans.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Strategic Context (Detailed Version)

The development of outdoor recreation and the supporting local community facilities fulfils the aims and agendas of a variety of several government departments, agencies and strategic organisations. Outdoor Recreation NI has taken care to ensure that the proposed development(s) outlined in this Scoping Study, aligns with these policies and strategies at a regional and local level.

The following strategies and policies were identified as having most strategic relevance.

Theme	Policy / Strategy
Overarching Strategies	– Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 (NI Executive, 2016) – Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD 2010) – Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 (MUDC, 2020) – Our Community Plan: 10 year plan for Mid Ulster (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)
Health & Well-being	– A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022 – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)
Economy & Tourism	– Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	– Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland (2014) – A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021) – Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025 – Outdoor Recreation Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Parks and Play Strategy (MUDC, 2021)
Natural Environment & Heritage	– Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050 – NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 – Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2012) – Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006 – The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011) – Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021) – Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)
Equality	– Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006)
Community Planning	– Village Plans for Cappagh & Galbally, Ballygawley and Stewartstown

Table 4: Relevant Strategies and Policies for this study

The following is a brief synopsis of each document considered in the Strategic Context to be of significance in terms of how the proposed development and recommendations made in this Scoping Study do align to and/or could contribute towards the delivery of key regional and sub-regional policies and strategies.

Regional Strategic Context
Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016) The draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework sets out the aspirations of the Executive for society and provides a strategic context for other key strategies and policies. The PfG was also to shape the development of the Executive's budget over the course of the current mandate and provide a mechanism for ensuring funds are best directed to where they can contribute most. The Framework contains 14 strategic outcomes and connect to every aspect of government, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and building confident and peaceful communities. The following outcomes are of relevance to this Scoping Study: – Outcome 2: Live and work sustainably – protecting the environment; – Outcome 4: Enjoy long, healthy, active lives; – Outcome 12: Create a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest; – Outcome 14: Give our children and young people the best start in life. These outcomes are supported by 42 indicators, with each indicator accompanied by a measure which is largely derived from existing statistics to monitor performance. The following indicators are of relevance to this Scoping Study: – Indicator 2: Reduce health inequality – Indicator 3: Increase healthy life expectancy – Indicator 6: Improve mental health – Indicator 30: Improve our attractiveness as a destination and our international reputation. Key to the success of the PfG is the ability of Departments to work collaboratively with not only themselves but also with other public bodies and the voluntary and private sector.
Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD, 2010)

This Strategy is designed to deliver the spatial aspects of the PfG and is intended to inform the spatial aspects of other Government Departments, Councils' decisions and investments, and guide investment by the private sector. Relevant aims of the Strategy for this Scoping Study include:

- Support towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential
- Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities
- Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information
- Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake

The Strategy highlights the importance of improving facilities for walking and cycling as part of infrastructure investment.

A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022

Obesity is a major public health challenge facing Northern Ireland and this Framework aims to empower people to make healthier choices by creating an environment that supports a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet. It recognises the factors that underpin weight gain are complex and cover factors such as social and individual psychology, physiology, food consumption, individual activity and built environment.

In addition, many wider determinants of poor health such as health inequalities, poverty, mental health, deprivation and structural barriers also play an important role. Of relevance, the Strategy outlines how environmental factors affect choices and behaviours, for example lack of access to green space reduces physical activity opportunities. Other barriers include poor urban environments, limited safe play facilities and community safety, and sedentary lifestyles.

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)

The new Health Strategy recognises that the Health Service faces growing demand driven by successful interventions and improving life expectancy. As a result, there is a need to move beyond managing illness and instead ensure that people are supported to live well; physically, mentally and emotionally. To do this, the onus is on Departments and Agencies to work together to deliver the best outcomes.

Core to PfG Outcome 4 of people leading long, healthy and active lives is improving people's health. The Strategy outlines a future in which people are supported to keep well with the information, education and support to make informed choices and take control of their own health and wellbeing.

This requires the circumstances for people to stay healthy, well, safe and independent in the first place. There is a need to:

- Build capacity in communities and in prevention to reduce inequalities and ensure the next generation is healthy and well
- Work with communities to support them to develop their strengths and use their assets to tackle the determinants of health and social wellbeing
- Tap into the innovative ideas and energies in communities themselves, and in the community and voluntary sectors.
- In all communities, every child and young person should have the best start in life, people should have a decent standard of living, and all citizens should be supported to make healthier and better-informed life choices
- Work alongside all communities to enable social inclusion and tackle health inequalities and the underlying contributory factors including poverty, housing, education and crime.

Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland (2014)

Commissioned by Sport NI and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), this Action Plan highlights the importance of making the outdoors accessible to everyone and the opportunities that there are to participate, not only in rural areas but also in the urban fringes.

Due to the recognition that access to green space enhances physical health and mental wellbeing, and addresses issues associated with social exclusion, rural and urban deprivation and community cohesion, the vision of the Action Plan is "a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland".

It provides key recommendations for actions and challenges that need to be addressed to make Northern Ireland a place where outdoor recreation can deliver:

- Healthy active lifestyles for local people from all communities;
- Economic growth through encouraging visitors to come and enjoy the outdoors; and
- Protection of landscapes and ecosystems for future generations.

To achieve this vision, the aim is for Northern Ireland to be a place where:

- There are increasing opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone in a broad range of outdoor recreation activities;
- There are accompanying benefits to local communities, especially those who are socially excluded in terms of health, social inclusion, cohesion, equality, and economic development;
- People enjoy the outdoors and show a high degree of responsibility for themselves, towards others and towards the environment they are using, and play their part in maintaining, supporting and enhancing our environment and heritage.

A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021)

As of April 2021, the DfC was still in the process of public consultation for this new, 10-year draft strategy. Having been drafted during the Covid-19 pandemic period, this Strategy specifically highlights that sport and physical activity and the associated benefits that these bring, will play an important role in Northern Ireland's recovery.

The draft Strategy now defines 'sport' in a broader context, as 'all forms of physical activity which, through casual organised participation, aimed at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels'.

The proposed Vision is 'Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity leads to an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence'.

To deliver this vision, six Key Themes have been identified. Goals relating to the achievement of each theme, that are relevant to this Study have been highlighted in bold and listed:

1. Recovery from the impact of the pandemic on sport and physical activity
2. **Promoting participation, inclusion and community engagement**
    - Improved physical and mental health and well being
    - Sport and physical activity is inclusive, safe, diverse, shared and offers equality of opportunity to participate for all
    - Children and young people are given the best start in life through sport and physical activity opportunities
3. Promoting excellence in sport
4. **The importance of partnership and integration**
    - Better outcomes for communities through a collaborative approach to the development of sport and physical activity
    - Outcomes for communities are improved by a focus on co-design and co-production
    - Strengthened sports and physical activity partnerships at local, regional, national and international level
    - An increasing proportion of our facilities are shared across sports, clubs, schools and communities
5. **Providing inclusive and shared spaces**
    - Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality sports and physical activity infrastructure
    - A safe, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional sports and physical activity infrastructure
    - Our sports and physical activity sector and infrastructure are enabled by innovative and emerging technologies
6. Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity

Underpinning these Key Themes and their goals, are three cross-cutting principles:

- **Developing inclusive, shared communities**
- Developing capacity and governance in sport and physical activity
- Developing national and international linkages

Those which are of relevance to this Scoping Study are highlighted in **bold.**

Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025

The vision of the Sport NI Plan is the same as the new, draft Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for NI: '...a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport'. Sport NI's mission statement is: "We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2025, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all".

To achieve this, Sport NI has identified two strategic outcomes over the next 5 years:

- Outcome 1: People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and recreation
- Outcome 2 NI Athletes among the best in the world

Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050

This Plan frames DAERA's strategic priorities for the next 30 years. DAERA's vision and purpose, outlined in this Plan, is "Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone".

The Plan states that a "sustainable approach creates a healthy environment to live in, which will underpin a healthy population and stimulate healthy economic rural communities" therefore acknowledging the link between a healthy environment, access to it and the health and well-being of communities. It states that "a healthy population depends on access to a healthy diet and a healthy, enjoyable environment" and "enhancing our environment matters, as a healthy environment is interlinked with our health and wellbeing".

In the Plan, the Natural Environment is one of four strategic priorities – 'to protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all'. Directly related to achieving this is one of the Plan's ten goals –

"9. Health and wellbeing for All - we will focus on using and enhancing our natural resources to improve the health and wellbeing for all of Northern Ireland. We will encourage people to spend more time in nature. We will work collectively to develop and showcase the tourism opportunities of our wonderful environment and NI's world class food and drink production".

The Plan highlights that DAERA has a responsibility for 113,000 Ha forests which represents an obvious asset and resource to achieving the above.

NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022

The priorities for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency as outlined in this document, under the following themes, includes:

Healthy Natural Environment

- A well-functioning network of protected sites and areas including enhancing the management of designated sites to benefit site features and protecting and conserving the historic environment
- Sustainable, diverse landscapes with rich biodiversity which are resilient to change

People and Places

- Extensive opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the natural and built environment
- Common understanding of the role the environment plays in the health and wellbeing of people
- Greater business and community involvement in the environment including through volunteering and community stakeholder groups
- The natural environment and built heritage assets meet the needs of society and communities

Sustainable Economic Growth

- The value of natural and built assets to the economy is fully realised
- The best outcome for the environment is obtained whilst minimising cost to business.

Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2013)

This study highlighted findings from a research study that set out proposals for tourism development in Northern Ireland's forests. The study was set in the context of the Forest Service's policy to realise further opportunities for the recreational and social use of forests, in partnership with local authorities and other recreation providers.

The study established a vision for forest related tourism which was to "use the forest estate to deliver an exceptional visitor and short break experience for all, which will increase the economic impact of forest related tourism in Northern Ireland."

To achieve this vision, the study set out the following supporting aims:

- To increase the economic impact of forest related tourism
- To encourage visitor experience and product development opportunities that will provide an exceptional visitor experience in line with the Northern Ireland brand principles

– To promote and enable effective partnership working.

Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006

This Strategy aims to tackle issues of poverty and social exclusion by targeting efforts and available resources on people, groups and areas in greatest social need. The priorities identified include:

– Eliminating poverty
– Eliminating social exclusion
– Tackling area-based deprivation
– Eliminating poverty from rural areas
– Tackling health inequalities
– Tackling cycles of deprivation

The goals and targets set out include the following:

– Allowing all children and young people to experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential
– Ensuring that everyone has the potential to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

The development of community access to green space and outdoor recreation provision across the Mid Ulster forests aligns with this Strategy and has the potential to contribute to eliminating social exclusion and poverty and tackling health inequalities.

The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011)

The Northern Ireland Executive's vision for volunteering is a society where:
– Everyone values the vital contribution that volunteers make to community wellbeing
– Everyone has the opportunity to have a meaningful and enjoyable volunteering experience.

The growth and development of outdoor recreation across three forest areas provides a unique opportunity for people to volunteer and become involved in their local communities.

Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021)

NI Water's Strategy have identified 5 strategic priorities – Economy ….

Much of the Strategy is heavily centred on optimising the operation, management and impacts of the water supply business of NI Water. However, under strategic priority 'Economy' there are 3 objectives:

- Funding world class economic infrastructure
- Efficient and affordable services
- Sustainable growth

Under the 'sustainable growth' and 'nature' priorities NI Water acknowledge that they are one of Northern Ireland's largest public landowners and therefore have a role to pay in tourism. One of the actions is to "seek opportunities to utilise our catchment land, raw water reservoirs and assets to maximise the community benefits, working closely with local councils'.

Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)

This 2-year policy provides a framework defining what access is permitted to NI Water owned lands and waters, and how access arrangements for recreational use will be communicated, controlled and governed.

Key factors in determining access for recreational use are summarised here as risk, cost, sustainability, biodiversity and conservation and protection of water quality and supply.

Sub-Regional Strategic Context

Consideration is also given to relevant Council strategic documents and the positive benefits and impact outdoor recreation can make on the objectives of the Council's draft Local Development Plan, Corporate Plan, Community Plan, Economic Development Plan and Tourism Strategy.

Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024

This Plan has been influenced by the Council's Community Plan, Economic Development Plan, Tourism Strategy and draft Local Development Plan.

The Plan has 5 strategic themes, of which 'Environment' and 'Communities' are two. In addition, 'addressing rurality' and 'working collaboratively across public, private, community and voluntary sectors to achieve shared objectives' are identified as cross-cutting corporate commitments. Commitment which the recommendations for development in this Scoping Study fulfil.

Within the Environment theme, 1 of 4 priorities is to 'increase the protection of, access to and development of our heritage assets, both natural and man-made, including our strategic visitor sites'.

Within the Communities theme, the Council aim to 'make a tangible difference to the health and well-being of local people, and contribute to the creation of viable and vibrant, safe and prosperous communities'. Accessibility to the outdoors and access to opportunities to adopt a more active lifestyle in a greater range of settings are highlighted, as well as the 'benefits of the outdoors for physical and mental health'. Priorities for the Council under this theme are to –

- Open up and sustain accessible pathways to participation in leisure and outdoor recreation activities which enhance health and well-being by providing high quality, accessible facilities in local communities and through programmes tailored to community need
- Continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests and green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking and cycling trails, and water recreation
- Along with our community planning partners, work to address poverty and deprivation across the Mid Ulster region
- We will continue, through our community development programmes, grant aid schemes and our partnership-working, to support local communities and to build capacity in the community and voluntary sector

Our Community Plan: 10-year Plan for Mid Ulster (2017)

The Council has identified 15 outcomes structured under 5 themes to deliver the Community Plan. This Scoping Study fits into 5 themes and 11 of the 15 outcomes, as outlined below:

Theme	Outcomes

Economic Growth	– We prosper in a stronger and more competitive economy – We have more people working in a diverse economy – Our towns and villages are vibrant and competitive *Success Indicators* – *Improved attractiveness as a tourism destination* – *Increased no. of social economy businesses* – *Increased performance of our towns and villages*
Infrastructure	– We increasingly value our environment and enhance it for our children *Success Indicators* – *Increased environmental sustainability* – *Increased protection, access and enjoyment of our natural and built heritage*
Education and Skills	– We give our children and young people the best chance in life – We are more entrepreneurial, innovative and creative *Success Indicators* – *Increased number of schools which have community access* – *Improved chid development* – *Improved mental health and resilience in children and young people* – *Increased innovation in our economy*
Health and Wellbeing	– We are better enabled to live longer, healthier and more active lives – We care for those most vulnerable and in need *Success Indicators* – *Increased healthy life expectancy* – *Improved mental health* – *Increased quality of life and opportunities for people with disabilities* – *Reduced health inequality* – *Improved child development*
Vibrant and Safe Communities	– We are a safer community – We have a greater value and respect for diversity – We have stronger communities with less disadvantage and poverty *Success Indicators*

- *Reduced anti-social behaviour*
- *Increased respect for each other*
- *Increased shared space*
- *Reduced level of deprivation and poverty*
- *Greater coordination of community delivery*
- *Increased community capacity, volunteering and delivery*
- *Increased private led community initiatives*

Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)

As of May 2021, the final Plan is yet to be published. This spatial plan will set out the Council's vision for planning land use up until 2030, incorporating housing, infrastructure, transport and relevant to this project – tourism, community and recreational facilities.

Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017)

Key priorities for growing tourism in Mid Ulster are:

- History and Heritage
- Outdoor Activities
- Seamus Heaney

The latter 2 propositions are described as 'significant and prominent, but so far undeveloped'. Current tourism is largely based on rural and outdoor activities and tied into the area's natural attributes - the recommendations in this Scoping Study fit this current profile.

Key issues for the growth and management of tourism that have implications for this scoping study are –

- While day visitation to the area is important, the reasons to visit are not well articulated
- The visibility of Mid Ulster's natural heritage, outdoor activity and historic and archaeological heritage are lost partly because they are spread across the area and also because these attributes haven't been pulled together into distinct propositions for visitors.
- There is a weak accommodation base, exacerbated by variable occupancy levels (and thus viability) throughout the year

- The SME and microbusiness characteristics of the tourism sector in the area exacerbate challenges of communicating and engaging with the trade and developing collaborative projects across the trade
- The geographical dispersal of the area – in terms of scale, distance and character – suggests a challenge in creating both a tourism identity for Mid Ulster itself and for a hierarchy of individual communities that have identities and propositions that could encourage visitation
- Continuing constraints in countryside access limit the opportunity to exploit the natural environment to its full potential for outdoor activities

Opportunities for the future that have been identified and align with the recommendations in this Scoping Study are –

- The opportunity exists to exploit Mid Ulster's central location within NI and improving access (completion of the Magherafelt Bypass; A6 dualling; Randalstown (M22) to Castledawson). The central location of Mid Ulster could also boost camping and caravanning based in the area. However, historically strong dependence on the NI domestic day and overnight market for visitation highlights the need to encourage more overnight stays from out-of-state markets and their greater expenditure.
- Outdoor tourism sites and experiences, including the presence of very successful outdoor activity providers, suggest that the outdoor tourism product can be exploited further right across the area
- An invigorated district wide programme of marketing and promotion is achievable, including events, enhanced signage, technology use, visitor information services and limiting print production.

To grow tourism in Mid Ulster there are 5 aims and objectives that actions and development should be centred on –

1. To develop three strategic tourism strands, around which the attributes of the area and the industry can cluster and to attract visitors –
   i. Seamus Heaney
   ii. Archaeological sites, history and heritage
   iii. Outdoor Activities
2. To grow tourism as an economic driver for Mid Ulster
3. To manage the destination and create the preconditions for successful tourism
4. To profile and promote Mid Ulster to enhance the visibility of the area and boost visitation and spend
5. To support the dispersal of visitor spend and investment across the area

This Scoping Study and any subsequent development of the recommendations can be tied to the 'Heritage and History' and 'Outdoor Activities' themes.

For Heritage & History, the Plan highlights that Mid Ulster is the only place to appreciate the history and importance of the O'Neill family – there are many features and remnants of the O'Neills in Cappagh area. Dunmoyle is also rich in heritage features and Drumcairne is a historic garden and demesne.

Walking, cycling, mountain biking, canoeing, angling, multi-adventure centres (e.g. Todds Leap, and Jungle NI) plus a number of activity tourism providers in the area are key propositions for outdoor activities in Mid Ulster. Horse riding and golf add further value to the product offering

and visitor experience. Except for golf, all of the forests are well positioned and have the potential to provide some or all of these activities.

Lastly, for the tourism vision Mid Ulster to be achieved, the Plan highlights the importance of local communities buying into the wider 'Mid Ulster identity'. It also highlights the importance of public realm quality, quality standards, food availability, access to information, etc within each community to ensure the visitor experience is positive and consistent across the area.

Mid Ulster Economic Development DRAFT Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)

The Council's previous Economic Development Plan expired in 2020. The purpose of this Draft Action Plan is to 'focus on the activity and actions that support businesses, high streets and economic recovery' in response to and amidst the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

The Draft Action Plan has multiple themes all aimed at driving recovery during the pandemic and building the foundations for sustained recovery.

Themes and outputs relevant to this study are –

Theme	Output
Physical Regeneration / improving Infrastructure	Rural Regeneration Projects – work in partnership with RDP to deliver Village Regeneration projects in Mid Ulster over 4 years
Strategic Projects	Delivery of Mid South West (MSW) Regional Economic Strategy – Develop a range of collaborative economic development projects as part of Growth Deal, e.g. Developing the O'Neill tourism proposition
Rural Business support / attracting investment	Micro business development scheme (TRPSI) – small capital grants for business development activities
Mid Ulster LEADER RDP Programme 2016-2020	Activities relating to the final delivery of 'Rural Business Investment Scheme', 'Rural Services Scheme' and 'Village Renewal Scheme' projects before closure of programme

Mid Ulster District Council Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan (MUDC, 2020)

This report and Action Plan sets out the future direction for the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across the Mid Ulster district over a 5-year period, from 2020 to 2025.

In this strategy, outdoor recreation is recognised as having significant benefits across society, from the individual level in terms of health, to the wider society in terms of education, the economy and environment.

The report identifies the following key issues and opportunities relating to the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation that are relevant to this project:

- All 22 forests in the area provide local recreation opportunities but some, if developed appropriately, have the potential to attract visitors from outside the area
- whilst the area already has several informal walking trails around villages and along river corridors, there is an overwhelmingly demand for a formal network of Community Trails to be developed across the area
- few mechanisms exist within MUDC to encourage collaboration between the many different organisations and interest groups involved in outdoor recreation across the area. These include landowners/land managers, NGBs, private sector activity providers and service providers
- some of the more niche customers such as camping and caravans are provided with good levels of information, but the more 'mass' offering to local people or visitors on outdoor recreation and parks is insufficient.
- there is an expressed desire by local people in the MUDC area to have better access to information on the outdoor recreation opportunities available across MUDC.

The Action Plan makes 24 recommendations aimed at improving the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation over the next 5 years. 0f the 24 recommendations, 14 are relevant to this project:

Management Structures

- Put in place an adequately resourced rolling maintenance programme for all current and future outdoor recreation facilities.
- Monitor existing and develop where appropriate new SLAs with Community Groups for the ongoing maintenance of outdoor recreation facilities.

Masterplanning

- Undertake Master Planning/Feasibility Studies for six Local Sites, including
    - Altmore Cappagh (Year 1-2)
    - Drumcairne Forest (Year 3-4)
- Develop a Community Trail Plan for each DEA

Product Development

- Develop 3 regional multi-use activity hubs
- Develop 9 local multi-use activity hubs:
    - Altmore Cappagh (Year 1-2)
    - Drumcairne Forest (Year 2-3)
- Develop short and medium distance walking trails
- Develop a network of Community Trails across the area

Promotion / Marketing

- Prepare a 5-year Marketing Strategy and tactical Marketing Action Plan.
- Develop visitor information and signage guidelines for all forest recreation sites.
- Undertake a review of signage, visitor information and waymarking at all outdoor recreation sites.
- Implement new visitor information and signage guidelines at all outdoor recreation sites across the area.
- Develop an Outdoor Recreation Participation Plan.
- Develop partnerships with the private sector to deliver outdoor recreation participation programmes.

Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (MUDC, 2021)

This report and Action Plan provides a comprehensive picture of the status of current public parks and play park facilities, as well as opportunities for future development, in the Mid Ulster district.

MUDC comprises over 100 public park and play facility sites ranging from small play parks to formal pitches/MUGA's to open parkland. One of the key findings of the report is that there is a disparity in provision with some areas in greatest needs suffering from a lack of provision while other areas are over provided for. This report provided an assessment of each facility, in terms of need, condition and spatial distribution.

In addition to site-specific recommendations, 11 over-arching, strategic recommendations were made. These are summarised as:

- Thorough Community Consultation
- Play should be inclusive
- Development of 'public parks' to plug the gap in open/green space across the Council area
- Develop woodland play
    - Drumcairne Forest is recommended as a 'small woodland park' site with a budget of £25,000 to be delivered in Year 5+
    - Altmore Forest is also identified as a 'small woodland park' site with budget of £25,000 to be delivered in Year 5+
- Compatibility with other Council strategies, including ORS, Tourism Strategy and Sports Facility Strategy
- Conduct Play Value assessments which considers the 'play experience'
- Adopt a risk-benefit approach to play provision
- Consider other public land sites and working in partnership with other public bodies to develop play provision
- Planning - protect the loss of open/green space except where there is a substantial community benefit
- Staff resource/maintenance and manning should be factored into future development projects when considering the development of play facilities

Appendix 2: Case Study - The Value and Impact of Darkley Forest Community Trail

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The Impact & Value of

Darkley Forest Community Trail

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland conducted a New Trail Impact Survey for Darkley Forest Community Trail in February 2021 using the Social Return on Investment methodology. The approach focused on the return on investment from the path users' perspective. Key findings are below.

Launched: **2018**
Length: **5km multi-use trails**
Annual Visits (2020): **20,617**
Funders: **SportNI**, **DAERA** & **ABC Borough Council**

Social Return on Investment

£10

Positive Outcomes

87% of visits involved physical activities

69% have better health/fitness since trail opened

16% achieving CMO physical activity targets*

83% of users strongly agreed the trail gave them mental health and wellbeing benefits.

66% strongly agreed that the trail made them feel closer to nature

47% strongly agreed that they learnt about nature of their local heritage

The total social value generated over the lifespan (25 years) of Darkley Forest Community Trail will be **£2,340,275** across physical health, wellbeing, environmental and learning benefits. This means that **for every £1 spent to create the trail, it will generate £10 in return.****

Proximity of trail to users' homes

< 300m	1km	2km	5km	10km	>10km
2%	7%	17%	**42%**	16%	17%

Transport to trail

93%	6%	1%

Improves my mental wellbeing as well as fitness in a safer environment than walking on the roads.

Develops my connection to nature, helps my mental health as well as my physical wellbeing. It is a peaceful and beautiful place to spend time with friends and family, walking and exploring.

* Chief Medical Officer (CMO) recommends adults do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity every week to achieve physical health benefits. **The methodology for the Social Return on Investment framework used for this study is available at [web address to be provided later].

Appendix 3 Community Survey and Results

Scoping Study for the Development of Dunmoyle Forest, Ballygawley

August 2021

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI

on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council

Executive Summary

The Site

Dunmoyle Forest is made up of five Forest Management Blocks totalling 400Ha (4km^2). Owned, managed, and maintained by Forest Service Northern Ireland, the site spans the council boundary between Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, around 5km north of the village of Ballygawley and 1km from the strategic A5 road corridor.

The Forest is made up of a high proportion of coniferous woodland, with some smaller areas with native broadleaved species as well as areas of open bog.

The Scoping Study

This Scoping Study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Dunmoyle Forest as a local multi-activity hub.

Initial scoping has proposed one of the five blocks for viable development as a local multi-activity hub. Referred to as Dunmoyle 1 throughout the study, this forest block covers an area of 160Ha and sits wholly within MUDC area. It is a hilly site, offering elevated views, and with some steep-sided terrain and ravine-like site drainage. There is established infrastructure associated with forestry activity including a well-maintained stone access lane with a steel forestry gate and entrance at Todd's Leap Road, and similar access at Greenhill Road from the direction of Ballygawley.

The Need for Development

There is clear community interest in developments at Dunmoyle from residents within surrounding areas, including the nearby village of Ballygawley. There is also interest from local third-party experience providers who recognise the added-value forest developments could bring to economic operations within the area. Largely, however, developments at Dunmoyle will focus on community provision to provide improved local access to outdoor spaces, particularly in light of recent increased demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ballygawley is ranked in the 10-20% bracket of most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. Dunmoyle has the potential to be a valuable community asset in helping overcome deprivation issues. 82% of survey respondents indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Dunmoyle Forest is 'very important' to the local community.

Several development priorities for Dunmoyle Forest have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from the public survey results, and are summarised as follows:

Development proposals

Development proposals reflect community sentiment, high-level technical feasibility, and assessment of need, with planning proposed to start in 2021 and visitor infrastructure delivered across two phases between 2023 and 2026. These are shown in Map 1 and summarised as follows:

Planning Phase up to 2023	Delivery Phase 1 2023-2024	Delivery Phase 2 2024-2026
•Starts now •Should involve close engagement with the surrounding community.	•Creation of car parking and trailhead at Todd's Leap Road forest entrance. •Development of new trails/formalisation of desire lines as community trails. •Create a sense of 'welcome'.	•Creation of car parking, horse trailer parking, and trailhead at Greenhill Road. •Development of an extended multi-use trail, using cobination of new build and forest roads.

Development Costs

An investment of £70,000 for the 'planning' element of works reflects external professional fees required to work up all phases of proposals to a shovel-ready stage. It is plausible that much of this could be delivered 'in-house' by Mid Ulster District Council staff, and that the full investment will not be required within single-year budgets.

Phase 1 2023-2024 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at £157,300.

Phase 2 2024-2026 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery costs are estimated at £249,200

Social Return on Investment

Using an evaluation methodology that considers sustainability, health and wellbeing, and social benefits, the Estimated Social Return on Investment for Dunmoyle Forest development is estimated at £11M over 25 yrs.

MAP 1

Todd's Leap Road

Dunmoyle 2

Phase 2

Dunmoyle 1

Phase 1

Dunmoyle 3

Knockonny Road (to Ballygawley)

0 250 500 m

Development Proposals

- Wayfinding
- Trailheads
- Access Point and Welcome Signage
- Interpretation
- Forestry Access Road
- Trail 1 - Forest Trail
- Trail 2 - Ravine Trail
- Trail 3 - Accessible Picnic Viewpoint Trail (out and back)
- Trail 4 - Dunmoyle Trail
- Car Parking
- Horse Trailer and Car Parking
- Third Party Car Parking and Visitor Services - Todd's Leap Actvity Centre

Background Information

- Todd's Leap Activity Centre and Accommodation
- Dunmoyle Forest Boundary

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1 Introduction

In February 2021, Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) appointed Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) to undertake a scoping study for the proposed development of Dunmoyle Forest, near Ballygawley, in County Tyrone (Figure 1)).

This study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Dunmoyle Forest as a local multi-activity hub.

MUDC defines a local multi-activity hub as a site developed primarily for the local community, to include a range of outdoor recreation and environmental products, accompanied by appropriate visitor servicing.

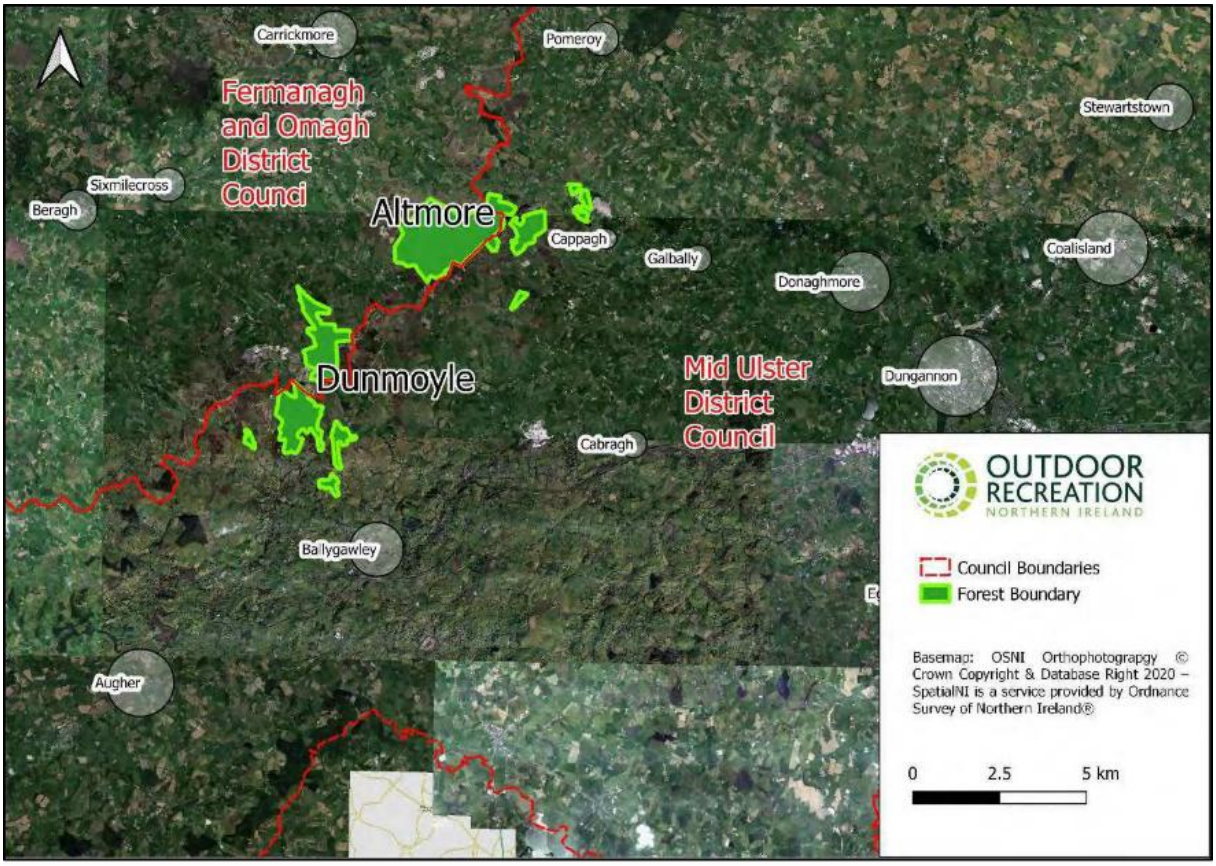


Figure 1 - Dunmoyle Forest Location

1.1 Scope of Study

The Scoping Study has been approached in two stages:

Stage 1

- Desktop review of existing strategies applicable to the region.
- Consultation with agencies/stakeholders, local community, Council staff and Councillors to ensure incorporation of ideas and feedback.
- SWOT Analysis
- Identification of land ownership and land management status and opportunities.
- Exploration of a sustainable balance between the economic, environmental, and social functions of the forest.
- Current infrastructure & condition audit.
- Exploration of the opportunity for linkages and routes within and external to the forest. Explore how the forest offers access to the village, local landscapes, and other neighbouring visitor attractions.
- Identification of any potential barriers to development.
- Determination of what is currently available within the site for outdoor recreation, to include any visitor data, and explore what capacity there is within the site to accommodate further outdoor recreation and educational activities.

Stage 2

- Identification of phased, viable and sustainable recreational, educational, and social activities which could be delivered within the scope of the development plan. Proposals aim to enhance user/visitor experience, whilst supporting biodiversity and local heritage.
- Exploration of potential local business/social economy options to use the site.
- Recommendation and Actions.
- Detailed Development Plan costs and profiled timetable of expenditure.
- Identification of suitable funding streams and timetables.

1.2 Approach

Table 1 summarises ORNI's approach to undertaking the Scoping Study, with key dates provided where relevant.

Table 1 – Scoping Study Approach and Key Dates

	Activity	Status
Stage 1	Desk-based assessments of population demographics, strategic context at Council and Regional scale, geography and geology, environmental and heritage opportunities and constraints, land use opportunities and constraints, forest planning and zoning.	Throughout
	Initial site walkovers.	26th February, 7th May 2021
	Bespoke engagement with select individuals representing themselves, a community group, or club within the surrounding community.	Complete (Ongoing as required)
	Promotion and marketing of scoping study, public survey, and virtual public meeting (Zoom).	Public meeting 14th April. Formal public engagement for 6 weeks concluded 18th April 2021.
	Meetings with key stakeholders including Forest Service NI to facilitate clear decision-making around future planning.	Complete (ongoing as required)
	Interim presentation to Council Officers and feedback period	Virtual Presentation 10th June 2021
Stage 2	Detailed site walkover survey	28th June 2021
	SWOT analysis, conclusions and recommendations, and final reporting	July 2021
	Presentation to Elected Members	Pending

2 The Site

Dunmoyle Forest is made up of five discrete forest blocks totalling 400Ha (4km^2). Two of the blocks, referenced within this report as Dunmoyle 1 and Dunmoyle 2, accounts for the majority of the forested area, with three further smaller blocks making up the remainder, as shown in Figure 3.

Please note, going forward 'Dunmoyle Forest' is used to refer to all five blocks as a whole, where specific mention is made to one block, its number will be used, i.e. 'Dunmoye 1'.

The forestry spans the council boundary between MUDC and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC).

The Forestry area is made up of a high proportion of coniferous woodland, with some smaller area with native broadleaved species as well as areas of open bog.

Dunmoyle 1 covers an area of 160Ha and sits wholly within MUDC area. It is a hilly forest site, offering elevated views, and with some steep-sided terrain and ravine-like site drainage. There is established infrastructure associated with forestry activity including a well-maintained stone access lane with a

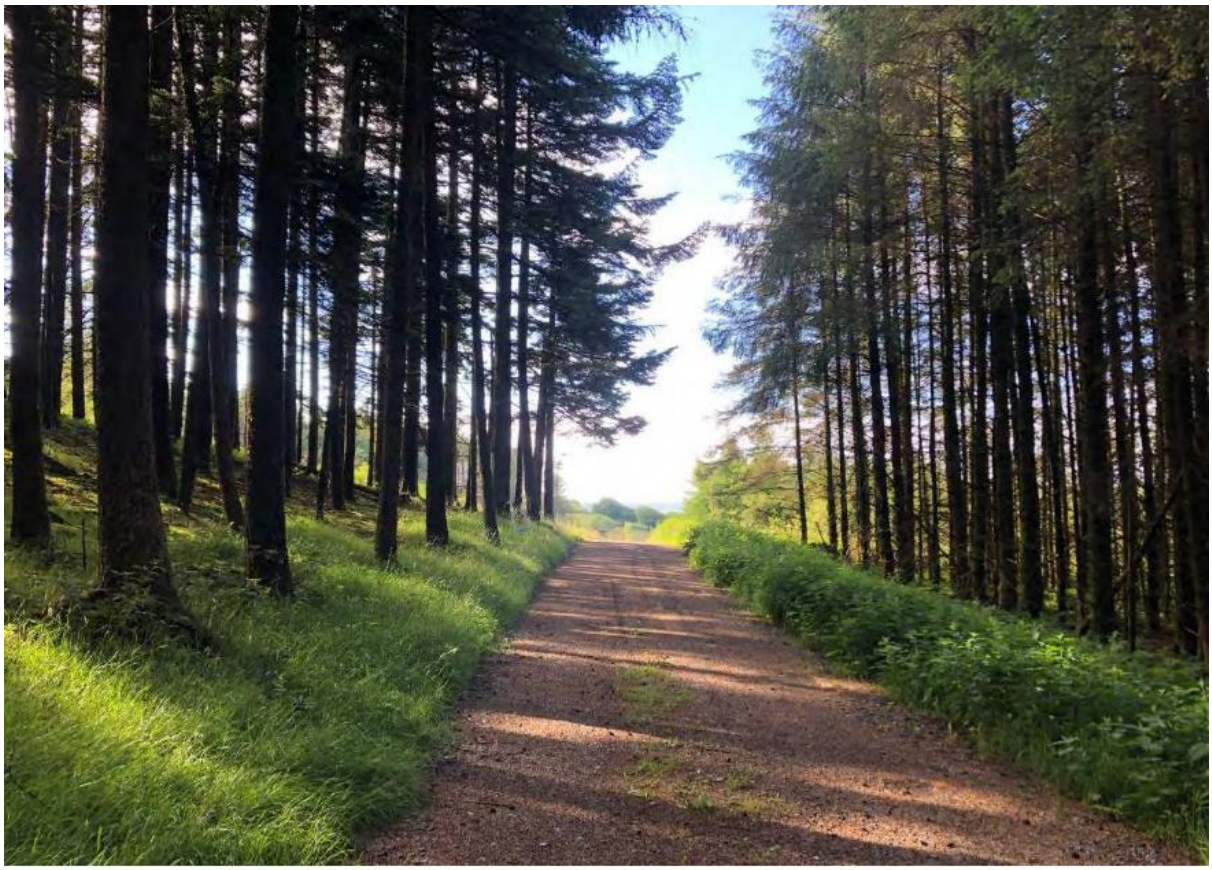


Figure 2 - Stone access lane at Todd's Leap Road entrance to Dunmoyle 1

steel forestry gate and entrance at Todd's Leap Road. There is similar access at Greenhill Road. There is evidence of informal recreational use of Dunmoyle 1.

The largest block, Dunmoyle 2, is 173Ha of forestry and sits wholly within FODC area. The block is segmented by several local roads (Altamuskin, Whitebridge, Foremass, and Shane Roads), effectively separating it into numerous sub-blocks. It is situated at an elevation where the landscape plateaus, offering a relatively flat forestry area.

Blocks 3, 4, and 5 make up a small proportion of the overall forestry area, and all sit wholly within the MUDC area.

2.1 Landownership and Land Management Status

All lands shown within the forest boundaries shown in Figure 3 is owned, managed, and maintained by Forest Service Northern Ireland (FSNI) as a singular management block.

Dunmoyle 2 Forest block falls entirely within FODC, with the remainder blocks sitting entirely within MUDC area, though neither Council is currently understood to have any management or maintenance responsibility for forestry lands at present.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Counci

Dunmoyle 2

Dunmoyle 1

Dunmoyle 4

Dunmoyle 3

Dunmoyle 5

Mid Ulster District Council

OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND

Dunmoyle Forest Boundary
Drainage/Ravine
Forestry Access Road
Forestry Storage/Turning Area
Todd's Leap Activity Centre and Accommodation
A5 Road Ballygawley-Omagh
Council Boundaries

Basemap: OSNI Orthophotograpgy © Crown Copyright & Database Right 2020 – SpatialNI is a service provided by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland®

0 1 2 km

Figure 3 - Dunmoyle Forest Layout

2.2 Heritage Designations

2.2.1 Environment

Dunmoyle Forest and its surroundings do not fall within any designated Environmentally Protected Area.

Small areas of the Forest, and to a wider extent its surroundings, are made up of peat deposits. Some of this peat is registered by Northern Ireland Environment Agency as priority habitat.

No other priority habitat is registered in the immediate vicinity of the Dunmoyle Forest.

2.2.2 Built Heritage

Built heritage across the forest areas is limited with some features present in Dunmoyle 2 only (FODC areas). These features include an 'enclosure' of uncertain origin (SMR TYR 044:044) with substantial remains, and Dunmoyle Church of Ireland (Listed Building HB11/20/003).

Field notes for the enclosure indicate that the area around the feature was clear felled in 2001, with work inside the enclosure carried out by hand. The area was not re-planted. Notes indicate that it seems likely that this feature was built as a landscape feature for Dunmoyle Estate, established in the 1880s and demolished in 1965, with limited known remnants other than the enclosure.

Both features can be directly accessed from Shane Road.

2.3 External Site Linkages

Dunmoyle Forest is surrounded and intersected by a dense network of rural roads.

Dunmoyle 1 sits immediately adjacent to Todd's Leap Activity Centre, a private activity provider specialising in outdoor adventure. Todd's Leap is also a tourism generator for the area. This is just 1 mile from the strategic A5 Ballygawley-Omagh road which facilitates visitors at a regional and national scale. The Todd's Leap Centre ownership boundary, particularly the section of the site that offers overnight accommodation, immediately adjoins Dunmoyle 1 and there is evidence of an informal desire line linking between the two.

An 'upper' entrance to Dunmoyle 1 via Greenhill Road offers an alternative back-road local link to residents of Ballygawley and surrounding area, avoiding the need to use the A5 Road for this short journey. Ballygawley village sits 5km south of Dunmoyle 1, accessible along a network of quiet rural roads.

2.4 Existing Outdoor Recreation Provision

There is no existing formal provision for outdoor recreation within Dunmoyle Forestry. A network of forest roads and informal roadside parking around the periphery of the forest blocks means that entry on an informal basis can be facilitated, and is known to occur, mainly for people accessing on foot.

In Dunmoyle 1 there is evidence of use extending beyond the forest roads in the form of desire lines observable on the ground and on Strava (publicly available digital route tracking). There are minor indications of mountain biking within Dunmoyle 1, as well as tyre tracks from scramblers – the latter of which was also reported through public consultation.

Dunmoyle 2 is segmented by public roads to such an extent that there is no observable coherent network of desire lines or routes. Nor are there any desire lines observable on Strava.

Dunmoyle 3,4 and 5 do not exhibit any indications of existing use for outdoor recreation, nor was any reported during the public consultation process

There is no existing signage, interpretation, wayfinding, or pre-visitor information for Dunmoyle Forest.

Figure 4 - Clockwise from top left: Informal roadside car parking; steel gated entry to Dunmoyle 1 at Todd's Leap Road; internal Forest roads in Dunmoyle 1; recreation desire lines in Dunmoyle 1

2.4.1 *Private Operator – Todd's Leap Activity Centre*

Todd's Leap Activity Centre[1], adjacent to Dunmoyle 1, offers an abundance of options for many forms of adventure activities ranging from archery and crate climbing to off-road motor vehicle driving. While the Centre's everyday activity offer does not routinely make use of Dunmoyle Forest, the owners have used Dunmoyle 1 for occasional, one-off activities under license with Forest Service. These have mainly consisted of 'mud-run' type events.

Notably, Todd's Leap Activity Centre offers outdoor learning opportunities aimed at discovery, experimentation, learning about nature, connecting with nature, and engaging in outdoor adventures, activities, and sports. They offer this though their offer of formal instructor-led sessions or a more informal approach to experiencing the natural world to gain a knowledge and understanding or appreciation of nature.

> *'Whether you're climbing to the top of a zip tower (or flying down), finding your way through the woodland and eco trails, pausing to listen to the streams, building your own outdoor den, or finding where animals inhabit during winter, you'll be laughing whilst slipping on rain soaked muddy pathways'.*
>
> - *ToddsLeap.com*

Figure 5 - Todd's Leap Activity Centre offer

[1] https://toddsleap.com/

3 Assessment of Need

3.1 Strategic Context

The development of outdoor recreation and local community facilities, in general, fulfils the aims and agendas of a variety of several government departments, agencies and strategic organisations. Outdoor Recreation NI has taken care to ensure that the consideration of any proposed developments at Dunmoyle aligns with these policies and strategies at a regional, sub-regional and local level.

Table 2 outlines strategies identified as having most strategic relevance this study to provide an indication of proposed works required to develop Dunmoyle Forest fully and appropriately as a local multi-activity hub. A detailed assessment of Strategic Context is presented in Appendix 1.

Table 2 - Relevant policies and strategies for Dunmoyle Forest

Theme	Policy / Strategy
Overarching Strategies	– Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 (NI Executive, 2016) – Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD 2010) – Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 (MUDC, 2020) – Our Community Plan: 10-year plan for Mid Ulster (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)
Health & Well-being	– A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022 – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)
Economy & Tourism	– Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	– Outdoor Recreation Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Parks and Play Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland (2014) – A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021) – Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025
Natural Environment & Heritage	– Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050 – NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 – Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2012) – Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006 – The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011) – Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021) – Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)

Equality	– Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006)
Community Planning	– Village Plans for Galbally & Cappagh, Ballygawley and Stewartstown.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of each of these documents, identifying their specific relevance to this Scoping Study and any proposed development at Dunmoyle.

In summary, this strategic review highlights the importance that the Northern Ireland Executive and government departments (at a regional level) and the Council (at a sub-regional level), place on outdoor recreation and access to forests and quality greenspace for the social, economic, physical, mental, and environmental well-being of our local communities.

Outdoor Recreation NI considers that proposed developments/enhancements within Dunmoyle offer a strong fit with each of the strategies outlined in Table 2, because the recommendations have the potential to:

- Contribute to, or kick-start in some cases, the regeneration of rural communities through the investment in and provision of quality outdoor activities and experiences.
- Improve the health (mental and physical) and wellbeing (including social inclusion) of local people and visitors through the development of sports, leisure, and recreation infrastructure within the area in order to provide formal and informal opportunities for people to engage in physical activity and to better access green spaces.
- Protect our natural environment through the development of environmentally sensitive trails and components with an educational dimension.
- Conserve and enjoy the unique built heritage of Mid Ulster.
- Contribute to the development of a strong and shared community by unlocking the potential of the leisure sector as an instrument for positive change.
- Encourage active citizenship through volunteering and social enterprise opportunities.
- Contribute to long-term economic growth through the development of the tourism industry of the Council area, offering a distinct and complementary sustainable outdoor recreation product to that is currently under-developed in the Council area.

3.2 Dunmoyle Public Survey

A Public survey was rolled out in March 2021, advertised within local press and across relevant social media outlets, to obtain public feedback and sentiment in a consultative manner. The survey remained open online and in hard copy format for a six-week period, concluding on 18th April 2021. Survey questions and the full suite of results is presented in Appendix 3. Output from the survey is used to support statements in Section 3.3-3.5 to inform the assessment of need for development at Dunmoyle Forest.

There were 495 responses to the public survey.

3.3 Local Access to Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

The public were asked 'besides Dunmoyle Forest, what sites/facilities do you use most regularly for outdoor recreation and outdoor leisure time?'. Responses dominantly indicated that the following sites are used on a regular basis:

- Favour Royal Forest (5 miles south of Ballygawley), offering several waymarked trails including a section of the Ulster Way, and built heritage experiences.
- Knockmany Forest (7 miles west of Ballygawley) provides walking and a built heritage experience.
- Gortin Glen (25 miles north of Ballygawley).
- Loughmacrory (13 miles north of Ballygawley).

Other reported sites visited include Gosford forest Park (27 miles), Parkanaur (9 miles), and Peatlands Park (25 miles).

There is limited mention of a known 1km long 'pavilion' walkway at the heart of Ballygawley village within survey responses, which could indicate that this facility is viewed by the public as one with different objectives to provision within forest-type environments.

> *"The development of Dunmoyle is a necessary asset to an ever-increasing populous town of Ballygawley. Given the amount of new developments in the area it is important to have sufficient recreation facilities in the area. Also, it would be a necessary counter balance for Knockmany which has become busy and over-run".*
>
> - *Survey Respondent*

The public survey further indicated that besides using Dunmoyle Forest, most respondents (72%) will walk/run/cycle/horse ride on local roads for outdoor recreation and outdoor leisure time.

Regionally relevant evidence exists[2] to support the need for improved ***local*** access to spaces for outdoor recreation in general, citing sustainability benefits, health, and wellbeing benefits, and improved social benefits. For example, Darkley Forest in Co. Armagh launched a 5km network of multi-use trails in 2018 located approximately 1km from a local village centre. Using a robust Social Return on Investment methodology to assess its impact, **the total social value generated over the lifespan (25 years) of Darkley Forest Community Trail will see a £10 return on investment for every £1 spent to create the trail.** Further detail on this specific study is included in Appendix 2. Although the setting and scale of Dunmoyle forest differs slightly from this Darkley example (Dunmoyle is further away from the closest village of Ballygawley and is a larger forest), its potential Strategic Return on Investment is assumed to be of a similar magnitude because:

- Dunmoyle is the closest forest site to Ballygawley, and one of the best potential sites for a Ballygawley 'community trail'.
- There is a perception of forest connectivity and adjacency as villagers do not have to enter the strategic road network to access Dunmoyle as they do to get to other nearby sites.
- An observed sense of community 'ownership' of Dunmoyle Forest exists, perhaps due to its adjacency to community assets such as Errigal Ciaran GAA club and Todd's Leap Activity Centre. Ballygawley residents will travel directly past Dunmoyle en-route to these community facilities.

Figure 6 - Social Return on Investment 1:10 for Darkley Forest, Co Armagh

A Village Plan for Ballygawley drafted by Mid Ulster District Council has identified several development opportunities relevant to outdoor recreation provision, summarised in Table 3. Notably, Dunmoyle forest boundary sits just outside the Ballygawley Ward to which the Plan applies, but the

[2] https://mcusercontent.com/4dc93b5ea821bcdbd4cfd748e/files/2e0da6ff-abb9-4f10-82a1-f33dcd77e4d3/People_Nature_and_Health_NI_March_2021_report_1_.pdf

document makes strong reference to an existing strategy to develop recreational and social use of forests.

Table 3 - Ballygawley Village Plan Outdoor Recreation Summary

	Key characteristics	Development opportunity
Ballygawley Village Plan	– Ballygawley ward is ranked 10-20% most deprived wards in NI – MUGA and play park (funded by RDP 2013-2015 programme) with walkway around pitches. – Poorly lit walkway around the pavilion – The Recreation Park is a good resource for the community. – Limited community integration	– Playground needs refurbished. – Potential to link in with surrounding villages. – Install lighting and drainage along pavilion walkway. – Forests Strategy: "That our forests will become key venues for outdoor recreation and tourism, offering opportunities to appreciate and enjoy biodiversity, and a wide choice of activities for an increasing number of visitors".

3.4 Dunmoyle Visitor Profile

Visitor data from counters or user intercept surveys does not currently exist for Dunmoyle Forest, reflecting that there is currently no formal provision at the site.

Of those who responded to the ORNI public survey, 62% said they have visited Dunmoyle Forest before. The reported frequency of visits across the past year is shown in Figure 7, with the highest proportion of respondents reporting that they visit just a few times in the year.

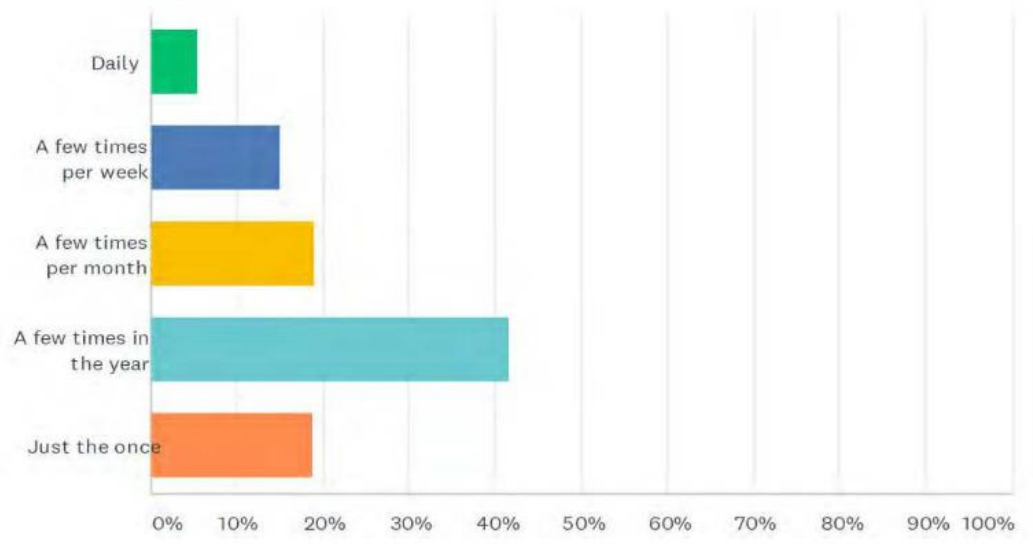


Figure 7 - Frequency of visits to Dunmoyle Forest in the past year

Walking or hiking is recorded as the recreation activity by far most undertaken within the Forest (81% of visits). Running makes up a further 5% , with the remaining small proportion reported as 'day out or picnic', cycling, observing wildlife, or 'other' at 4% (motorbiking features within 'other').

On a typical visit to Dunmoyle Forest, the majority of respondents report that they visit with family (60%). 16% visit on their own, and 1% visit as part of an organised group.

3.5 Community Demand

82% of survey respondents indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Dunmoyle Forest is 'very important' to the local community. Less than 1% of respondents indicated they did not see development as important for the local community.

> *In line with the GAA investment in sporting facilities in Dunmoyle, I feel investment in exercise outside of GAA sports would be beneficial to the community as a whole but also to bring others to this beautiful part of the country. I grew up running around the forests feeling like I was breaking the law and always being warned away. I would like my children to feel that the forests and local area are there to be explored and enjoyed.*
>
> - *Public survey respondent*

5% of survey respondents, representing 27 individuals, indicated that they have reduced/limited mobility or another disability.

There is a small proportion of demand for mountain biking access to the site.

A proportionally small demand for horse-riding trails has been indicated.

Five distinct key priorities have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from the public survey results, and are summarised in Figure 8.

Figure 8 - Priority Themes for Dunmoyle Forest Development from the Community Perspective

Survey respondents were asked how frequently they would envisage themselves visiting Dunmoyle Forest, should facilities be developed, with most responding that they would visit a few times per week, in contrast with the few times per year that people currently visit.

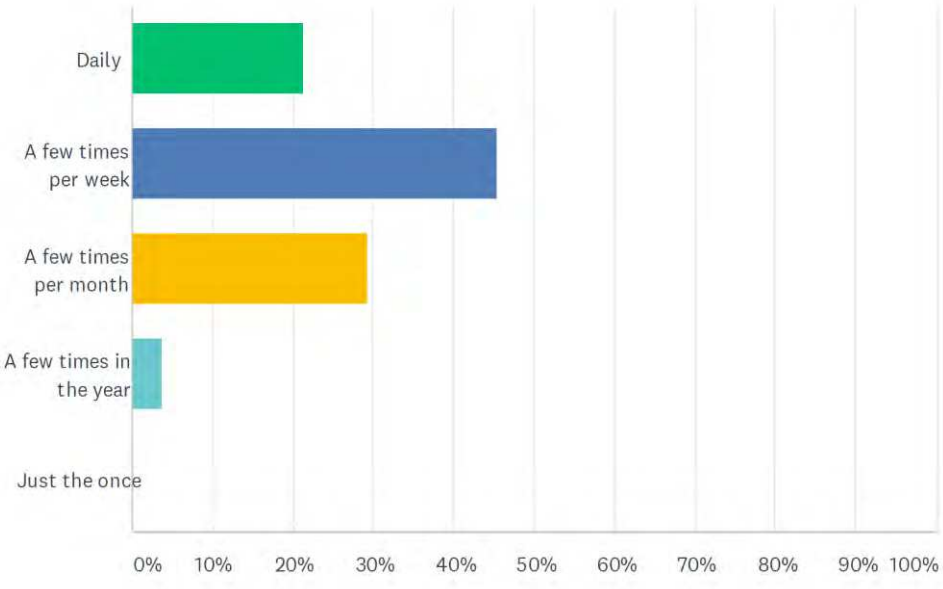


Figure 9 - Anticipated frequency of visits to Dunmoyle Forest should developments happen

3.6 Regional and International Tourism

For Mid Ulster, Tourism Northern Ireland Visitor Attitude Survey (2018)[3] reports a much higher proportion of leisure visitors from within Northern Ireland (NI), particularly day-trippers, compared with other Council Districts. Great Britain is the area's largest out of state source market, followed by North America and the Republic of Ireland but makes up a small proportion of visitors.

Visitors to Mid Ulster are most likely to be visiting to see a particular attraction, with historic monuments/sites and forest parks/gardens especially popular.

Note that statistics are not available to reflect a post-COVID-19 era but it is assumed that the proportion of leisure visitors from within NI is likely to have increased, with a more local catchment than ever. Sentiment from within the public survey indicates a strong desire for the development of Dunmoyle for a community-scale/local audience, but with good understanding of the benefits it could bring to the local economy from incidental passers-by.

> *I personally live in Dunmoyle near the forest and I think that this is a fantastic idea. It would certainly help bring more people to the area as well as get more people out for exercise.*
>
> - *Public survey respondent*

[3] Tourism Northern Ireland: Visitor Attitude Survey 2018, Cognisense Ltd. Base: n=138

4 Dunmoyle Forest SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Strong community support for site-appropriate development/enhancements
- Interest from Altamuskin Community Association and Ballygawley Area Development Association.
- Close to a strategic road network for regional/national visitors.
- Local quiet road access from nearby Ballygawley Village for local visitors.
- Good views across surrounding countryside.

Weaknesses

- Some areas of steep gradients in Dunmoyle 1 inhibit accessibility.
- Dunmoyle 2 is intersected into numerous smaller forest blocks by public roads.
- Dunmoyle 3,4, and 5 are small sites of limited recreational value.
- A sense of remoteness (from a social safety perspective).
- Forest management area spans the border between two council areas.

Opportunities

- Development of community trails network and associated visitor infrastructure.
- Increase community value and involvement.
- Increase educational value of site.
- Define and highlight the natural and cultural significances of the site through community engagement and interpretation.
- Contribute to regional tourism development, including directly or indirectly supporting private sector business development.
- Mutually beneficial provision between private operators and Mid Ulster District Council, as an economic generator.

Threats

- Beaureaucratic barriers associated with forestry management area spanning two council areas.
- 'Overdevelopment' would detract from visitor experience, conservation aims, and the will of the local community.
- Forestry operations to be considered.
- Reported anti-social behaviour, particularly fly-tipping and inappropriate use of motorised vehicles on the site.
- Poor public awareness of the site outside the area.
- Perceptions of preferential treatment relating to mutually beneficial third party visitor servicing arrangements.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Target Market and Segments

Mid Ulster District Council, though the commission of this scoping study, has already indicated an awareness of the need to develop Dunmoyle Forest as a local multi-activity hub; a site developed primarily for the local community.

It is clear through the work of this scoping study that the market need is indeed greatest within the local community, and that is where the greatest Social Return on Investment (SRoI) lies. Similar in scope and setting to Darkley forest in Co. Armagh (see Appendix 2), a SRoI of £10 for every £1 spent on developing trails and associated visitor services for the local community is very likely to be achieved.

Dunmoyle Forest is unlikely to be a major regional or international tourism generator. However, incidental tourism benefits are likely to arise by increasing the area's offer and so increasing the economic value of local providers of accommodation, leisure activities, food, etc.

Existing and anticipated use of the site indicates that the largest user segment is **local people visiting a few times per week for walking, engaging with nature, and enjoying nature and the landscape**. This includes:

- Family groups and lone parents with children.
- Friends meeting up.
- People of retirement age.
- Regular dog walkers.
- People enjoying purposeful exercise e.g. running or walking.
- Sports clubs and groups (for training)
- Education groups
- Activity providers for organised events

Through consultation across various areas within MUDC council area it is also apparent there is a general demand and need for safe off-road areas for equestrian activity. Dunmoyle Forest has been assessed as having a landscape that may be suited to this type of activity. Therefore, an additional target user segment includes:

- Equestrian activity on multi-use trails (hacking facility), including individuals and family groups on horses, or horse-trekking experience providers.

5.2 Engaging the Local Community

Engagement with nearby community groups including Ballygawley Area Development Association, Altamuskin Community Association, local schools, GAA club, and local business providers should continue throughout any phase of development/enhancement of the Forest. The local community will be a significant asset to the good custodianship of the Forest and should be further engaged to explore the opportunity to set agreed parameters to help manage and maintain the site, or assist with visitor provision, through a voluntary or SLA arrangement with the Council.

5.3 Management Model

It is recommended that MUDC enter into a license agreement with Forest Service Northern Ireland for use of the site for activities outlined in this study. MUDC should further enter into lease agreements with FSNI for areas of car parking and visitor servicing.

MUDC should adopt an overall custodianship and regular management schedule for visitor servicing, but this could be supplemented through SLA arrangements with local community groups or economic providers within the vicinity of the Forest.

5.4 Dunmoyle Development Proposals

Development proposals within this report are recommended for Dunmoyle 1 only, because:

- Dunmoyle 2, while covering a large area, is sub-divided into smaller forest blocks by rural roads, limiting its coherence as a site with good outdoor recreation potential.
- It is acknowledged that there are some heritage features of interest within Dunmoyle 2 associated with the former Dunmoyle House. However, these are best placed in the context of a wider heritage experience for the entire Dunmoyle area, going beyond the Forest extents.
- Dunmoyle 2 sits entirely within Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Area, so MUDC-led developments are not feasible in this forest block.
- Dunmoyle 3, 4, and 5 are small and of geometries such that a coherent outdoor recreation experience is of low value.

An Overview Map of development proposals is shown in Figure 11.

Proposals focus on the establishment of visitor infrastructure across a two delivery phases (following a period of planning), offering the most sustainable and site-sympathetic solution to satisfy community need in a way that complements and enhances the offering of local economic providers.

5.4.1 Trails

A new multi-use trail network is recommended for Dunmoyle 1. The trail network would comprise four trails in total, in a stacked loop system, totalling c.7.5km. The trail system would be comprised of a mixture of new build trail and use of existing forest roads, and be designed and built with the following users in mind –

- Walkers
- Runners
- Horse riders (Trail 4 only)

There are two proposed trailheads; one at the Todd's Leap Road side of Dunmoyle 1, and one at the Greenhill Road side, closest to Ballygawley.

See Figure 11 for a map of the trails.

Trail 1 Forest Trail: A 1.4km Forest Trail largely follows existing desire lines in a loop, starting from a trailhead at the site's western side close to Todd's Leap at a proposed car park. Terrain can be steep in places but should be developed step-free, with gradients overcome using trail switchbacks to maximise accessibility.

Trail 2 Ravine Trail: A 2km 'Ravine Trail' begins on the Forest Trail but diverges off to offer an extended loop option taking in a more rugged and steep terrain using construction methods that include stone steps to overcome gradients. The Ravine Walk takes visitors along a scenic small, steep-sided valley with a mix of woodland features.

Trail 3 Viewpoint Trail: An 'out and back' picnic trail, close to the trailhead at the Todd's Leap Road entrance, bringing people to an elevated viewpoint close to their vehicles.

Trail 4 Dunmoyle Trail: A further 5km trail (option of additional 1.5m using forest roads) offering an extended walk and equestrian hack loop meanders through the elevated section of the Forest, linking to Greenhill Road (Ballygawley connection).

Figure 10 - Clockwise from top left: 'Ravine Trail'; 'Ravine Trail existing desire line; existing forest road; view across surrounding countryside from proposed picnic trail.

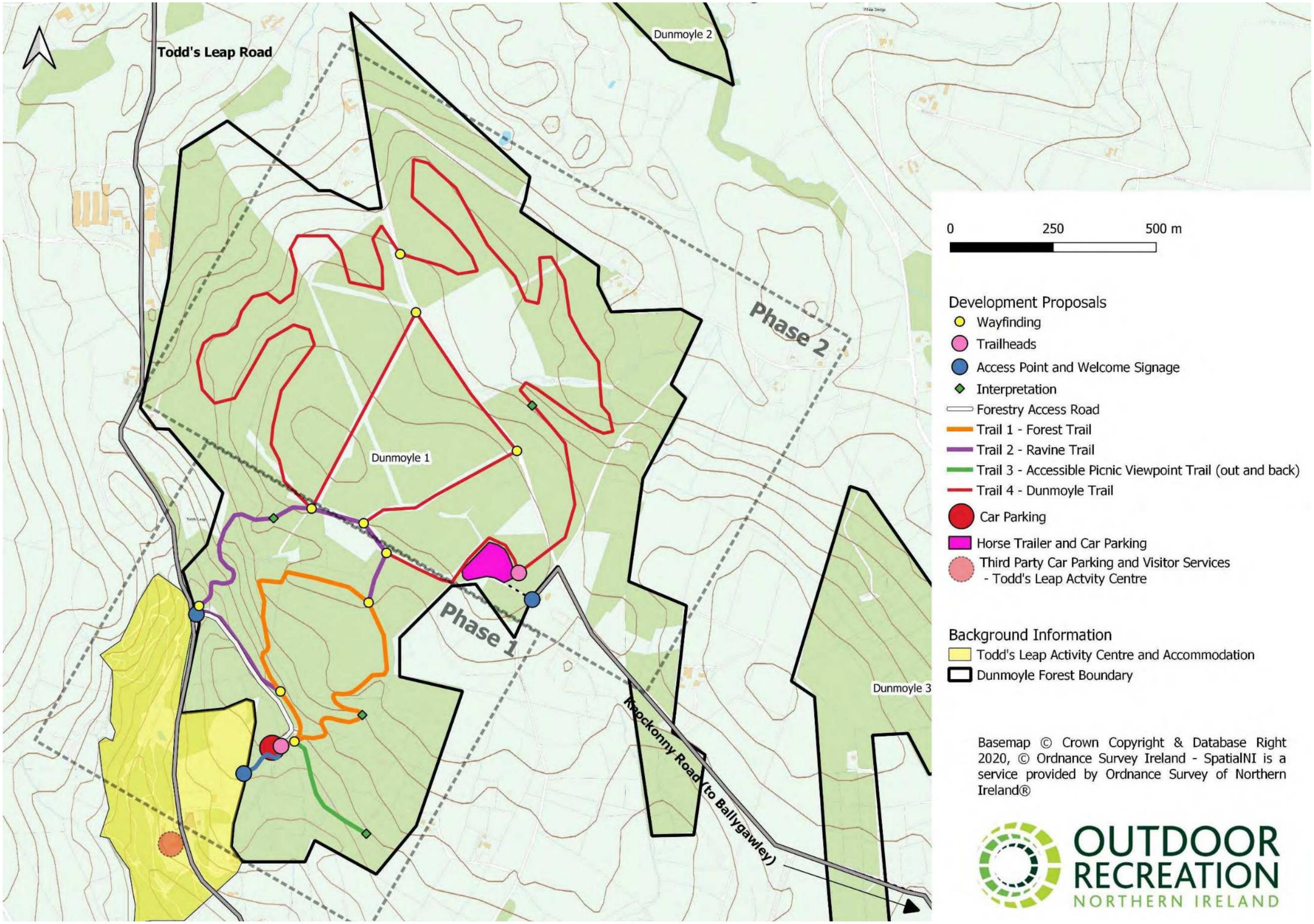


Figure 11 - Dunmoyle Forest Development Proposals

5.4.2 Car Parking and Site Entry

Formalisation of 3 new access points, with car parking, are proposed at the following locations:

1. Vehicular entry via Todd's Leap Road, just north of Todd's Leap Activity Centre. This makes use of an existing forestry entry point with gravel lane and steel gate entry. This entry is suitable for cars only (not horse trailers), as Trails 1 and 2 starting from this trailhead are not suitable for equestrian activity. An existing area of hardstanding is of an appropriate scale for a car parking.
2. Vehicular entry (cars and horse trailer parking) via Greenhill Road, as this offers local Ballygawley (and surrounding) residents a more coherent entry point from the village without having to enter the strategic road network and is 'en-route' to other community locations such as Errigal Ciaran GAA grounds.
3. Pedestrian entry directly from Todd's Leap Activity Centre, close to their accommodation, merging with entry point 1 above. Todd's Leap Activity Centre also offers car parking and other visitor servicing such as toilets and a café.

Figure 12 - forest entry point and area proposed for car parking at Todd's Leap Road.

5.4.3 Interpretation, Creating a Sense of 'Welcome', and Play

The Association for Heritage Interpretation defines interpretation as 'a communication process that helps people make sense of, and understand more about, a site, collection or event'. It can:

- Bring meaning to a cultural or environmental resource, enhancing visitor appreciation and promoting better understanding. As a result, visitors are more likely to care for what they identify as a precious resource.
- Enhance the visitor experience, resulting in longer stays and repeat visits. This will lead to increased income and create employment opportunities.
- Enable communities to better understand their heritage, and to express their own ideas and feelings about their home area. As a result, individuals may identify with lost values inherent in their culture.

It has also been described by Freeman Tilden, one of the founders of modern interpretation, as 'an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships using original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information'.

Dunmoyle Forest should be subject to a whole-site Brand and Signage Plan and Interpretation Framework, the implementation of which should be delivered across all phases of development with a key objective of creating a sense of welcome to the Forest and setting the tone for its responsible use. These should take measured account of the objectives of any third-party providers.

All trail and site furniture including wayfinding, interpretation, bench seating and picnic benches, should fall within one coherent site brand image that ties the whole experience together.

The public indicated a demand for play at the forest. However, forest development proposals have taken account of the wider community context and as a result bespoke play is not recommended as part of this package of works, because:

- Ballygawley Village Plan indicates a demand for improved play within the village, at a site that is likely to be more accessible by all from within the village community.
- Forest developments should not in any way conflict with/compete with the offer of existing economic operators, e.g. Todd's Leap Activity Centre.

5.5 Summary and Outline Cost of Development Proposals

Visitor infrastructure proposals are presented in Figure 11. A Phased Implementation Plan showing a breakdown of costs is provided in Section 6 of this Scoping Study report.

Planning Phase up to 2023	Delivery Phase 1 2023-2024	Delivery Phase 2 2024-2026
•Visitor infrastructure planning and design actions = **£70,000**	•Visitor infrastructure delivery = **£157,300**	•Visitor infrastructure delivery = **£249,200**
•Management actions initial outlay = **£10,000**	•Management Actions = **£20,000 P/A**	•Management Actions increasing to = **£25,000 P/A**

Visitor Infrastructure Development Costs Total	£476,500
Management costs over 25 yrs.	£625,000
Estimated Social Return on Investment over 25 yrs[4]	£11m

[4] Based on anticipated 1:10 SRoI modelled for Darkley Forest, Co. Armagh – See Appendix 2

6 Dunmoyle Phased Implementation Plan

VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE ACTIONS & COSTS

CATEGORY		Item	PLANNING PHASE 2021 - 2024	DELIVERY PHASE 1 2023-2024	DELIVERY PHASE 2 2024-2026
Brand and Interpretation	1	External Navigation Signage	Brand and Signage Strategy Interpretation Framework The above may be applied across multiple forest sites as a value-for-money exercise and to deliver consistency across the Council area. They must consider the proposed two-phased development and delivery, and should identify opportunities for community co-curation. To align with respective infrastructure items and proposed phases. £20,000	Design, production, and installation x 2 £4,000	
	2	Welcome Signage		Design, production, and installation x 3 £5,000	
	3	Interpretation/ Viewpoint Panels		Design, production, and installation £5,000	
Trail Network	4	Visitor Counter	Professional fees for advancements of development concept for new build trails: - Refined cost estimate - Application for funding - Commissioning of ecological, heritage impact surveys. - Planning Approvals - Trail prescription for contract specification - Contractor procurement £30,000	Installation x 2 £6,000	Installation x 1 £3,000
	5	Trailhead Panel		Design, production, and installation x 2 £4,000	
	6	Trail 1: Forest Trail		New Build Trail Cat 3 Multi-use trail 1500m (1.5m width) x £30/m £45,000	
	7	Trail 2: Ravine Trail		New Build Trail Cat 4 1000m additional to forest trail: - Cat 3 700m x £40/m - Stone steps/stone pitching 300m x £80/m £52,000	
		Trail 3: Accessible Viewpoint Trail		New Build Cat 1 accessible gravel trail 300m x £30/m plus gravel pads for trail furniture. £10,000	
		Trail 4: Dunmoyle Trail			New Build Cat 2/3 Multi-use trail - Trail surface 5000m x £40/m – priced for 2m width and possible peat deposits. £200,000
	8	Wayfinding		Post & Disc Est. 10No @ £150 £1,500	Post & Disc Est. 10No @ £150 £1,500
Trailhead Infrastructure and Visitor Services	10	Car Parking	Professional fees for: - Proposed layout plans for parking areas x 2 - Planning approvals - Site ground investigation to inform construction build-up of Greenhill Road parking due to possibility of peat deposits, and to refine costs. £20,000	Todd's Leap Road Forest car parking x 15 car spaces, gravel surface, upgrade existing space = £20,000. £20,000	Greenhill Road car and horse trailer parking x 15 car spaces, 3 horse trailer spaces & turning room. New build gravel surface = £45,000 £45,000

	13	Picnic Tables		4No. wooden picnic tables @ £600 each picnic trail £2,400	2No wooden picnic tables @ £600 each Greenhill Road entrance £1,200
	14	Bench Seating		8No. wooden benches throughout trail system @ £300 each £2,400	
		Phased Totals	**£70,000**	**£157,300**	**£249,200**
				Total	**£476,500**

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS & COSTS

CATEGORY	Item		**PLANNING PHASE**	**DELIVERY PHASE 1 2023-2024**	**DELIVERY PHASE 2 2024-2026**
Third Party Agreements	1	Forest Service	Council to agree: Lease or license agreements to cover the accesspoints, access roads and trails and car parking areas and trails Cost: Nominal		
	2	Private Operators	- Further engagement with any third party providers to discuss partnership opportunities.	SLA and/or volunteer agreement for: • Waste/Litter. • Opening/closing gates. • Car parking and other visitor service facilities. £10,000 P/A	Continued from Phase 1 £10,000 P/A
Community Engagement	3		- Engage local community groups - Press releases to announce planned investment.	Launch event and community volunteer/'Friends of the Forest' recruitment.	
Future Site Management	4	Site Management Plan	Develop a Management Plan that clearly outlines what all party's roles and responsibilities will be, to be agreed with all parties in advance of forest developments. £10,000	Council implementation of Site Management Plan £10,000 P/A	Council implementation of Site Management Plan increasing to £15,000P/A
		Phased Totals	**£10,000**	**£20,000 P/A**	**£25,000 P/A**

7 Funding Streams

Several funding options may be available for a project of this kind, including the following:

Initiatives to Tackle Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

DAERA TRPSI fund has the potential be a good fit for developments such as those proposed within this Scoping Study.

For example, over the past 4 years DAERA has committed £5.7m from its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme to 17 Forest Park Enhancement Schemes. This significant financial commitment has levered in a further £3.9m through partnerships formed with Councils and other grant aiding bodies. These projects contribute to the health and well-being of the residents of the surrounding areas to the Forests/Trails by developing safe, way marked, off-road cycling/walking trails that will accommodate a wide range of users and helping locals and visitors alike to stay healthy and happy, both physically and mentally.

Successful application for funding would be dependent on MUDC securing match funding of (currently 15% for 2021/22 funding programme).

Further detailed information can be found at https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/initiatives-tackle-rural-poverty-and-social-isolation-trpsi

DAERA Environmental Challenge Fund

DAERA's Environmental Challenge Fund aims to support projects that will deliver outcomes in at least one of their strategic priorities, including Implementation of actions that are essential to delivery of DAERA's strategic outdoor recreation priorities, to increase sustainable public enjoyment and understanding of land and seascapes including: a) Delivery of core path networks and strategic routes, primarily in partnership with councils; b) Promotion of environmental responsibility and good practice; c) Projects on NIEA sites, particularly for those for whom access is currently difficult.

Overarching factors that will be taken into account in shortlisting and allocating funding to projects include;

- Scale
- Evidence of need
- Environmental impacts
- Value for money (including match funding options)

- Sustainable impact

Further detailed information can be found at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/ef-environment-fund-2019-22-overarching-criteria-environmental-impact

National Lottery Heritage Fund

National Lottery funds projects that connect people and communities to the national, regional, and local heritage of the UK. They provide different levels of funding to heritage of all shapes and sizes, with grants ranging from £3,000 up to millions of pounds. The Heritage Fund prioritises heritage projects that meet six of their outcomes as follows:

- A wider range of people will be involved in heritage.
- The funded organisation will be more resilient.
- People will have greater wellbeing.
- People will have developed skills.
- The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit.
- The local economy will be boosted.

All projects are also expected to demonstrate that they are building long-term environmental sustainability and inclusion into their plans.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Strategic Context (Detailed Version)

The development of outdoor recreation and the supporting local community facilities fulfils the aims and agendas of a variety of several government departments, agencies, and strategic organisations. Outdoor Recreation NI has taken care to ensure that the proposed development(s) outlined in this Scoping Study, aligns with these policies and strategies at a regional and local level.

The following strategies and policies were identified as having most strategic relevance.

Theme	Policy / Strategy
Overarching Strategies	– Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 (NI Executive, 2016) – Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD 2010) – Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 (MUDC, 2020) – Our Community Plan: 10 year plan for Mid Ulster (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)
Health & Well-being	– A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022 – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)
Economy & Tourism	– Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	– Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland (2014) – A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021) – Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025 – Exercise, Explore, Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways (DfI, 2016) – Mountain Bike Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014 –2024 – Outdoor Recreation Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Parks and Play Strategy (MUDC, 2021)
Natural Environment & Heritage	– Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050 – NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 – Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2012) – Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006 – The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011) – Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021) – Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)
Equality	– Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006)

Community Planning	– Village Plans for Cappagh & Galbally, Ballygawley and Stewartstown

Table 4: Relevant Strategies and Policies for this study

The following is a brief synopsis of each document considered in the Strategic Context to be of significance in terms of how the proposed development and recommendations made in this Scoping Study do align to and/or could contribute towards the delivery of key regional and sub-regional policies and strategies.

Regional Strategic Context
Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016) The draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework sets out the aspirations of the Executive for society and provides a strategic context for other key strategies and policies. The PfG was also to shape the development of the Executive's budget over the course of the current mandate and provide a mechanism for ensuring funds are best directed to where they can contribute most. The Framework contains 14 strategic outcomes and connect to every aspect of government, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and building confident and peaceful communities. The following outcomes are of relevance to this Scoping Study: – Outcome 2: Live and work sustainably – protecting the environment; – Outcome 4: Enjoy long, healthy, active lives; – Outcome 12: Create a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest; – Outcome 14: Give our children and young people the best start in life. These outcomes are supported by 42 indicators, with each indicator accompanied by a measure which is largely derived from existing statistics to monitor performance. The following indicators are of relevance to this Scoping Study: – Indicator 2: Reduce health inequality – Indicator 3: Increase healthy life expectancy – Indicator 6: Improve mental health – Indicator 30: Improve our attractiveness as a destination and our international reputation. Key to the success of the PfG is the ability of Departments to work collaboratively with not only themselves but also with other public bodies and the voluntary and private sector.

Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD, 2010)

This Strategy is designed to deliver the spatial aspects of the PfG and is intended to inform the spatial aspects of other Government Departments, Councils' decisions and investments, and guide investment by the private sector. Relevant aims of the Strategy for this Scoping Study include:

- Support towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential
- Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities
- Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information
- Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake

The Strategy highlights the importance of improving facilities for walking and cycling as part of infrastructure investment.

A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022

Obesity is a major public health challenge facing Northern Ireland and this Framework aims to empower people to make healthier choices by creating an environment that supports a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet. It recognises the factors that underpin weight gain are complex and cover factors such as social and individual psychology, physiology, food consumption, individual activity and built environment.

In addition, many wider determinants of poor health such as health inequalities, poverty, mental health, deprivation and structural barriers also play an important role. Of relevance, the Strategy outlines how environmental factors affect choices and behaviours, for example lack of access to green space reduces physical activity opportunities. Other barriers include poor urban environments, limited safe play facilities and community safety, and sedentary lifestyles.

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)

The new Health Strategy recognises that the Health Service faces growing demand driven by successful interventions and improving life expectancy. As a result, there is a need to move beyond managing illness and instead ensure that people are supported to live well; physically, mentally and emotionally. To do this, the onus is on Departments and Agencies to work together to deliver the best outcomes.

Core to PfG Outcome 4 of people leading long, healthy and active lives is improving people's health. The Strategy outlines a future in which people are supported to keep well with the information, education and support to make informed choices and take control of their own health and wellbeing. This requires the circumstances for people to stay healthy, well, safe and independent in the first place. There is a need to:

- Build capacity in communities and in prevention to reduce inequalities and ensure the next generation is healthy and well
- Work with communities to support them to develop their strengths and use their assets to tackle the determinants of health and social wellbeing
- Tap into the innovative ideas and energies in communities themselves, and in the community and voluntary sectors.
- In all communities, every child and young person should have the best start in life, people should have a decent standard of living, and all citizens should be supported to make healthier and better-informed life choices
- Work alongside all communities to enable social inclusion and tackle health inequalities and the underlying contributory factors including poverty, housing, education and crime.

Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland (2014)

Commissioned by Sport NI and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), this Action Plan highlights the importance of making the outdoors accessible to everyone and the opportunities that there are to participate, not only in rural areas but also in the urban fringes.

Due to the recognition that access to green space enhances physical health and mental wellbeing, and addresses issues associated with social exclusion, rural and urban deprivation and community cohesion, the vision of the Action Plan is "a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland".

It provides key recommendations for actions and challenges that need to be addressed to make Northern Ireland a place where outdoor recreation can deliver:

- Healthy active lifestyles for local people from all communities;
- Economic growth through encouraging visitors to come and enjoy the outdoors; and
- Protection of landscapes and ecosystems for future generations.

To achieve this vision, the aim is for Northern Ireland to be a place where:

- There are increasing opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone in a broad range of outdoor recreation activities;
- There are accompanying benefits to local communities, especially those who are socially excluded in terms of health, social inclusion, cohesion, equality, and economic development;
- People enjoy the outdoors and show a high degree of responsibility for themselves, towards others and towards the environment they are using, and play their part in maintaining, supporting and enhancing our environment and heritage.

A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021)

As of April 2021, the DfC was still in the process of public consultation for this new, 10-year draft strategy. Having been drafted during the Covid-19 pandemic period, this Strategy specifically highlights that sport and physical activity and the associated benefits that these bring, will play an important role in Northern Ireland's recovery.

The draft Strategy now defines 'sport' in a broader context, as 'all forms of physical activity which, through casual organised participation, aimed at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels'.

The proposed Vision is 'Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity leads to an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence'.

To deliver this vision, six Key Themes have been identified. Goals relating to the achievement of each theme, that are relevant to this Study have been highlighted in bold and listed:

1. Recovery from the impact of the pandemic on sport and physical activity
2. **Promoting participation, inclusion and community engagement**
    - Improved physical and mental health and well being
    - Sport and physical activity is inclusive, safe, diverse, shared and offers equality of opportunity to participate for all
    - Children and young people are given the best start in life through sport and physical activity opportunities
3. Promoting excellence in sport
4. **The importance of partnership and integration**
    - Better outcomes for communities through a collaborative approach to the development of sport and physical activity
    - Outcomes for communities are improved by a focus on co-design and co-production
    - Strengthened sports and physical activity partnerships at local, regional, national and international level
    - An increasing proportion of our facilities are shared across sports, clubs, schools and communities
5. **Providing inclusive and shared spaces**
    - Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality sports and physical activity infrastructure
    - A safe, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional sports and physical activity infrastructure
    - Our sports and physical activity sector and infrastructure are enabled by innovative and emerging technologies
6. Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity

Underpinning these Key Themes and their goals, are three cross-cutting principles:

- **Developing inclusive, shared communities**
- Developing capacity and governance in sport and physical activity
- Developing national and international linkages

Those which are of relevance to this Scoping Study are highlighted in **bold.**

Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025

The vision of the Sport NI Plan is the same as the new, draft Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for NI: '...a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport'. Sport NI's mission statement is: "We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2025, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all".

To achieve this, Sport NI has identified two strategic outcomes over the next 5 years:

- Outcome 1: People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and recreation
- Outcome 2 NI Athletes among the best in the world

Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050

This Plan frames DAERA's strategic priorities for the next 30 years. DAERA's vision and purpose, outlined in this Plan, is "Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone".

The Plan states that a "sustainable approach creates a healthy environment to live in, which will underpin a healthy population and stimulate healthy economic rural communities" therefore acknowledging the link between a healthy environment, access to it and the health and well-being of communities. It states that "a healthy population depends on access to a healthy diet and a healthy, enjoyable environment" and "enhancing our environment matters, as a healthy environment is interlinked with our health and wellbeing".

In the Plan, the Natural Environment is one of four strategic priorities – 'to protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all'. Directly related to achieving this is one of the Plan's ten goals –

"9. Health and wellbeing for All - we will focus on using and enhancing our natural resources to improve the health and wellbeing for all of Northern Ireland. We will encourage people to spend more time in nature. We will work collectively to develop and showcase the tourism opportunities of our wonderful environment and NI's world class food and drink production".

The Plan highlights that DAERA has a responsibility for 113,000 Ha forests which represents an obvious asset and resource to achieving the above.

NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022

The priorities for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency as outlined in this document, under the following themes, includes:

Healthy Natural Environment

- A well-functioning network of protected sites and areas including enhancing the management of designated sites to benefit site features and protecting and conserving the historic environment
- Sustainable, diverse landscapes with rich biodiversity which are resilient to change

People and Places

- Extensive opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the natural and built environment
- Common understanding of the role the environment plays in the health and wellbeing of people
- Greater business and community involvement in the environment including through volunteering and community stakeholder groups
- The natural environment and built heritage assets meet the needs of society and communities

Sustainable Economic Growth

- The value of natural and built assets to the economy is fully realised
- The best outcome for the environment is obtained whilst minimising cost to business.

Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2013)

This study highlighted findings from a research study that set out proposals for tourism development in Northern Ireland's forests. The study was set in the context of the Forest Service's policy to realise further opportunities for the recreational and social use of forests, in partnership with local authorities and other recreation providers.

The study established a vision for forest related tourism which was to "use the forest estate to deliver an exceptional visitor and short break experience for all, which will increase the economic impact of forest related tourism in Northern Ireland."

To achieve this vision, the study set out the following supporting aims:

- To increase the economic impact of forest related tourism
- To encourage visitor experience and product development opportunities that will provide an exceptional visitor experience in line with the Northern Ireland brand principles
- To promote and enable effective partnership working.

Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006

This Strategy aims to tackle issues of poverty and social exclusion by targeting efforts and available resources on people, groups and areas in greatest social need. The priorities identified include:

- Eliminating poverty
- Eliminating social exclusion
- Tackling area-based deprivation
- Eliminating poverty from rural areas
- Tackling health inequalities
- Tackling cycles of deprivation

The goals and targets set out include the following:

- Allowing all children and young people to experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential
- Ensuring that everyone has the potential to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

The development of community access to green space and outdoor recreation provision across the Mid Ulster forests aligns with this Strategy and has the potential to contribute to eliminating social exclusion and poverty and tackling health inequalities.

The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011)

The Northern Ireland Executive's vision for volunteering is a society where:
- Everyone values the vital contribution that volunteers make to community wellbeing
- Everyone has the opportunity to have a meaningful and enjoyable volunteering experience.

The growth and development of outdoor recreation across three forest areas provides a unique opportunity for people to volunteer and become involved in their local communities.

Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021)

NI Water's Strategy have identified 5 strategic priorities – Economy ….

Much of the Strategy is heavily centred on optimising the operation, management and impacts of the water supply business of NI Water. However, under strategic priority 'Economy' there are 3 objectives:

- Funding world class economic infrastructure
- Efficient and affordable services
- Sustainable growth

Under the 'sustainable growth' and 'nature' priorities NI Water acknowledge that they are one of Northern Ireland's largest public landowners and therefore have a role to pay in tourism. One of the actions is to "seek opportunities to utilise our catchment land, raw water reservoirs and assets to maximise the community benefits, working closely with local councils'.

Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)

This 2-year policy provides a framework defining what access is permitted to NI Water owned lands and waters, and how access arrangements for recreational use will be communicated, controlled and governed.

Key factors in determining access for recreational use are summarised here as risk, cost, sustainability, biodiversity and conservation and protection of water quality and supply.

Sub-Regional Strategic Context

Consideration is also given to relevant Council strategic documents and the positive benefits and impact outdoor recreation can make on the objectives of the Council's draft Local Development Plan, Corporate Plan, Community Plan, Economic Development Plan and Tourism Strategy.

Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024

This Plan has been influenced by the Council's Community Plan, Economic Development Plan, Tourism Strategy and draft Local Development Plan.

The Plan has 5 strategic themes, of which 'Environment' and 'Communities' are two. In addition, 'addressing rurality' and 'working collaboratively across public, private, community and voluntary sectors to achieve shared objectives' are identified as cross-cutting corporate commitments. Commitment which the recommendations for development in this Scoping Study fulfil.

Within the Environment theme, 1 of 4 priorities is to 'increase the protection of, access to and development of our heritage assets, both natural and man-made, including our strategic visitor sites'.

Within the Communities theme, the Council aim to 'make a tangible difference to the health and well-being of local people, and contribute to the creation of viable and vibrant, safe and prosperous communities'. Accessibility to the outdoors and access to opportunities to adopt a more active lifestyle in a greater range of settings are highlighted, as well as the 'benefits of the outdoors for physical and mental health'. Priorities for the Council under this theme are to –

- Open up and sustain accessible pathways to participation in leisure and outdoor recreation activities which enhance health and well-being by providing high quality, accessible facilities in local communities and through programmes tailored to community need
- Continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests and green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking and cycling trails, and water recreation
- Along with our community planning partners, work to address poverty and deprivation across the Mid Ulster region
- We will continue, through our community development programmes, grant aid schemes and our partnership-working, to support local communities and to build capacity in the community and voluntary sector

Our Community Plan: 10-year Plan for Mid Ulster (2017)

The Council has identified 15 outcomes structured under 5 themes to deliver the Community Plan. This Scoping Study fits into 5 themes and 11 of the 15 outcomes, as outlined below:

Theme	Outcomes

Economic Growth	– We prosper in a stronger and more competitive economy – We have more people working in a diverse economy – Our towns and villages are vibrant and competitive *Success Indicators* – *Improved attractiveness as a tourism destination* – *Increased no. of social economy businesses* – *Increased performance of our towns and villages*
Infrastructure	– We increasingly value our environment and enhance it for our children *Success Indicators* – *Increased environmental sustainability* – *Increased protection, access and enjoyment of our natural and built heritage*
Education and Skills	– We give our children and young people the best chance in life – We are more entrepreneurial, innovative and creative *Success Indicators* – *Increased number of schools which have community access* – *Improved chid development* – *Improved mental health and resilience in children and young people* – *Increased innovation in our economy*
Health and Wellbeing	– We are better enabled to live longer, healthier and more active lives – We care for those most vulnerable and in need *Success Indicators* – *Increased healthy life expectancy* – *Improved mental health* – *Increased quality of life and opportunities for people with disabilities* – *Reduced health inequality* – *Improved child development*
Vibrant and Safe Communities	– We are a safer community – We have a greater value and respect for diversity – We have stronger communities with less disadvantage and poverty

Success Indicators

- *Reduced anti-social behaviour*
- *Increased respect for each other*
- *Increased shared space*
- *Reduced level of deprivation and poverty*
- *Greater coordination of community delivery*
- *Increased community capacity, volunteering and delivery*
- *Increased private led community initiatives*

Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)

As of May 2021, the final Plan is yet to be published. This spatial plan will set out the Council's vision for planning land use up until 2030, incorporating housing, infrastructure, transport and relevant to this project – tourism, community and recreational facilities.

Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017)

Key priorities for growing tourism in Mid Ulster are:

- History and Heritage
- Outdoor Activities
- Seamus Heaney

The latter 2 propositions are described as 'significant and prominent, but so far undeveloped'. Current tourism is largely based on rural and outdoor activities and tied into the area's natural attributes - the recommendations in this Scoping Study fit this current profile.

Key issues for the growth and management of tourism that have implications for this scoping study are –

- While day visitation to the area is important, the reasons to visit are not well articulated
- The visibility of Mid Ulster's natural heritage, outdoor activity and historic and archaeological heritage are lost partly because they are spread across the area and also because these attributes haven't been pulled together into distinct propositions for visitors.

- There is a weak accommodation base, exacerbated by variable occupancy levels (and thus viability) throughout the year
- The SME and microbusiness characteristics of the tourism sector in the area exacerbate challenges of communicating and engaging with the trade and developing collaborative projects across the trade
- The geographical dispersal of the area – in terms of scale, distance and character – suggests a challenge in creating both a tourism identity for Mid Ulster itself and for a hierarchy of individual communities that have identities and propositions that could encourage visitation
- Continuing constraints in countryside access limit the opportunity to exploit the natural environment to its full potential for outdoor activities

Opportunities for the future that have been identified and align with the recommendations in this Scoping Study are –

- The opportunity exists to exploit Mid Ulster's central location within NI and improving access (completion of the Magherafelt Bypass; A6 dualling; Randalstown (M22) to Castledawson). The central location of Mid Ulster could also boost camping and caravanning based in the area. However, historically strong dependence on the NI domestic day and overnight market for visitation highlights the need to encourage more overnight stays from out-of-state markets and their greater expenditure.
- Outdoor tourism sites and experiences, including the presence of very successful outdoor activity providers, suggest that the outdoor tourism product can be exploited further right across the area
- An invigorated district wide programme of marketing and promotion is achievable, including events, enhanced signage, technology use, visitor information services and limiting print production.

To grow tourism in Mid Ulster there are 5 aims and objectives that actions and development should be centred on –

1. To develop three strategic tourism strands, around which the attributes of the area and the industry can cluster and to attract visitors –
   i. Seamus Heaney
   ii. Archaeological sites, history and heritage
   iii. Outdoor Activities
2. To grow tourism as an economic driver for Mid Ulster
3. To manage the destination and create the preconditions for successful tourism
4. To profile and promote Mid Ulster to enhance the visibility of the area and boost visitation and spend
5. To support the dispersal of visitor spend and investment across the area

This Scoping Study and any subsequent development of the recommendations can be tied to the 'Heritage and History' and 'Outdoor Activities' themes.

For Heritage & History, the Plan highlights that Mid Ulster is the only place to appreciate the history and importance of the O'Neill family – there are many features and remnants of the O'Neills in Cappagh area. Dunmoyle is also rich in heritage features and Drumcairne is a historic garden and demesne.

Walking, cycling, mountain biking, canoeing, angling, multi-adventure centres (e.g. Todds Leap, and Jungle NI) plus a number of activity tourism providers in the area are key propositions for outdoor activities in Mid Ulster. Horse riding and golf add further value to the product offering and visitor experience. Except for golf, all of the forests are well positioned and have the potential to provide some or all of these activities.

Lastly, for the tourism vision Mid Ulster to be achieved, the Plan highlights the importance of local communities buying into the wider 'Mid Ulster identity'. It also highlights the importance of public realm quality, quality standards, food availability, access to information, etc within each community to ensure the visitor experience is positive and consistent across the area.

Mid Ulster Economic Development DRAFT Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)

The Council's previous Economic Development Plan expired in 2020. The purpose of this Draft Action Plan is to 'focus on the activity and actions that support businesses, high streets and economic recovery' in response to and amidst the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

The Draft Action Plan has multiple themes all aimed at driving recovery during the pandemic and building the foundations for sustained recovery.

Themes and outputs relevant to this study are –

Theme	Output
Physical Regeneration / improving Infrastructure	Rural Regeneration Projects – work in partnership with RDP to deliver Village Regeneration projects in Mid Ulster over 4 years
Strategic Projects	Delivery of Mid South West (MSW) Regional Economic Strategy – Develop a range of collaborative economic development projects as part of Growth Deal, e.g. Developing the O'Neill tourism proposition
Rural Business support / attracting investment	Micro business development scheme (TRPSI) – small capital grants for business development activities
Mid Ulster LEADER RDP Programme 2016-2020	Activities relating to the final delivery of 'Rural Business Investment Scheme', 'Rural Services Scheme' and 'Village Renewal Scheme' projects before closure of programme

Mid Ulster District Council Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan (MUDC, 2020)

This report and Action Plan sets out the future direction for the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across the Mid Ulster district over a 5-year period, from 2020 to 2025.

In this strategy, outdoor recreation is recognised as having significant benefits across society, from the individual level in terms of health, to the wider society in terms of education, the economy and environment.

The report identifies the following key issues and opportunities relating to the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation that are relevant to this project:

- All 22 forests in the area provide local recreation opportunities but some, if developed appropriately, have the potential to attract visitors from outside the area
- whilst the area already has several informal walking trails around villages and along river corridors, there is an overwhelmingly demand for a formal network of Community Trails to be developed across the area
- few mechanisms exist within MUDC to encourage collaboration between the many different organisations and interest groups involved in outdoor recreation across the area. These include landowners/land managers, NGBs, private sector activity providers and service providers
- some of the more niche customers such as camping and caravans are provided with good levels of information, but the more 'mass' offering to local people or visitors on outdoor recreation and parks is insufficient.
- there is an expressed desire by local people in the MUDC area to have better access to information on the outdoor recreation opportunities available across MUDC.

The Action Plan makes 24 recommendations aimed at improving the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation over the next 5 years. 0f the 24 recommendations, 14 are relevant to this project:

Management Structures

- Put in place an adequately resourced rolling maintenance programme for all current and future outdoor recreation facilities.

- Monitor existing and develop where appropriate new SLAs with Community Groups for the ongoing maintenance of outdoor recreation facilities.

Masterplanning

- Undertake Master Planning/Feasibility Studies for six Local Sites, including
    - Altmore Cappagh (Year 1-2)
    - Drumcairne Forest (Year 3-4)
- Develop a Community Trail Plan for each DEA

Product Development

- Develop 3 regional multi-use activity hubs
- Develop 9 local multi-use activity hubs:
    - Altmore Cappagh (Year 1-2)
    - Drumcairne Forest (Year 2-3)
- Develop short and medium distance walking trails
- Develop a network of Community Trails across the area

Promotion / Marketing

- Prepare a 5-year Marketing Strategy and tactical Marketing Action Plan.
- Develop visitor information and signage guidelines for all forest recreation sites.
- Undertake a review of signage, visitor information and waymarking at all outdoor recreation sites.
- Implement new visitor information and signage guidelines at all outdoor recreation sites across the area.
- Develop an Outdoor Recreation Participation Plan.
- Develop partnerships with the private sector to deliver outdoor recreation participation programmes.

Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (MUDC, 2021)

This report and Action Plan provides a comprehensive picture of the status of current public parks and play park facilities, as well as opportunities for future development, in the Mid Ulster district.

MUDC comprises over 100 public park and play facility sites ranging from small play parks to formal pitches/MUGA's to open parkland. One of the key findings of the report is that there is a disparity in provision with some areas in greatest needs suffering from a lack of provision while other areas are over provided for. This report provided an assessment of each facility, in terms of need, condition and spatial distribution.

In addition to site-specific recommendations, 11 over-arching, strategic recommendations were made. These are summarised as:

- Thorough Community Consultation
- Play should be inclusive
- Development of 'public parks' to plug the gap in open/green space across the Council area
- Develop woodland play
    - Drumcairne Forest is recommended as a 'small woodland park' site with a budget of £25,000 to be delivered in Year 5+
    - Altmore Forest is also identified as a 'small woodland park' site with budget of £25,000 to be delivered in Year 5+
- Compatibility with other Council strategies, including ORS, Tourism Strategy and Sports Facility Strategy
- Conduct Play Value assessments which considers the 'play experience'
- Adopt a risk-benefit approach to play provision
- Consider other public land sites and working in partnership with other public bodies to develop play provision
- Planning - protect the loss of open/green space except where there is a substantial community benefit
- Staff resource/maintenance and manning should be factored into future development projects when considering the development of play facilities

Appendix 2: Case Study - The Value and Impact of Darkley Forest Community Trail

OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND

The Impact & Value of

Darkley Forest Community Trail

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland conducted a New Trail Impact Survey for Darkley Forest Community Trail in February 2021 using the Social Return on Investment methodology. The approach focused on the return on investment from the path users' perspective. Key findings are below.

Launched: **2018**
Length: **5km multi-use trails**
Annual Visits (2020): **20,617**
Funders: **SportNI**, **DAERA** & **ABC Borough Council**

Social Return on Investment

£10

Positive Outcomes

87% of visits involved physical activities

69% have better health/fitness since trail opened

16% achieving CMO physical activity targets*

83% of users strongly agreed the trail gave them mental health and wellbeing benefits.

66% strongly agreed that the trail made them feel closer to nature

47% strongly agreed that they learnt about nature of their local heritage

The total social value generated over the lifespan (25 years) of Darkley Forest Community Trail will be **£2,340,275** across physical health, wellbeing, environmental and learning benefits. This means that **for every £1 spent to create the trail, it will generate £10 in return.****

Proximity of trail to users' homes

< 300m	1km	2km	5km	10km	>10km
2%	7%	17%	**42%**	16%	17%

Transport to trail

93%	6%	1%

Improves my mental wellbeing as well as fitness in a safer environment than walking on the roads.

Develops my connection to nature, helps my mental health as well as my physical wellbeing. It is a peaceful and beautiful place to spend time with friends and family, walking and exploring.

* Chief Medical Officer (CMO) recommends adults do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity every week to achieve physical health benefits. **The methodology for the Social Return on Investment framework used for this study is available at [web address to be provided later].

Appendix 3 Community Survey and Results

Scoping Study

For the Development of Altmore, Cappagh, as a Local Multi Activity Hub

August 2021

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI

on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council

OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND

Executive Summary

The Site

Altmore is a rural upland landscape distinctive for its areas of land associated with forestry and reservoirs, on the outskirts of the Village of Cappagh in Co. Tyrone. There is a dispersed rural population throughout the area.

Six forest blocks make up a single forest management unit known as Altmore Forest. Forest Service Northern Ireland (FSNI) owns and manages the Forest, totalling an area of 570Ha. The largest forest block spans the land boundary between Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC).

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) owns and manages a sequence of lands, impounded waterbodies, and a water treatment plant spanning the valley between Altmore Forest's largest block and Cappagh Village. Two reservoirs; the Upper Pond and the Lower Pond, are designated 'out of service' as public water supplies.

The Scoping Study

The Study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Altmore Forest as a 'local multi-activity hub'.

In addition to Altmore Forest, the Scoping Study has been strongly influenced by the recreational opportunities associated with Northern Ireland Water lands. Therefore, the Study area of Altmore embraces all lands reaching as far east as Cappagh Village, rather than just the forested area.

The Need for Development

Despite an abundance of publicly owned lands in Altmore there is no formal provision for outdoor recreation within the Study Area. Altmore Super Output Area falls within the top 10-20% band of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland, and with such limited existing recreational opportunities, the public lands have the potential to be a valuable community asset for people from the nearby villages of Cappagh, Galbally, Carrickmore, Pomeroy, and Donaghmore.

92% of people who responded to a public survey (focused on the Forest area only at the early stages of the project) indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Altmore is 'very important' to the local community. Notably, much of the feedback within open survey comments emphasised the importance of looking at assets beyond just the forest, to include the reservoirs and NIW lands, and this has strongly influenced the direction of this Scoping Study.

Key development priorities for Altmore have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from public survey results, and summarised as follows:

Development Proposals

Development proposals reflect Community sentiment, high-level technical feasibility, and assessment of need. They have been developed in consultation with key landowners including FSNI and NIW, and also FODC. T*hese relationships must continue throughout all proposed stages of planning and development to ensure deliverability of proposals and alignment with each organisation's aims and objectives.*

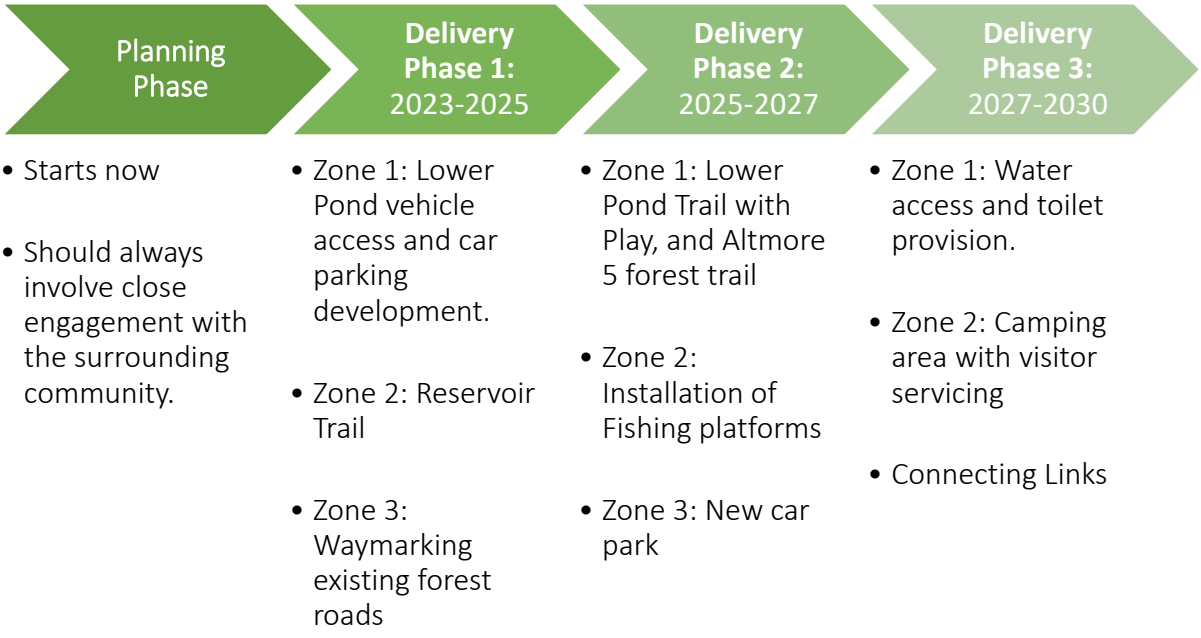
Development proposals are presented across three Zones:

- Zone 1: The Lower Pond and Cappagh Village *(Map 1)*
- Zone 2: The Upper Pond *(Map 2)*
- Zone 3: Altmore 1 *(Map 3)*

Further to this, opportunities for connectivity across the zones have been considered, as

- Connecting Links *(Map 4)*

Planning is proposed to start in late 2021, with visitor infrastructure delivered across three phases between 2023 -2030. Phasing is independent of Zones. Phasing of key actions is summarised as follows:



An investment of **£243,000** for the 'planning' element of works is a high-level estimate for external professional fees required to work up all phased of proposals to a shovel-ready stage. It is plausible that some of this could be delivered 'in-house' by MUDC staff, and that the full investment will not be required within single year budgets.

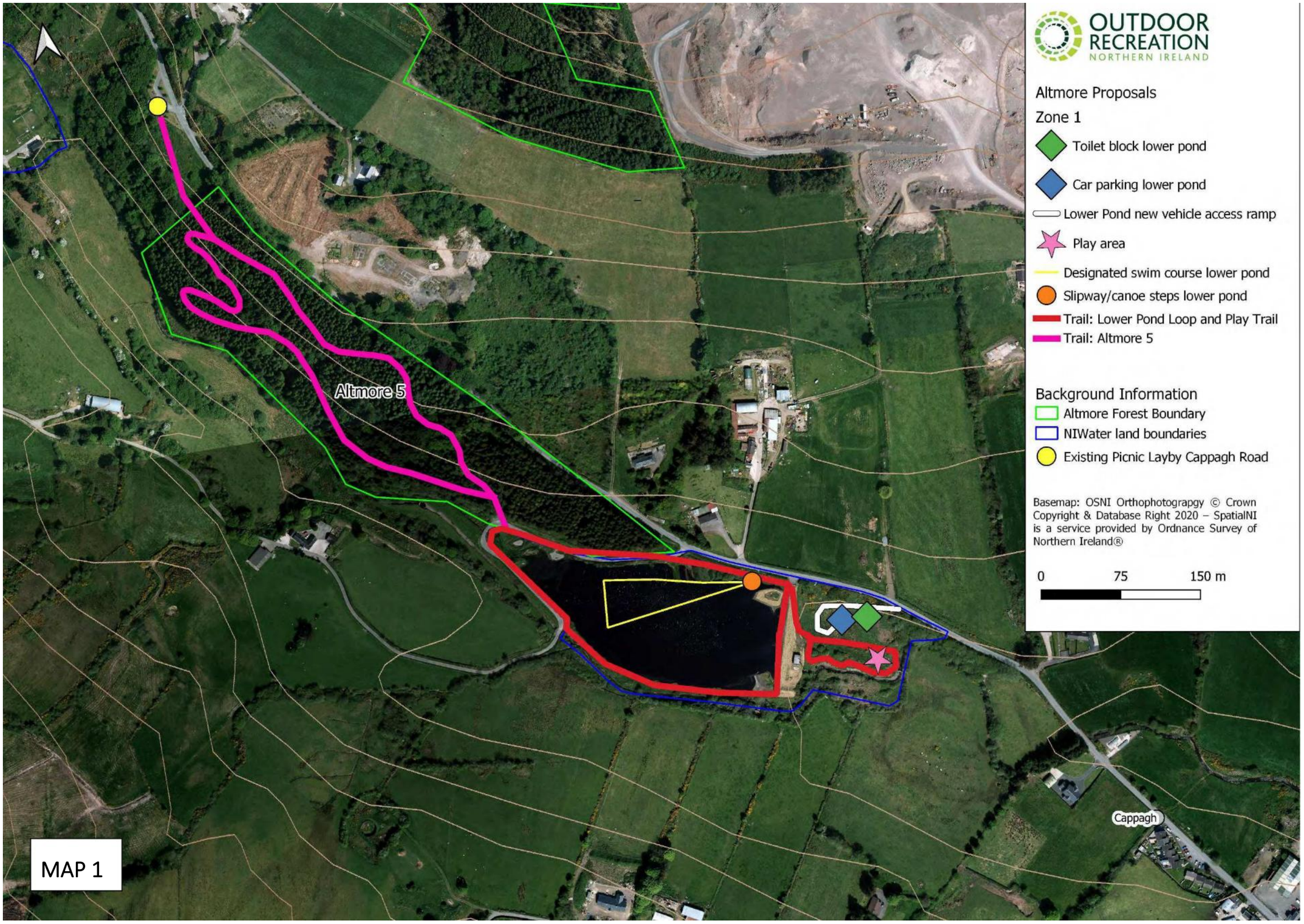
Phase 1 2023-2025 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery Costs are estimated at **£349,900**

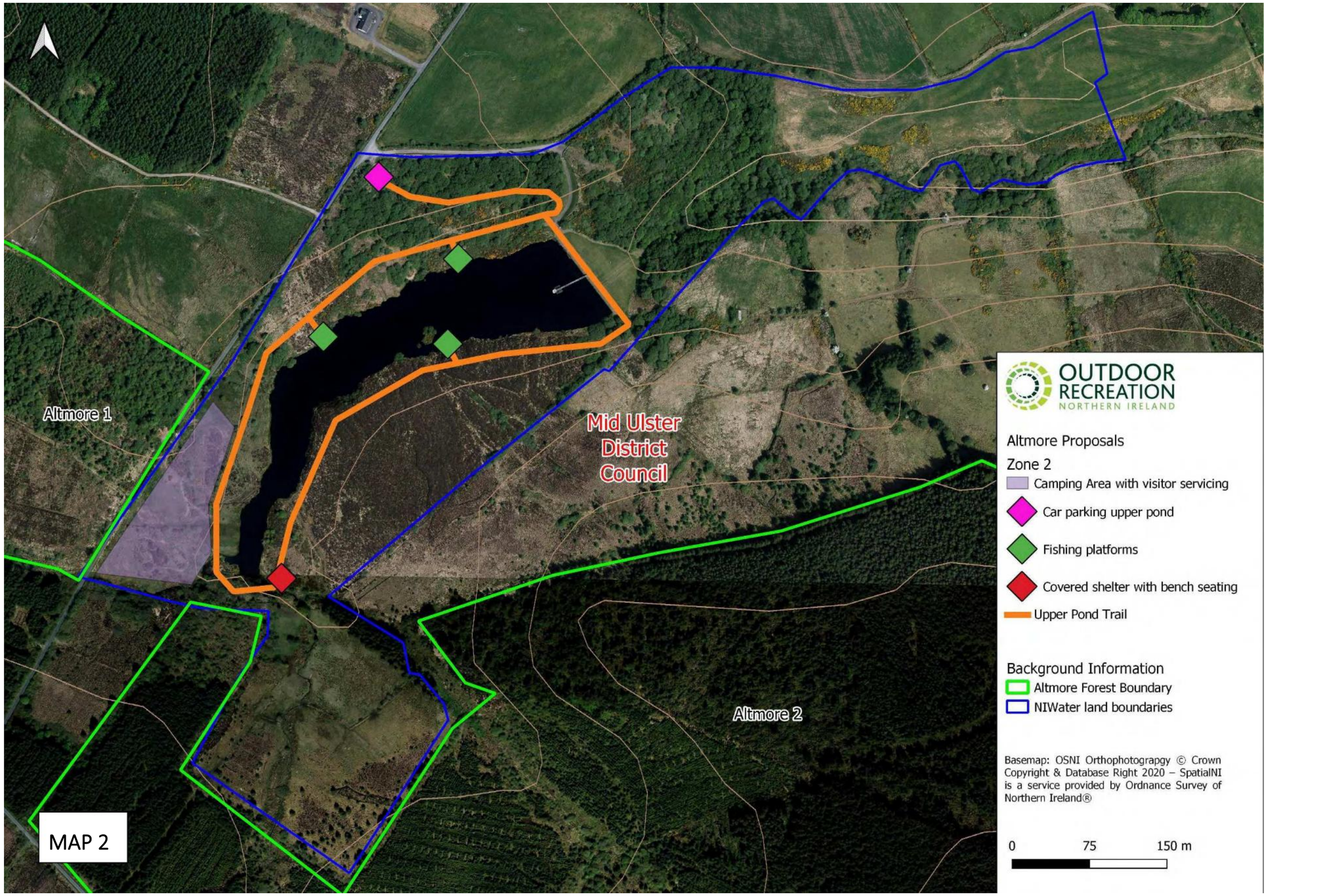
Phase 2 2025-2027 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery Costs are estimated at **£401,000**

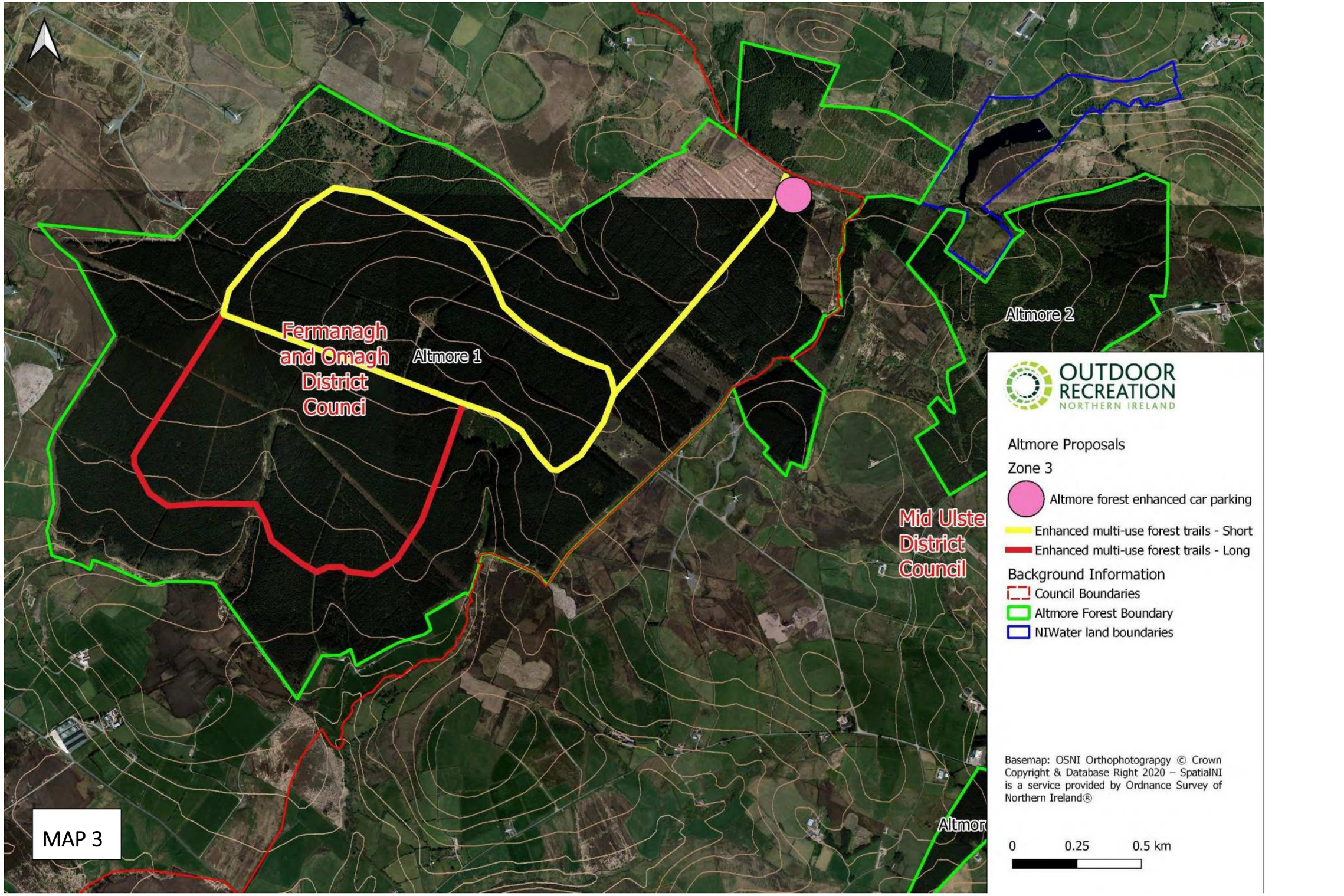
Phase 3 2027-2030 Visitor Infrastructure Delivery Costs are estimated at **£422,100**

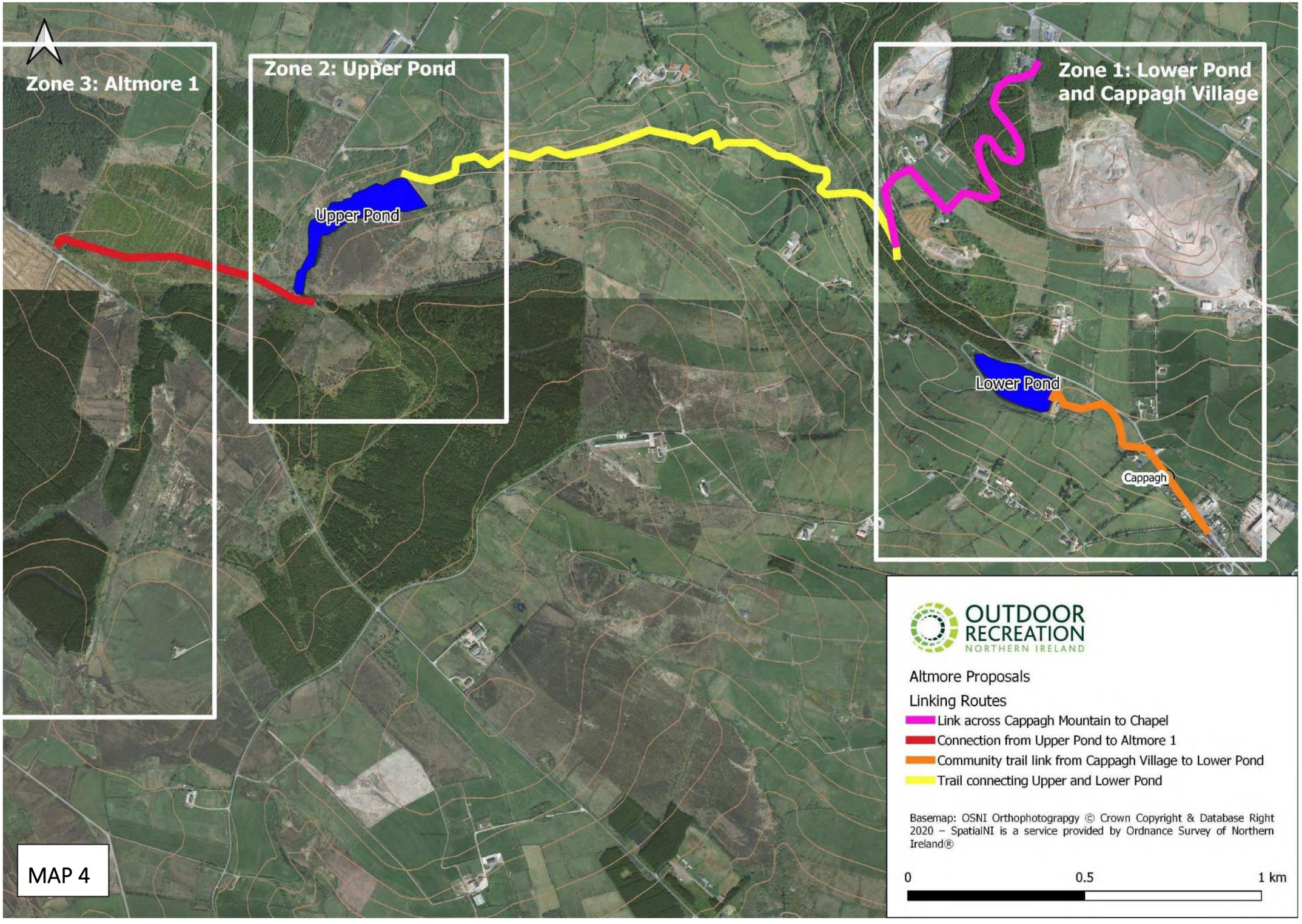
Social Return on Investment

Using an evaluation methodology that considers sustainability, health and wellbeing, and social benefits, and taking account of the population of the area, the estimated Social Return on Investment is estimated to be capped at £11M over 25 years.


OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND
Altmore Proposals
Zone 1
Toilet block lower pond
Car parking lower pond
Lower Pond new vehicle access ramp
Play area
Designated swim course lower pond
Slipway/canoe steps lower pond
Trail: Lower Pond Loop and Play Trail
Trail: Altmore 5
Background Information
Altmore Forest Boundary
NIWater land boundaries
Existing Picnic Layby Cappagh Road
Basemap: OSNI Orthophotograpgy © Crown Copyright & Database Right 2020 – SpatialNI is a service provided by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland®
0
75
150 m
Altmore 5
Cappagh
MAP 1


Altmore 1
Mid Ulster District Council
Altmore 2
MAP 2
OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND
Altmore Proposals
Zone 2
Camping Area with visitor servicing
Car parking upper pond
Fishing platforms
Covered shelter with bench seating
Upper Pond Trail
Background Information
Altmore Forest Boundary
NIWater land boundaries
Basemap: OSNI Orthophotograpgy © Crown Copyright & Database Right 2020 – SpatialNI is a service provided by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland®
0
75
150 m


Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
Altmore 1
Altmore 2
Mid Ulste
District
Council
Altmor
MAP 3
OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND
Altmore Proposals
Zone 3
Altmore forest enhanced car parking
Enhanced multi-use forest trails - Short
Enhanced multi-use forest trails - Long
Background Information
Council Boundaries
Altmore Forest Boundary
NIWater land boundaries
Basemap: OSNI Orthophotograpgy © Crown Copyright & Database Right 2020 – SpatialNI is a service provided by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland®
0
0.25
0.5 km


Zone 3: Altmore 1
Zone 2: Upper Pond
Upper Pond
Zone 1: Lower Pond and Cappagh Village
Lower Pond
Cappagh
OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND
Altmore Proposals
Linking Routes
Link across Cappagh Mountain to Chapel
Connection from Upper Pond to Altmore 1
Community trail link from Cappagh Village to Lower Pond
Trail connecting Upper and Lower Pond
Basemap: OSNI Orthophotograpgy © Crown Copyright & Database Right 2020 – SpatialNI is a service provided by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland®
0
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1 km
MAP 4

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1 Introduction

In February 2021, Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) appointed Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) to undertake a Recreational Scoping Study for Altmore Forest, near Cappagh, Co. Tyrone (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

The project has been strongly influenced by the recreational opportunities associated with Northern Ireland Water lands and therefore the Study area of Altmore embraces all lands reaching as far east as Cappagh Village, rather than just the forested area.

The Study provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to fully develop Altmore as a 'local multi-activity hub'.

MUDC defines a local multi-activity hub as a site developed primarily for the local community, to include a range of outdoor recreation and environmental products, accompanied by appropriate visitor servicing.

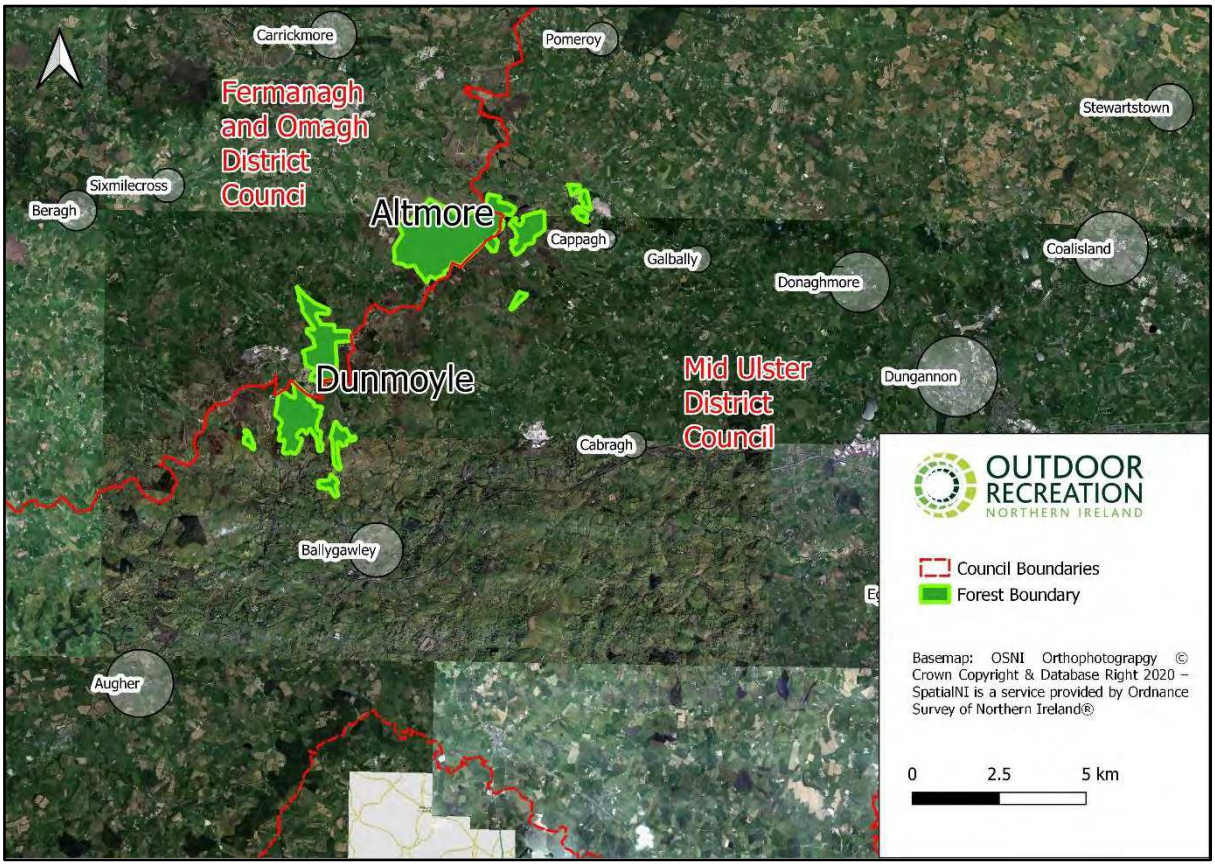

Figure 1 - Altmore Forest Location

1.1 Scope of Study

The Scoping Study included two stages:

Stage 1

- Desktop review of existing strategies applicable to the region.
- Consultation with agencies/stakeholders, local community, Council staff and Councillors to ensure incorporation of ideas and feedback.
- SWOT Analysis
- Identification of land ownership and land management status and opportunities.
- Exploration of a sustainable balance between the economic, environmental, and social functions of the forest.
- Audit of current infrastructure and condition
- Exploration of the opportunity for linkages and routes within and external to the Forest including how the Forest offers access to the village, local landscapes, and other neighbouring visitor attractions.
- Identification of any potential barriers to development.
- Determination of what is currently available within the site for outdoor recreation, including any visitor data, and exploring what capacity there is within the site to accommodate further outdoor recreation and educational activities.

Stage 2

- Identification of phased, viable and sustainable recreational, educational, and social activities which could be delivered within the scope of the Development Plan. The proposals aim to enhance user/visitor experience, whilst supporting biodiversity and local heritage.
- Exploration of potential watersport and renewable energy options associated to the neighbouring reservoirs.
- Recommendations and Actions.
- Detailed Development Plan costs and profiled timetable of expenditure.
- Identification of suitable funding streams and timetables.

1.2 Approach

Table 1 summarises ORNI's approach to undertaking the Scoping Study, with key dates provided where relevant.

Table 1 – Scoping Study Approach and Key Dates

	Activity	Status
Stage 1	Desk-based assessments of population demographics, strategic context at Council and Regional scale, geography and geology, environmental and heritage opportunities and constraints, land use opportunities and constraints, forest planning and zoning.	Throughout
	Initial site walkovers.	26th February, 7th May 2021
	Bespoke engagement with select individuals representing themselves, a community group, or club within the surrounding community.	Complete (Ongoing as required)
	Promotion and marketing of scoping study, public survey, and virtual public meeting (Zoom).	Public meeting 13th April. Formal public engagement for 6 weeks concluded 18th April 2021.
	Meetings with key stakeholders including Forest Service NI and Northern Ireland Water to facilitate clear decision-making around future planning.	Complete (ongoing as required)
	Interim presentation to Council Officers and feedback period	Virtual Presentation 10th June 2021
Stage 2	Detailed site walkover survey	28th June 2021
	SWOT analysis, conclusions and recommendations, and final reporting	July 2021
	Presentation to Elected Members	Pending

2 The Study Area

The Study Area, shown in Figure 3, extends approximately 7km from East to West.

The area lies within what is colloquially referred to as the Mountains of Pomeroy, an upland hummocky landscape reaching elevations of around 300m above sea level. It spans the Council boundary between MUDC and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC) and offers a sense of remoteness, though is accessible via a dense network of typically single-track rural roads just 8km from the strategic A4 Belfast-Ballygawley Road. The landscape is interspersed with rural dwellings and the small villages of Cappagh and Galbally, not far from Carrickmore, Pomeroy, and Donaghmore. The upland landscape also hosts several windfarms, and active quarrying takes place throughout the area, evidenced by landscape scarring.

Two in-line reservoirs (Altmore reservoirs) lie within the Study Area. Locally referred to as 'Cappagh Ponds' – upper and lower – these drain from a main forestry area down-gradient towards the village of Cappagh, forming the head of the river Torrent that drains into the Blackwater near Lough Neagh.

Figure 2 - View facing east across the Upper Pond (Altmore upper reservoir) towards Cappagh quarry

2.1 Landownership and Land Management Status

A map of the Study Area, with known public land ownership boundaries, is shown in Figure 3.

2.1.1 Forest Service Northern Ireland

Six discrete blocks make up the single forest management unit known as Altmore Forest. Forest Service Northern Ireland (FSNI) own, manage, and maintain the Forest, totalling an area of 570Ha (5.7km^2). These blocks are separated by third-party lands and rural roads. Forest block Altmore 1 (see Figure 3) is the largest block, making up 82% (469Ha) of the total area owned by FSNI. This block sits almost entirely within the FODC Council area, with the remaining blocks sitting within MUDC. To date, neither Council have been involved in managing or maintaining the forest blocks.

Note: Going forward within this report 'Altmore Forest' is used to refer to the whole forest management unit. Where specific mention is made to one forest block, its number will be used i.e. 'Altmore 1'.

2.1.2 Northern Ireland Water

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) owns, manages, and maintains a sequence of lands, impounded waterbodies, and a water treatment plant spanning the valley between Altmore 1 and Cappagh Village, all within MUDC area. The two reservoirs; the Upper Pond and the Lower Pond, are designated 'out of service' as public water supplies and include:

- Upper Pond land area = 40Ha (0.4km^2)
- Upper Pond water area = 3Ha (0.03km^2)
- Lower Pong land area = 4Ha (0.04km^2)
- Lower Pond water area = 2Ha (0.02km^2)

In 2014, NIW issued an expression of interest relating to the disposal of the reservoirs and associated lands, but issues around the management and on-going maintenance resulted in no interest from other bodies. The local community had, and still have, an active interest in realising the recreational value of the reservoir and lands. Since 2014, the Water and Sewerage Services Act[1] and the Reservoirs Bill[2] have been introduced meaning that NIWater must effectively retain control of their Altmore assets in the interest of social, environmental, climate change, and health and safety matters.

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[1] https://www.niwater.com/sitefiles/resources/htmlfiles/information_management/water_and_sewerage_services_northern_ireland_order_2006.pdf

[2] http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/agriculture-and-rural-development/reservoirs/ni-water-.pdf

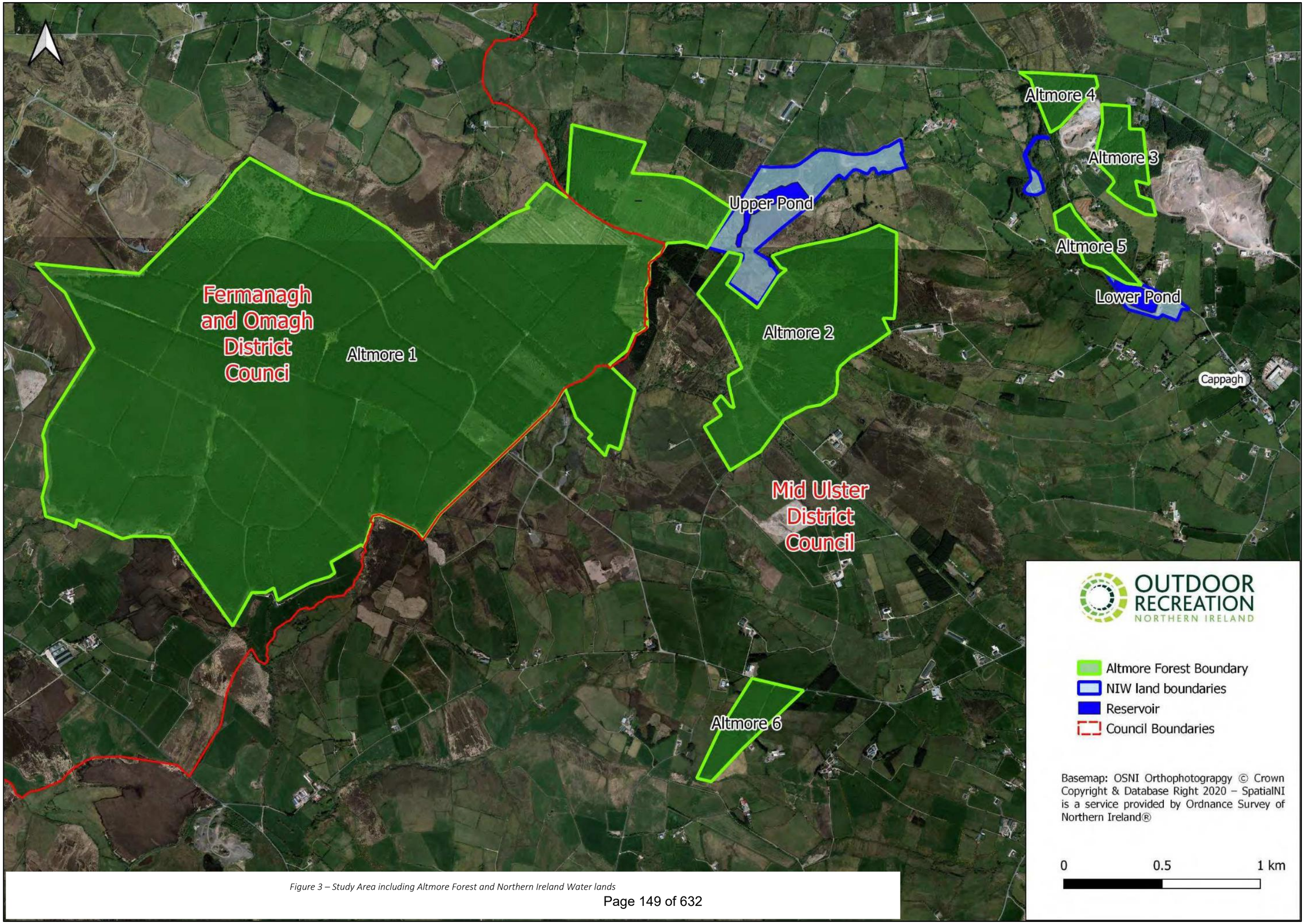


Figure 3 – Study Area including Altmore Forest and Northern Ireland Water lands

2.2 Heritage Designations

2.2.1 Environment

The Study Area exhibits relatively limited registered Environmental features[3]. However, considerations for the surrounding area include:

- A rock exposure at a quarry site at Lurgylea, just north of Cappagh Village, which was declared an Area of Special Scientific Interest[4] in 2007 because of its important geology and the rock exposures at the site that allow the geology's observation. The same site is also designated as a Local Wildlife Site. However, the quarry site is still known to be active, and arguably sits just outside the study area being considered within the scope of this report.
- Extensive areas of Peatland priority habitat are registered across the Study Area, with much of it referenced as 'peat cutting'.
- Towards the western extent of the Study Area there are indication of priority species of 'breeding Waders'.

2.2.2 Built Heritage

The Study Area is host to a dispersed but abundant array of local and regionally important heritage ranging from recent industrial features to Bronze-Age prehistoric burial grounds.

Registered heritage[5] features include:

- Listed buildings (bridges): HB13/14/004
- Fortified mound, Scheduled zone: TYR045:011
- Shane Barnagh's Sentry Box (non-antiquity – rock outcrop): TYR045:001
- Bronze Age Cist Burial (unlocated): TYR045:013
- Non-antiquity natural sink hole: TYR045:017

Other heritage features, unregistered but known through local literature and local knowledge include:

- O'Neill herb garden

---

[3] Registered by Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Department for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs.

[4] https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doe/Lurgylea-ASSI-citation-documents-and-map.pdf

[5] Department for Communities Historic Environment Register

- Altmore Barracks
- King James' Well
- Moat of Crannogue
- Altmore Cairn

Figure 4 - King James' Well, along the roadside just west of Cappagh Village

2.3 External Site Linkages

Cappagh Village has close community links to nearby Galbally village (3km to the east), effectively sharing community facilities such as the Galbally Pearses GAC that sits between the two small villages, and a primary school.

Public transport access to the area is limited, with most residents and visitors accessing the area by car. The surrounding road network includes many poor-quality peat roads, but is just 8km away from the strategic A4 Belfast-Ballygawley Road by car.

The Study Area has clear links to a wider area of heritage interest, not least that associated with what is locally known as 'Tyrone's Ancient Highway'.

The array of heritage features within, and extending beyond, the study area has been documented within a book produced by Camowen Partnership, called 'Tyrone's Ancient Highway'. The route is said

to have passed through Cappagh, along Cappagh Road, and appears best known for a journey by King James in the 17th Century:

> *"in 1689, King James II made a journey through the heartland of County Tyrone on his was from Dublin to Derry which, at that time was under siege from his army. In doing so he was following in the footsteps of countless previous generations of people to had travelled this portion of the ancient route between Tara and Derry".*

2.4 Existing Outdoor Recreation Provision

Despite the vast availability of public lands, the Study Area lacks formal provision for outdoor recreation. Informal sites used by the local community are described below.

2.4.1 Altmore 1

Just prior to the onset of the COVID pandemic in 2020, the largest forest block, Altmore 1, was subject to clearfelling along Barnagh's Road. Internal forest roads and a vehicular entrance to the forest were developed/upgraded to facilitate FSNI's felling activities. This exposed the local public to the forest's potential for recreation, showing a distinct, more welcoming, and 'open' point of access. There was a reported increase in people accessing Altmore 1 for walking, running, and off-road bicycling, particularly as the pandemic took hold and people sought more local spaces for exercise and accessing the outdoors. It has been reported through community consultation and engagement with FSNI that prior to these forestry works, very few knew the extent or potential of Altmore 1 for existing informal or future formal recreation.

There is no formal provision for car parking, with visitors making use of locally widened 'splays' and laybys along the surrounding narrow public roads. Public vehicular access to the internal forest roads is prevented by a steel gate at the site's entrance.

Existing trails used for recreation are limited to long, wide and straight forestry roads, surfaced with coarse gravel to facilitate the movement of large forestry vehicles. This is confirmed through Strava records. Although these roads provide a highly functional facility for purposeful exercise, they result in a very homogenous experience for the walker with little exposure or views to the surrounding countryside and its features.

There is no welcome signage, interpretation, or wayfinding across the site.

Figure 5 – Altmore 1 Clockwise from top: Recent clearfell and forest entrance from Bernaghs Road, typical internal forest road with drainage ditch, internal forest road used by large Forest Service NI vehicles

2.4.2 Upper Pond

No official access exists to the Upper Altmore Reservoir, known locally as the 'Upper Pond'. Although fenced off, there are clear tracks at the site's western end and a stile leading to the water's edge. No clear desire lines exist beyond the stile. It is thought this stile may be in place either for maintenance access or for fishing access, though the Upper Pond is not known to be stocked or licensed for fishing.

Figure 6 - Western extent of the Upper Pond, Altmore

The eastern extent of the impounded Upper Pond is defined by a large, flat-topped earth dam which is easily acceessible to the public despite there being no official formal public access. From here visitors have excellent views across the valley to the east and the reservoir and upland forests to the west.

This area is serviced by a maintenance access lane, closed off with a steel gate, but with enough space on the public side to allow for informal parking and turning of vehicles.

The area is known to have been subject to anti-social behaviour/loitering, fly-tipping, and littering, attributed to its remoteness yet relative ease of access.

It is not considered feasible to walk along the reservoir edges to complete a loop of the water due to rough vegetation, nor are there any indications that the public already do so, with the limit of recreational walking confined to a short line along the flat top of the earth dam only.

There is no provision for swimming or water access at the Upper Pond by way of slipways, canoe steps, or similar.

Figure 7 - Eastern extent of the Upper Pond. Clockwise from top left: Steel gate leading to earth dam, View across the Upper Pond towards the west, Downslope of the earth dam, Impounded water level behind earth dam.

2.4.3 Lower Pond

The Lower Altmore Reservoir, or the 'Lower Pond', sits on the outskirts of Cappagh Village. Like the Upper Pond, it is possible to access the reservoir with relative ease. Around one third of the reservoir is bound by a public road and a shared concrete access lane. If walking in a clockwise direction around the reservoir's perimeter, this lane projects onto unimpeded and walkable grassy access to the reservoir's southern embankment. The ability to complete a walking loop of the pond is impeded by the presence of a shallow reservoir spillway.

There is no provision for swimming or water access at the Lower Pond by way of slipways, canoe steps, or similar.

Figure 8 - Lower Pond. Clockwise from top left: Earth Dam and vehicular access to lands at toe of dam, Unimpeded access to the reservoir embankment along its southern edge, Walking along the reservoir's southern edge, Shallow spillway draining into river Torrent

2.4.4 Altmore 2 – 6

No existing formal or informal recreation provision takes place in forest blocks Altmore 2 – Altmore 6.

3 Assessment of Need

3.1 Strategic Context

The development of outdoor recreation and local community facilities, in general, fulfils the aims and agendas of a variety of several government departments, agencies and strategic organisations. Care has been taken in this study to ensure that the proposed development across the Altmore Study Area align with these policies and strategies at a regional, sub-regional and local level.

Table 2 outlines those strategies with the best 'strategic fit' for the proposed works required to develop Altmore fully and appropriately as a local multi-activity hub.

Table 2 - Relevant policies and strategies for Altmore

Theme	Policy / Strategy
Overarching Strategies	– Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 (NI Executive, 2016) – Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD 2010) – Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 (MUDC, 2020) – Our Community Plan: 10-year plan for Mid Ulster (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)
Health & Well-being	– A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022 – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)
Economy & Tourism	– Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	– Outdoor Recreation Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Parks and Play Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland (2014) – A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021) – Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025
Natural Environment & Heritage	– Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050 – NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 – Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2012) – Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006 – The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011) – Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021) – Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)
Equality	– Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006)

Community Planning	– Village Plans for Galbally & Cappagh, Ballygawley and Stewartstown.

See Appendix A for adetailed summary of the above documents, identifying their specific relevance to this Scoping Study and any proposed development at Altmore.

In summary, this strategic review highlights the importance that the Northern Ireland Executive and government departments (at a regional level) and the Council (at a sub-regional level), place on outdoor recreation and access to forests and quality greenspace for the social, economic, physical, mental, and environmental well-being of our local communities.

The proposed developments/enhancements within Altmore offer a strong fit with each of the strategies outlined in Table 2, as the recommendations have the potential to:

- Contribute to, or kick-start in some cases, the regeneration of rural communities through the investment in and provision of quality outdoor activities and experiences.
- Improve the health (mental and physical) and wellbeing (including social inclusion) of local people and visitors through the development of sports, leisure, and recreation infrastructure within the area in order to provide formal and informal opportunities for people to engage in physical activity and to better access green spaces.
- Protect our natural environment through the development of environmentally sensitive trails and components with an educational dimension.
- Conserve and enjoy the unique built heritage of Mid Ulster.
- Contribute to the development of a strong and shared community by unlocking the potential of the leisure sector as an instrument for positive change.
- Encourage active citizenship through volunteering and social enterprise opportunities.
- Contribute to long-term economic growth through the development of the tourism industry of the Council area, offering a distinct and complementary sustainable outdoor recreation product to that is currently under-developed in the Council area.

3.2 Altmore Public Survey

As part of the consultation process, a 6-week public survey was carried out both online and in paper format. 488 responses were received. See Appendix C for detailed results. The survey results have been used to inform the recommendations set out in Section 5.

There were 488 responses to the public survey.

3.3 Local Access to Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

The public were asked 'besides Altmore, what sites/facilities do you use most regularly for outdoor recreation and outdoor leisure time?' The following 7 other sites (distance from Cappagh Village provided for reference) were popular

- Pomeroy (5 miles)
- Dungannon Park (10 miles)
- Loughmacrory (10 miles)
- Parkanaur (6.5 miles)
- Knockmany (15 miles)
- Gortin Glens (25 miles)
- Gosford (30 miles)

Respondents also reported use of the local Galbally Pearse's GAC football grounds for walking as well as using the local road network for walking, running, cycling and horse riding.

> "The development of Altmore Forest is essential for the local and wider community. Also, as an additional point, it would benefit the environment as people wouldn't be travelling to forests further away if they had facilities near home"
>
> - Public Survey Respondent

Regionally relevant evidence exists[6] to support the need for improved ***local*** access to spaces for outdoor recreation in general, citing sustainability benefits[7], health, and wellbeing benefits, and improved social benefits. For example, Darkley Forest in Co. Armagh launched a 5km network of

[6] https://mcusercontent.com/4dc93b5ea821bcdbd4cfd748e/files/2e0da6ff-abb9-4f10-82a1-f33dcd77e4d3/People_Nature_and_Health_NI_March_2021_report_1_.pdf
[7] http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/blog/reducing-the-need-to-travel/

multi-use trails in 2018 located approximately 1km from a local village centre. Using a robust Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology to assess its impact, **the total social value generated over the lifespan (25 years) of Darkley Forest Community Trail will see a £10 return on investment for every £1 spent to create the trail.** Further detail on this specific study is included in Appendix B

Although the setting and potential for the development of the Altmore Study Area differs from Darkley due to development potential in multiple 'zones', its potential SROI, should trail development of a similar scale be realised, and based on the comparable population of the village of Cappagh to that of Darkley, is assumed to be of a similar magnitude.

Figure 9 - Social Return on Investment 1:10 for Darkley Forest, Co Armagh

The Village Plan for Cappagh and Galbally, drafted by Mid Ulster District Council in 2017 identified several development opportunities relevant to outdoor recreation provision, summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 – Galbally and Cappagh Village Plan Outdoor Recreation Summary

	Key characteristics	Development opportunity
Galbally and Cappagh Village Plan	– Service provision in Cappagh is extremely limited. – Altmore SOA is in the 10-20% band of most deprived wards in NI. – Cappagh Village Regeneration Group and Galbally Community Association are instrumental in the delivery of many community initiatives, events and groups, e.g. social programme for third age, play groups, etc. – Lack of available community space in Cappagh. – Few opportunities for young people especially if not interested in sport.	– To develop Cappagh's green space as both casual leisure and visitor attraction asset. – To develop and celebrate the area's history and culture. – To build on cross-community contact to position Cappagh/Galbally as an inclusive, safer rural community. – Potential to develop partnerships with adjacent communities/agencies to address issues such as poverty, emotional health and wellbeing, young people. – Opportunity to build on the work of Altmore Fisheries in bringing visitors to the area via development of the reservoirs and green/natural assets e.g. walking and cycling.

	– Limited play space for families and children. – No services in village to attract footfall.	– Reservoir is an asset that should be enhanced and developed. – Explore potential for enterprise/industrial units in the area and support local people in social enterprise initiatives. – Cappagh/Galbally area - carry out scoping exercise of local natural resources with tourism potential.

3.4 Altmore Visitor Profile

Currently no visitor data exists for the Altmore Study Area.

Given Altmore 1 currently provides the main recreational opportunity in the area, albeit informally, the public survey focused on gathering information on visitor profiles across the area. Of those who

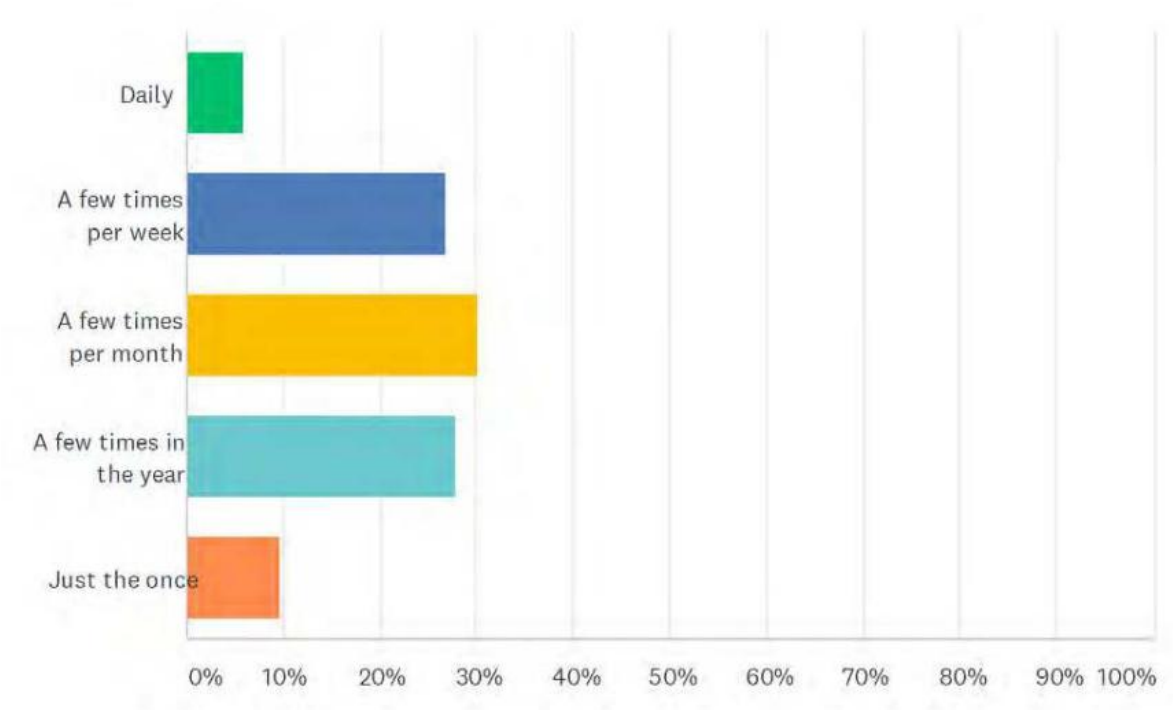


Figure 10 - Frequency of visits to Altmore Forest

responded to the public survey, 82% reported they had visited Altmore Forest previously. The reported frequency of visits across the past year is shown in Figure 10, with the highest proportion of respondents reporting that they visit a few times per month, closely followed by those reporting they visit a few times per week.

Walking or hiking is recorded as the most popular recreation activity undertaken within the forest (75% of visits). Running makes up a further 13% , with the remaining small proportion reported as 'day out or picnic', cycling, observing wildlife, or 'other' (motorsports features within 'other').

On a typical visit to Altmore Forest, the majority of respondents report that they visit with family (55%). 15% visit on their own, 14% visit with friends, 12% with a spouse of partner, and 1% visit as part of an organised group.

3.5 Community Demand

92% of survey respondents indicated that the development of recreation facilities at Altmore Forest is 'very important' to the local community. Fewer than 0.5% indicated they did not see development as important for the local community. ***Notably, much of the feedback within open survey comments emphasised the importance of looking at assets beyond just the forest, to include the reservoirs and NIW lands, and this has strongly influenced the direction of this Scoping Study***.

8% of survey respondents, representing 38 individuals, indicated that they have reduced/limited mobility or another disability.

There is clear community sentiment towards a sense of under-investment across the area over a prolonged period, a sense of 'neglect' that goes beyond the need for recreational infrastructure, and indications of troubles-related impacts.

> *"Cappagh has been starved of investment in the previous thirty years, the area has everything stacked against it… we are on the edge of the Council boundary, we are blocked from using the nearest recycling facility, Carrickmore, as it's not in our Council district, and we are split by two parish areas".*
>
> -
>
> *"This is an area that has been hugely neglected by both local and central government in terms of investment. Which is sad because it is a strong community with a rich history that goes back hundreds of years, and scenery you'll be hard pressed to find elsewhere".*
>
> - *Public Survey Respondents*

Several distinct key priorities have been identified from the public/community perspective, extrapolated from the public survey results, and are summarised in Figure 11.

Figure 11 - Priority themes for the development of Altmore Study Area, from the Community Perspective (derived from survey statistics and reflecting feedback in open comments)

Survey respondents were asked how frequently they would envisage themselves visiting Altmore Forest, should facilities be developed, with most responding that they would visit a few times per week. While the early timing of the survey was such that this question specified focused on proposals for forest developments only, these figures are considered to reflect demand for visits to any recreation site developed within the study area.

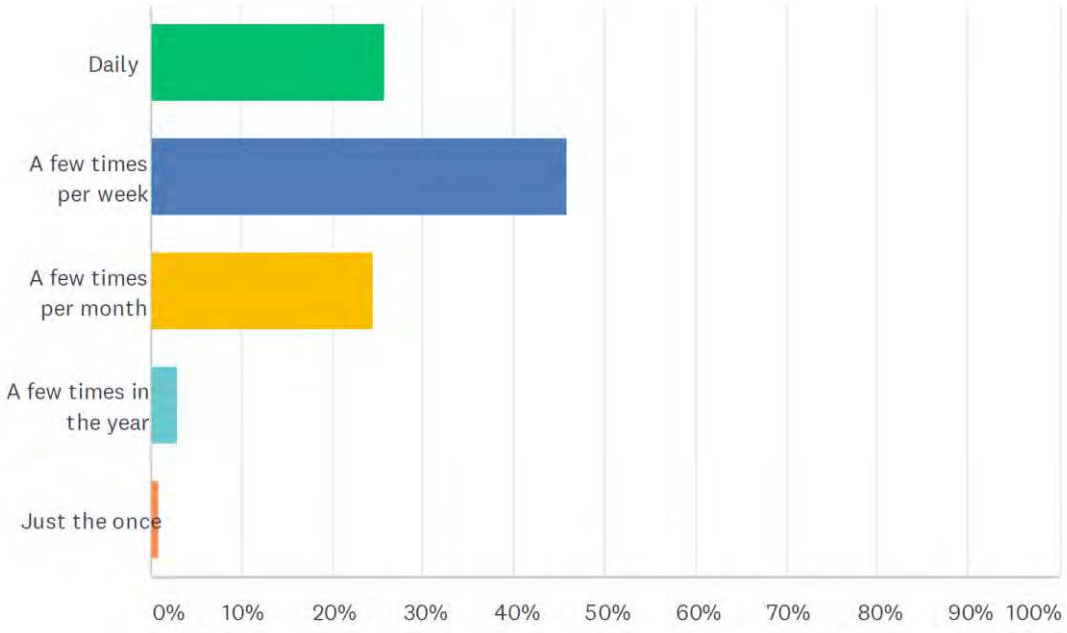


Figure 12 - Anticipated frequency of visits to Altmore Forest, should developments take place. These figures are considered to reflect demand for visits to any recreation site within the study area, not just the forest, should they be developed.

3.6 Regional and International Tourism

For Mid Ulster, Tourism Northern Ireland Visitor Attitude Survey (2018)[8] reports a much higher proportion of leisure visitors from within Northern Ireland (NI), particularly day-trippers, compared with other Council Districts. Great Britain is the area's largest out of state source market, followed by North America and the Republic of Ireland but makes up a small proportion of visitors.

Visitors to Mid Ulster are most likely to be visiting to see a particular attraction, with historic monuments/sites and forest parks/gardens especially popular.

Note that statistics are not available to reflect a post-COVID-19 era, but it is assumed that the proportion of leisure visitors from within NI is likely to have increased, with a more local catchment than ever. Sentiment from within the public survey indicates a strong desire for the development of Altmore for a community-scale/local audience, but with good understanding of the benefits it could bring to the local economy.

> *This area has been neglected for so long. This is an opportunity to regenerate Cappagh and Altmore, enhance community morale, and bring visitors to the area which would help sustain local business.*
>
> - *Public survey respondent*

[8] Tourism Northern Ireland: Visitor Attitude Survey 2018, Cognisense Ltd. Base: n=138

4 Altmore SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Strong community support for development/enhancements
- Very strong interest from Cappagh Village Regeneration Group.
- Large areas of publicly owned land.
- Diverse landscape that includes opportunities in forestry, hills, and water.
- Good views across surrounding countryside.
- Demonstrated existing community demand (use of Altmore 1).

Weaknesses

- A sense of remoteness (from a social safety perspective)
- Reported anti-social behaviour, particularly fly-tipping and inappropriate use of motorised vehicles across some areas.
- Poor road network throughout, and external to, the study area and limited public transpor options.
- Recreational development is "starting from scratch", meaning a cautious development approach to ensure sustainability of investment is required.
- Poor public awareness of the site outside the area.

Opportunities

- Development of community trails network and associated visitor infrastructure.
- To pioneer a diversification model with NIW for improved public access to 'Out Of Service' reservoirs and lands.
- Increase community value and involvement.
- Increase educational value of site.
- Define and highlight the natural and cultural significances of the site through community engagement and interpretation.
- Contribute to regional tourism development, including directly or indirectly supporting private sector business development.
- Mutually beneficial provision between private operators and Mid Ulster District Council, as an economic generator.

Threats

- Large Study Area means all proposals may not be able to be realised.
- Beaureaucratic barriers associated with forestry management area spanning two council areas.
- Health and safety constraints relating to development of around/on/in water activities relating to Altmore reservoirs.
- Development constraints associated with limitations on alterations to reservoir structures.
- Extensive deposits of deep peat in some parts of the Study Area are a constraint on viability of development.
- Reported deep peat deposits in forestry areas.
- Forestry operations to be considered.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Target Market and Segments

The key market and ultimate beneficiaries for the development of Altmore as a local multi-activity hub is undoubtedly the local communities of Cappaph and Galbally villages. However, it is anticipated that any new developments will also positively impact on the villages of Carrickmore, Sixmilecross, Beragh (all within FODC area), and Pomeroy, Donaghmore (MUDC area), all within approximately a 10km radius from the centre of the Study Area.

Existing and anticipated use of the site indicates that the largest user segment is **people from across ~10km radius rural catchment visiting a few times per week for walking, engaging with nature, and enjoying nature and the landscape**. This includes:

- Family groups and lone parents with children.
- Friends meeting up.
- People of retirement age.
- Regular dog walkers.
- People enjoying purposeful exercise e.g. running, family cycling, organised water activity.

Due to the area's undeveloped nature, effectively 'starting from scratch' in terms of recreational provision, long-term and sustained major capital investment in supporting infrastructure, including roads, would be required to realise the Altmore area as a major regional or international tourism generator.

5.2 Engaging the Local Community

Engagement with nearby community groups including Cappagh Village Regeneration Group, Galbally Pearses GFC, and local business providers should continue throughout any phase of development of Altmore. The local community will be a significant asset to the good custodianship of the area and should be further engaged to explore the opportunity to set agreed parameters to help manage and maintain any sites, or assist with visitor provision, through a voluntary or SLA arrangement with the Council.

5.3 Environmental Net Gain

Opportunities for environmental net gain should be considered and embraced at detailed design stage of any development. This could include complementing tree planting programmes that are under consideration by NIWater, planting of native tree and plant species in available and appropriate

spaces, preservation and restoration of peatlands, wildflower meadows, and ensuring there is a strong interpretive experience about natural surroundings and outdoor classrooms to engage and connect people with nature.

5.4 Brand and Interpretation Strategy

The Association for Heritage Interpretation defines interpretation as 'a communication process that helps people make sense of, and understand more about, a site, collection or event'. It can:

- Bring meaning to a cultural or environmental resource, enhancing visitor appreciation and promoting better understanding. As a result, visitors are more likely to care for what they identify as a precious resource.
- Enhance the visitor experience, resulting in longer stays and repeat visits. This will lead to increased income and create employment opportunities.
- Enable communities to better understand their heritage, and to express their own ideas and feelings about their home area. As a result, individuals may identify with lost values inherent in their culture.

It has also been described by Freeman Tilden, one of the founders of modern interpretation, as 'an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships using original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information'.

A brand and interpretation strategy for all developments across the Altmore Study Area should be developed, ensuring it aligns with MUDC's existing vision for branding and interpretation across its portfolio. The experiences should be co-curated with the local community as far as possible and practicable. A key objective should be to create a sense of welcome to the recreational space/s and set the tone for their responsible use, but also to tell the stories of the local area that the community are so passionate about.

Trail and site furniture including any wayfinding, interpretation, bench seating and picnic benches, and play, should fall within one coherent site brand image that ties the whole experience together.

5.4.1 History and Heritage

With the area being steeped in heritage, it is recommended that the local community leads on the production of a digital package of heritage interpretation e.g a Memory Map like that created recently

in Co. Fermanagh through the Culicagh to Cleenish project[9]. The Memory Map is an online interactive story-telling map for exploring the area's rich natural, built, archaeological and cultural heritage, with over 90 points of interest to discover. The map features music, stories, old and new community-made films, natural recordings, and photographs.

Figure 13 - A screen shot from the Cuilcagh to Cleenish: A Great Place Memory Map

[9] https://www.c2c.org.uk/memory-map/

5.5 Altmore Development Proposals

Development proposals within the Altmore Study Area are presented across three distinct zones:

- **Zone 1: The Lower Pond and Cappagh Village**
- **Zone 2: The Upper Pond**
- **Zone 3: Altmore 1** *(large forest block)*

Further to this, opportunities for connectivity across the zones have been included , as **Connecting Links .**

Figure 14 provides an overview of the development zones.

Zoning offers a geographic approach to organising development proposals. The proposed phasing of product delivery is independent of zoning (i.e. there is no priority delivery of zones, but priority delivery within each zone). This is largely influenced by sequencing over time what delivery options are considered feasible at the earliest possible opportunity. This has been assessed against priority need, and the resultant sequence is considered the most appropriate approach to delivering infrastructure as a local multi-activity hub for the community.

5.5.1 Summary of Key Actions and Total Costs

Planning Phase	Delivery Phase 1: 2023-2025	Delivery Phase 2: 2025-2027	Delivery Phase 3: 2027-2030
•Starts now •The majority of this phase should be achieved in advance of or concurrently with the Development Phases as appropriate. •Should always involve close engagement with the surrounding community.	•Zone 1: Lower Pond vehicle access and car parking development. •Zone 2: Reservoir Trail •Zone 3: Waymarking existing forest roads	•Zone 1: Lower Pond trail and Altmore 5 forest trail, and play. •Zone 2: Installation of Fishing platforms and associated infrastructure •Zone 3: New car park	•Zone 1: Water access and toilet provision. •Zone 2: Camping area with visitor servicing •Connecting Links
£243,000	£349,900	£401,000	£422,100

Total for development of Altmore as a local multi-activity hub: **£1,416,000**

Zone 3: Altmore 1

Fermanagh and Omagh District Counci

Altmore 1

Zone 2: Upper Pond

Upper Pond

Altmore 2

Mid Ulster District Council

Altmore 4

Altmore 3

Altmore 5

Lower Pond

Zone 1: Lower Pond and Cappagh Village

Cappagh

Altmore 6

OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND

Council Boundaries

Altmore Forest Boundary

Reservoir

NIW land boundaries

Basemap: OSNI Fustion Basemap © Crown Copyright & Database Right 2018, © Ordnance Survey Ireland - SpatialNI is a service provided by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland®

0 0.5 1 km

Figure 14 - Altmore Development Zones

5.5.2 Zone 1: The Lower Pond and Cappagh Village

5.5.2.1 Summary

Zone 1 sits close to Cappagh Village, just 500m from the village centre.

Development proposals for Zone 1 are shown in Figure 19.

Proposals are centred around community trail development, consisting of a walking loop around the Lower Pond and a forest trail within Altmore 5.

The proposed trailhead is in a flat area of NIWater land at the toe of the earth dam, with provision for play, a toilet facility, and a car parking area.

A slipway or canoe steps is proposed for facilitating in/on the water activities, including open water swimming.

5.5.2.2 Development Constraints

Consultation with NIW has indicated that the organisation is enthusiastic about diversification of use of lands and waters within their ownership, particularly at sites designated as 'out of service'. However, development proposals must be considerate of fundamental engineering and health and safety principles relating to reservoir construction, including (but not limited to):

- Long-term earth dam stability
- Spillways, overflows, outflows and inlets for maintaining water levels
- Ensuring good water quality

Recommendations for developments within this study suggest proposals that are structurally independent of reservoir features as far as is practicable.

Any proposals in the vicinity of the reservoir that may be considered to have any impact on the asset should be subject to risk assessment, including engineering assessment, in close consultation with NIW.

5.5.2.3 Management Model

At the earliest opportunity, MUDC should enter continued and sustained close communication with NIW to ensure proposals adhere to their organisational aims and objectives.

Long-term management and maintenance protocols are recommended as follows:

- MUDC should seek to lease lands from NIWater at the toe of the Lower Pond for the development of a trail head to include car parking, a toilet block, a short stretch of trail, and play facilities.
- MUDC should obtain a license from NIWater for use of lands (and waters for floating walkways) surrounding the reservoir for a loop trail.
- MUDC should obtain a license from NIWater for water-based activity.
- MUDC should obtain a license from Forest Service NI for the development of a trail within Altmore 5.

MUDC should adopt an overall custodianship and regular management schedule for all leased lands and licensed activities, and visitor servicing, but this could be supplemented through SLA arrangements with local Community Groups.

5.5.2.4 Trails

Two trails are proposed for Zone 1; a Lower Pond Loop and a Forest Trail within Altmore 5.

Lower Pond Loop: This trail is a 1km route that will consist of several components:

- A short 'play trail' at the toe of the earth dam, close to the car park and taking advantage of a short stretch of the meandering river.
- Use of the existing NIWater access ramp to get up-gradient from the trailhead (pedestrians only as part of these proposals).
- Use of the existing concrete access lane just off Cappagh Road. This is well maintained, with a wide grassy verge, and only very lightly trafficked for access only.
- Use of floating pontoon-style walkway to 'bypass' the reservoir spillway structurally independently, with similar to be used along any areas of embankment where engineering assessments indicate structural independence is the most feasible solution.

Forest Trail: A 1km trail consisting of a gravel surface, built largely parallel to contours using bench-cut techniques to overcome side-slope gradients and using switchbacks to maximise accessibility up- and

down- slope. There may be an option of linking to Cappagh picnic area at the trail's upper end at limited extra cost, subject to detailed design and land ownership clarifications.

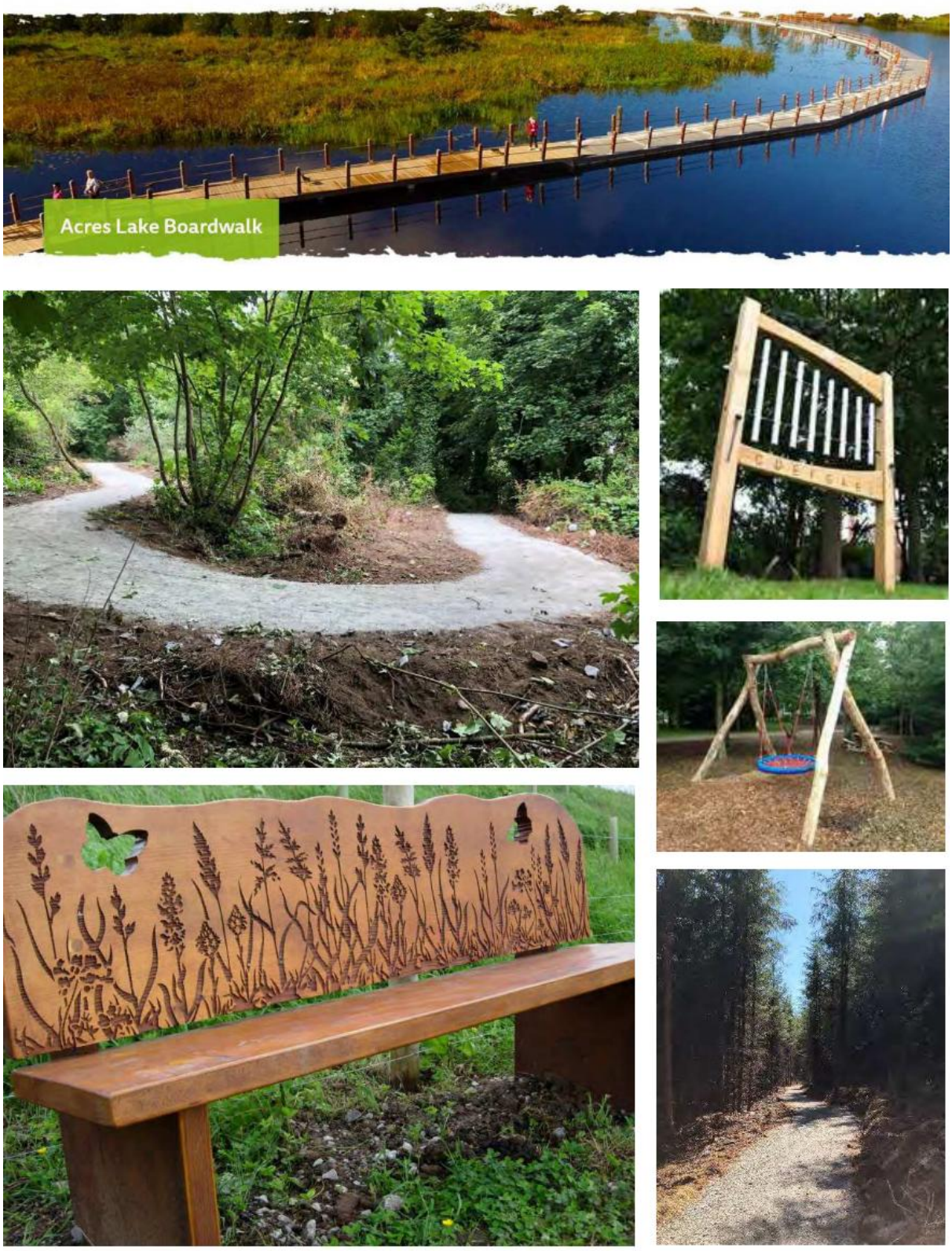


Figure 15 Clockwise from top: Acres Lake floating boardwalk in Leitrim - similar proposed for sections of the Lower Pond, Play features - woodland xylophone and disc swing, Bench cut woodland trail, Bench seating, Switchback gravel trail in woodland.

5.5.2.5 Water-Based Activity

Provision for water-based activity including swimming and kayaking (community-led) is proposed for the Lower Pond.

NIWater have historically prohibited swimming at their sites, and the key message to not swim in reservoirs remains as a default message to be fully respected. However, consultation with NIWater has indicated a desire to diversify, particularly with 'out of use' lands and reservoirs, to maximise community benefit from these assets and ensure a sustainable model for responsible public access.

The Open Water Swimming Society's Guide to Inland Bathing Areas[10] outlines various models for facilitating – or at a most primitive level not prohibiting – water access (including to reservoirs), that include:

- The Unsupervised Access Model
- Managed Bathing Facilities
    - Non-lifeguarded
    - Lifeguarded

Subject to appropriate risk assessment and any mitigation measures, **a Non-lifeguarded managed bathing facility** is recommended for the Lower Pond, that is, one where a risk assessment has indicated the space is suitable for swimming following implementation of measures highlighted in the risk assessment. Examples of such facilities in reservoirs in Northern Ireland include:

- **Camlough Lake, Newry.** Camlough Lake enjoys a strong community presence relating to Open Water Swimming, and the reservoir has been host to triathlons, swimming festivals, and championship swimming events as well as facilitating casual public swim access. It is an Out of Service reservoir with an earth dam and shallow spillway, similar to Cappagh's Lower Pond. The water body benefits from a slipway for water access, and a designated swim zone consisting of buoys to guide swimmers around a course, managed by Newry Mourne and Down District Council.
- **Loughmacrory, Co. Tyrone.** This water body is an active reservoir servicing the Omagh Area and has been in use for open water swimming, kayaking, and fishing for many years. A very strong community group has been the driver behind developments at the

[10] https://www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Guide-To-Inland-Bathing-Areas-2018_small.pdf

lake, and licensing and lease arrangements for the lake's use are directly between NIWater and the Community Group with no Council involvement. Although an Active reservoir, from an engineering perspective it is characteristically different from Camlough or the reservoirs at Altmore as it is not impounded by a dam and does not have the same level of engineering infrastructure. A slipway and a designated swim zone is installed and managed by the local community.

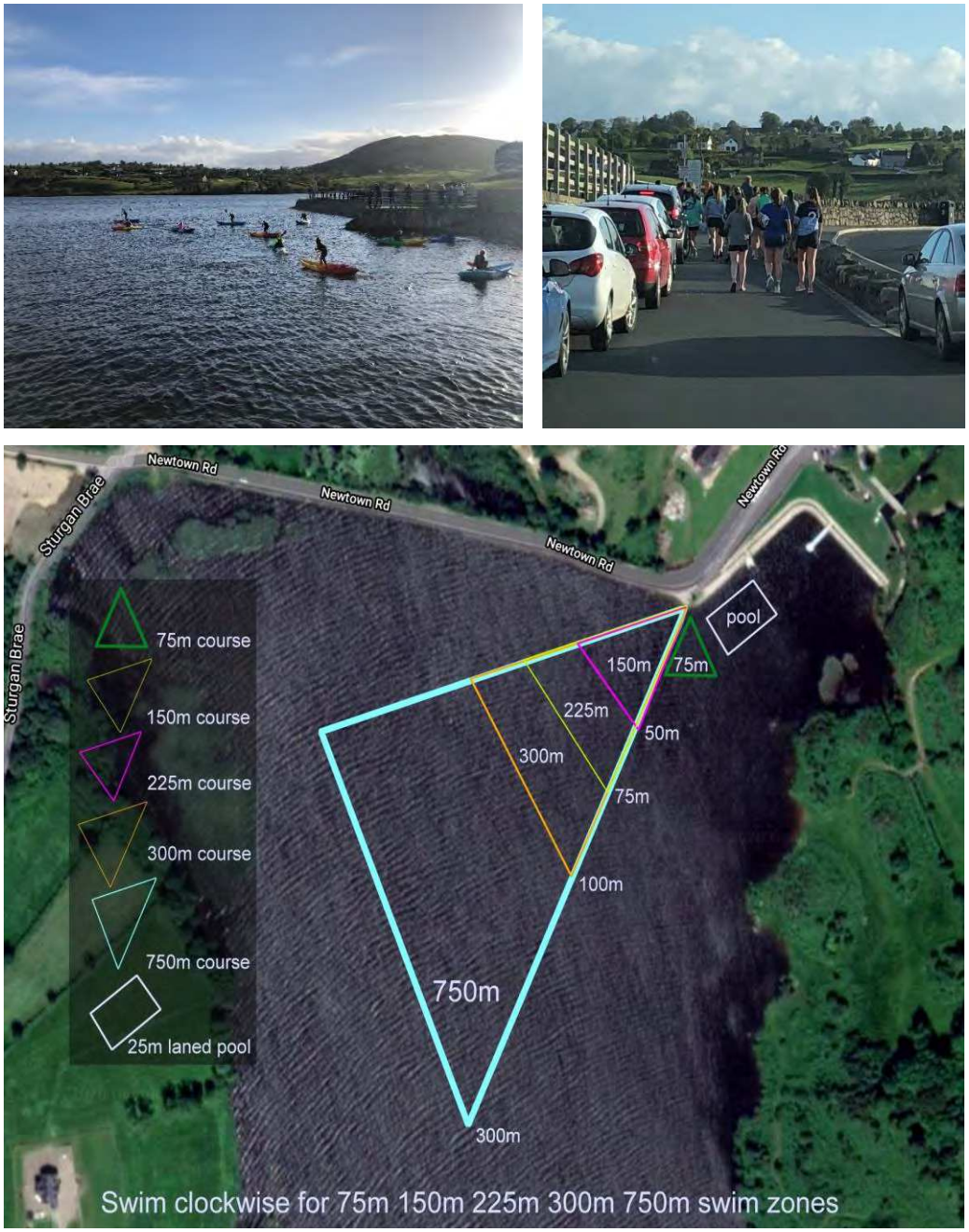


Figure 16 - Clockwise from top: Kayaking activity and spectators at Camlough Lake, Local football club members heading for a post-training dip at Camlough, Designated swim course at Camlough

5.5.2.6 Car Parking and Visitor Servicing

Due to a dispersed rural population throughout the Study Area it is anticipated that most visitors will access the Lower Pond site by car, . There is no complete footpath link to connect the site to the village and this is explored further in 'Connecting Links' (Section 5.5.5) to maximise options relating to equality of access and sustainability.

Car parking is proposed for the flat area at the toe of the earth dam. Development should be sited far enough away to be structurally independent of reservoir structures. This will require engineering assessments including ground investigation and detailed analysis of any sub-surface services, in close partnership with NIWater. An existing steep single-lane vehicular service access comes down from Cappagh Road and runs along the face of the dam. The existing configuration is unlikely to be suitable for public vehicle access without significant upgrade due to narrow width and steep gradient, so a new site entrance and access lane is proposed towards the western extent of the site, retaining independence from the existing functions of the service access which would instead be adopted as part of the trail network.

Parking capacity for approximately 20 vehicles is recommended, though available space would allow for more should it be required (and be appropriate) in future.

Figure 17 - Existing service access running along the front of the dam. New public vehicular access is proposed with this space becoming part of the walking trail network.

Public Toilets are proposed for the space close to the car park. The design of any toileting space should be an integral part of an overall brand and interpretive design to contribute to an overall sense of welcome and cohesion.

Figure 18 - Public toilets. Architecture and finish should contribute to an overall cohesive branding and interpretive experience of the site

5.5.2.7 Community Enterprise

Mid Ulster District Council should consider the licensing of site-appropriate mobile catering, e.g. coffee cart, to be based within or adjacent to the car parking area. Where possible within Council procurement processes, priority for this commercial opportunity should be given to providers that create an employment opportunity from within the immediate surrounding community.

5.5.2.8 Other Community Facilities

There is strong demand for further community facilities in this space beyond outdoor recreation, including a community hall or similar such building or meeting space. Provision for this is not included within this scoping study. However, it is considered that there is enough space within the NIWater lands that should the Council wish to incorporate this into overall plans for Cappagh Village, this is likely to be a viable proposal and should form part of a collective lease of the space.

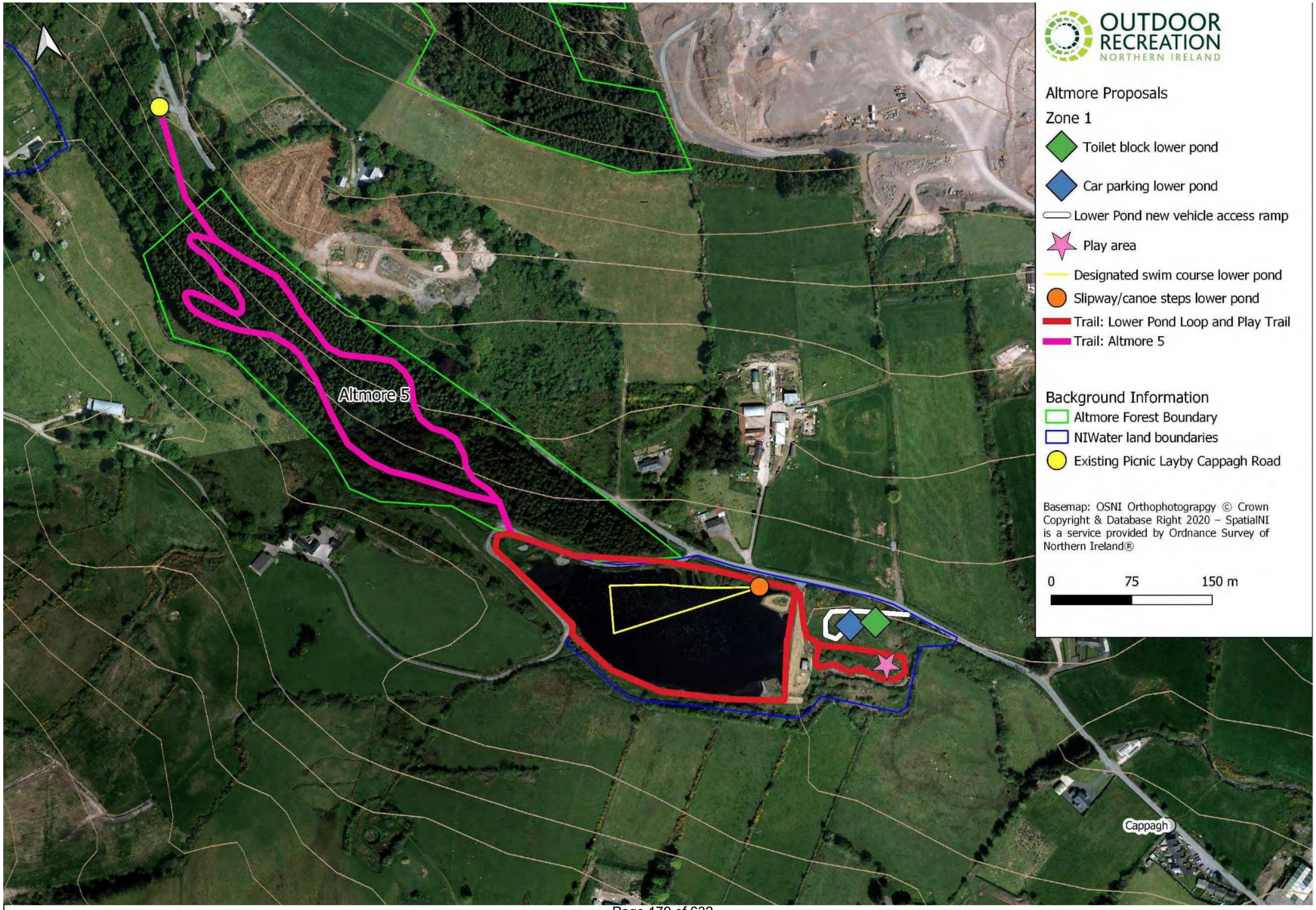


Figure 19 - Development Proposals for Zone 1 - Lower Pond and Cappagh Village

5.5.3 Zone 2: The Upper Pond

5.5.3.1 Summary

Zone 2 is located approximately 3km west from Cappagh Village within MUDC, not far from its boundary with FODC

Development proposals for Zone 2 are shown in Figure 24.

Proposals include a 1.5km community trail loop around the perimeter of the Upper Pond, with fishing platforms and a covered shelter for respite in poor weather.

A car park for approximately 30 cars is proposed along Barnagh's Road on a plot of land made up of existing hardstanding.

Outline proposals for a camping area with associated visitor servicing are included, though the case for its inclusion should be subject to further assessment of community benefit.

5.5.3.2 Development Constraints

Consultation with NIWater has indicated that the organisation is enthusiastic about diversification of use of lands and waters within their ownership, particularly at sites designated as 'out of service'. However, development proposals must be considerate of fundamental engineering and health and safety principles relating to reservoir construction, including (but not limited to):

- Long-term earth dam stability
- Spillways, overflows, outflows and inlets for maintaining water levels
- Ensuring good water quality

Recommendations for developments within this study suggest proposals that are structurally independent of reservoir features as far as is practicable.

Any proposals in the vicinity of the reservoir that may be considered to have any impact on the asset should be subject to risk assessment, including engineering assessment, in close consultation with NIWater.

5.5.3.3 Management Model

At the earliest opportunity, MUDC should enter continued and sustained close communication with NIWater to ensure proposals adhere to organisational aims and objectives.

Long-term management and maintenance protocols are recommended as follows:

- MUDC should seek to lease lands from NIWater for the area of car parking at Barnagh's Road
- MUDC should consider a future lease from NIWater and subsequent sub-let arrangements for the outlined camping area.
- MUDC should obtain a license from NIWater for use of lands surrounding the reservoir for a loop trail.
- MUDC should facilitate agreements between local fishing clubs and relevant licensing departments (agreements between club and DAERA/NIWater as appropriate) for stocking and fishing of the watercourse.

MUDC should adopt an overall custodianship and regular management schedule for all leased lands and licensed activities, and visitor servicing, but this could be supplemented through SLA arrangements with local Community Groups.

5.5.3.4 Trails

A single 1.5km trail loop is proposed for Zone 2, which will bring visitors on a complete loop around the reservoir. Around 30% of the trail is estimated to be on peat and will require a boardwalk-style construction, with the remainder of trail being built on a competent sub-base of near-surface rock and around the flat top of the earth dam.

Figure 20 - Earth dam of the Upper Pond (Zone 2)

At the reservoir's western edge there are numerous small water inlets that will require bridging structures up to ~10m. It is expected that these could take the form of boardwalk-bridges in a style continuous with a boardwalk path.

The trail also aims to provide fishing access, with up to three fishing platforms recommended to be integrated. Similar facilities exist at Lough Fea, close to Cookstown.

Figure 21 - Clockwise from top left: Example of Boardwalk style path, Arial view of boarwalk example at similar setting at Alnahinch Reservoir in Antrim, Fishing platform at Lough Fea in Cookstown, Gravel trail at Lough Fea.

5.5.3.5 Water-Based Activity

Water based activity at the site is considered feasible as much as it is in Zone 1, but in the context of proposals for the whole study area, a pilot model for water-based activity is considered more appropriate for the area closest to Cappagh village. Should this be a success, water-based activity in the future should be considered for Zone 2 and may be best approached in the context of outline proposals for a camping area with respective visitor servicing.

5.5.3.6 Car Parking and Visitor Servicing

Due to a dispersed rural population throughout the Study Area it is expected that most visitors will access the Upper Pond site by car. Car parking is proposed in an area of existing hardstanding just off Barnagh's Road, and this existing space is estimated to be able to provide space for approximately 30 cars. The area identified is fenced off and appears to be a form of storage area, within NIWater ownership boundaries. The area has become overgrown, and a stand of Japanese Knotweed was observed.

No other visitor servicing (e.g. toilets) is proposed for Zone 2.

Figure 22 - Existing hardstanding space identified for visitor car parking

5.5.3.7 Community Enterprise

The area outlined as a camping area with visitor servicing, subject to further assessment of viability, could be sub-let through Council-set parameters to provide a commercial opportunity for camping/glamping/activity centre.

Figure 23 - Clockwise from top left: Area identified as potential camping/glamping area, Camping area water access at reservoir's western extent, Example of an Out of Service reservoir use for camping/glamping and water-based activity in Belfast (Let's Go Hydro resort)

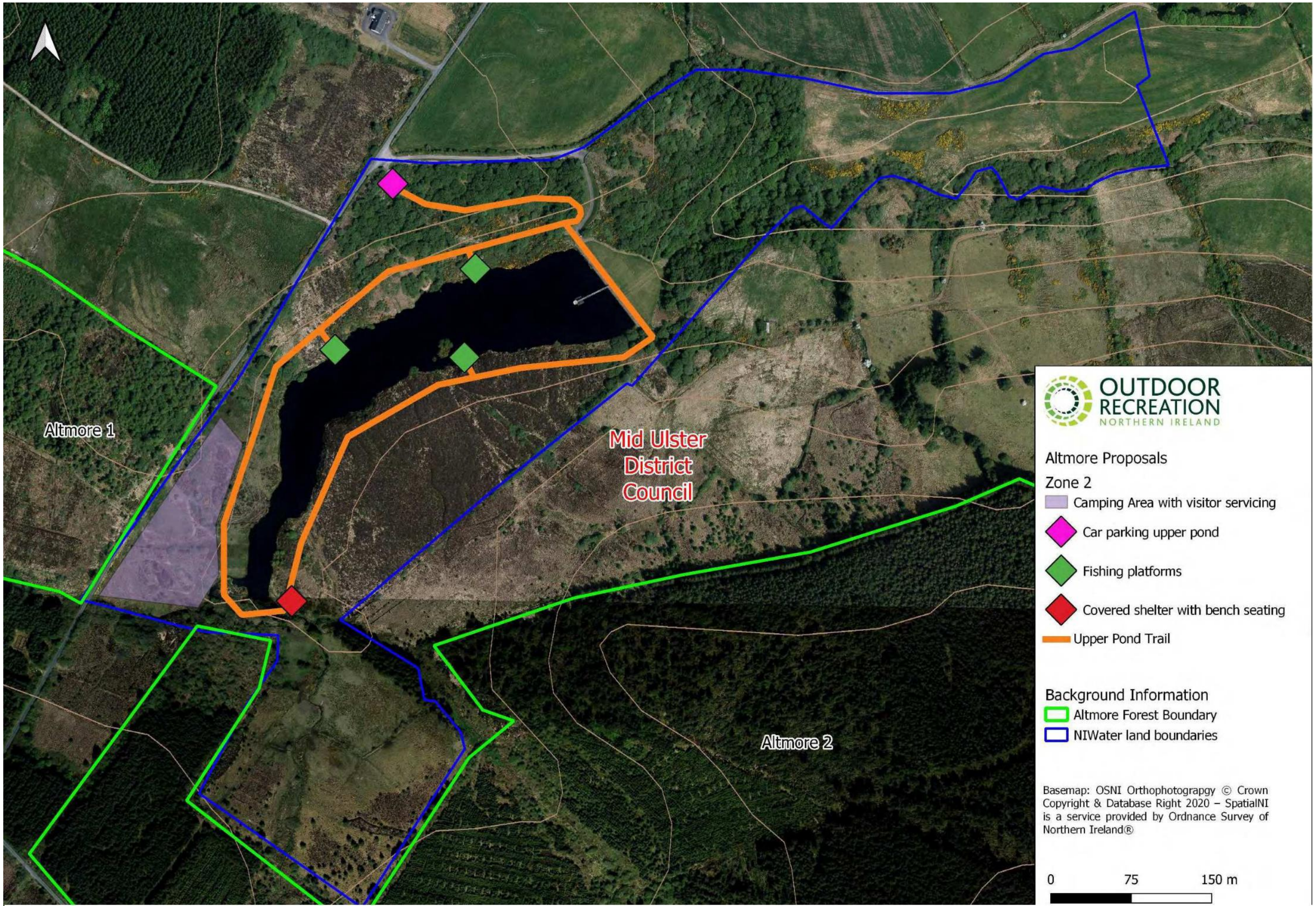


Figure 24 - Development Proposals for Zone 2 – Upper Pond

5.5.4 Zone 3: Altmore 1

5.5.4.1 Summary

Zone 3 is focused on Altmore 1, the largest forest block within the Altmore Forest management unit, and the one already used informally for recreation by the local community.

The vast majority of Altmore 1's area sits within Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Area.

Development proposals for Zone 3 are shown in Figure 25.

Proposals focus on enhancing the use of existing internal forest roads through wayfinding, and interpretation.

5.5.4.2 Development Constraints

Forest Service NI has indicated support in principle for recreational development within Altmore 1. However, it highlighted issues regarding significant depths of peat that make forestry activity difficult, and warnings that any development or even construction access would likely be prohibitively expensive and would risk de-stabilising the tree crop.

The site spans between two council areas, MUDC and FODC, with most of the site within FODC. This scenario presents challenges in terms of leading projects and could risk 'no action' on a bureaucratic basis, something the surrounding communities claim to have suffered with for many years. Rather than considering the split site as a constraint, there are opportunities to be taken advantage of from joined jurisdiction of sites and it is recommended that in the short-term, MUDC take a lead role in engaging with FODC on the shared progress of proposals on the following basis:

- The trailhead sits right on the Council boundary. Therefore, one Council will be required to take the lead and to date MUDC has been the driver for developments.
- Demand evaluated from the community survey was predominantly from ratepayers within MUDC. Geographically, residents from MUDC are considered the greatest beneficiaries of any developments within Altmore 1.
- Given the deep peat constraint, proposals are limited to basic enhancement of existing forest roads and are therefore a low-cost, quick, easy win for nearby communities.

5.5.4.3 Management Model

It follows the recommendation in 5.5.4.2 that MUDC take a lead on developing proposals, that the same Council also take the lead on entering into a license agreement for use of the forest for recreational activity from Forest Service NI.

Consultation as part of this Scoping Study indicated that some FODC Councillors were interested in the development of Altmore, so there may be opportunity to share the burden of cost and ongoing management resource. Support with any initial capital funding and ongoing resource should be negotiated and sought from FODC if possible. However, it is understood that Altmore is not a priority for development within FODC.

The lease of an area for car parking will be required between FSNI and the lead Council.

5.5.4.4 Trails

The Altmore 1 trail experience will change very little from its current form. Physical development constraints relating to deep peat mean the most feasible option to formalise recreation is to use existing forest roads but enhance them in a basic way with wayfinding and trail furniture, to create a more welcoming and interactive experience.

A stacked trail system will consist of a 5km main loop, with a further 2.6km available to create a longer loop. This gives a maximum continuous 7.6km of route suitable for purposeful exercise, and a quiet space to go for a long walk away from public roads.

5.5.4.5 Car Parking and Visitor Servicing

Due to a dispersed rural population throughout the Study Area it is expected that most visitors will access the site by car. Car parking should aim to accommodate approximately 20 vehicles. Geological mapping shows small areas along Barnagh's Road where peat is shallow, meaning that construction methods and costs associated with a car park build can potentially be minimised if these areas are targeted.

No other visitor servicing (e.g. toilets) is proposed for Zone 3.

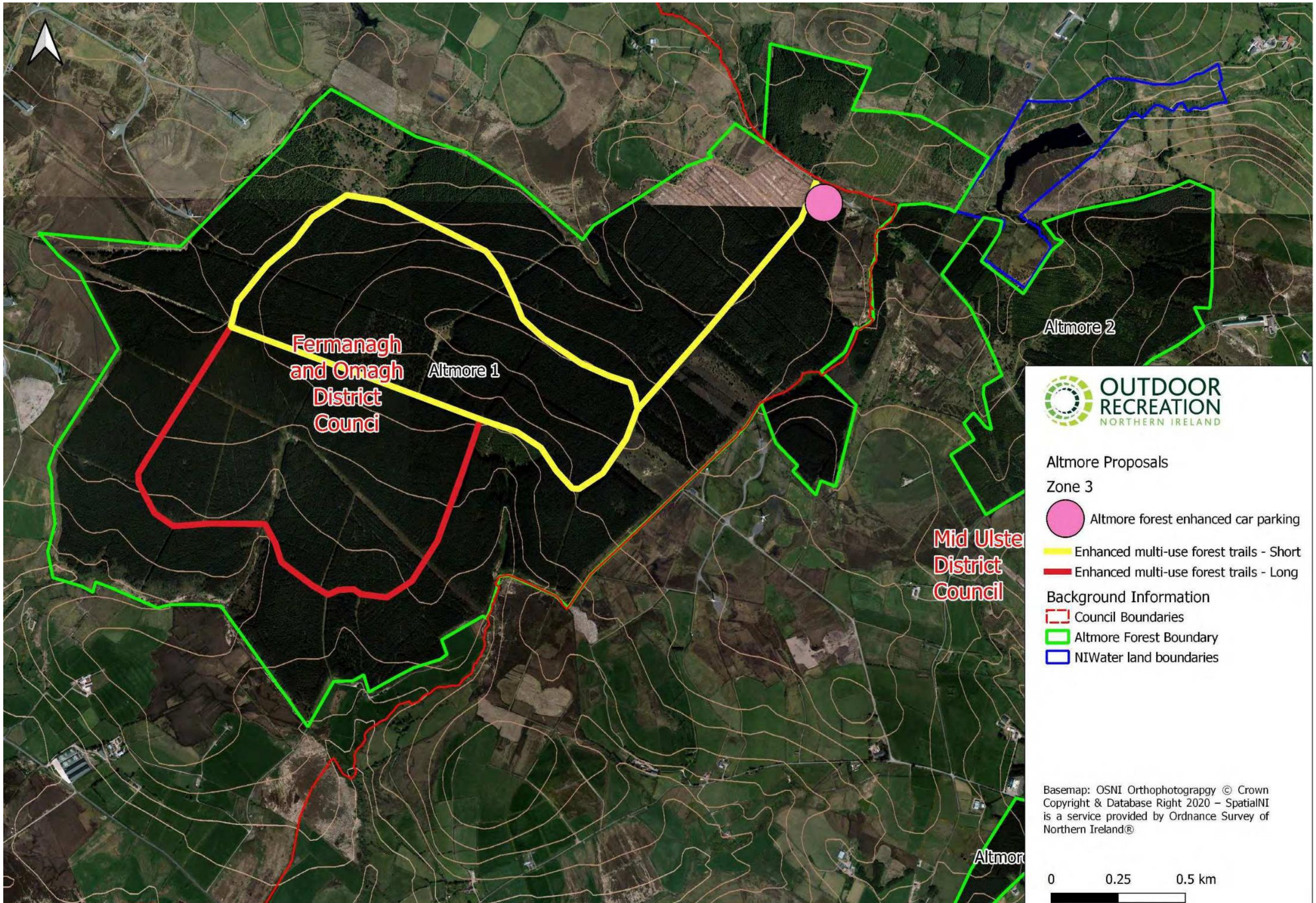


Figure 25 - Development Proposals for Zone 3 – Altmore 1

5.5.5 Connecting Links

There are opportunities associated with creating connecting recreational links within and across zones to maximise the value of individual developments. Four key links have been identified:

- Cappagh Village to the Lower Pond
- Lower Pond over Cappagh Mountain to the Chapel
- Lower Pond to the Upper Pond
- Upper Pond to Altmore 1

5.5.5.1 Cappagh Village to the Lower Pond

This is an approximately 500m valuable link that will physically connect Cappagh Village, traffic-free, to any developments at the Lower Pond. Such a link will provide 'doorstep' opportunity for outdoor recreation to those who potentially need it most and would secure the Lower Pond as a true community-focused asset. The land available to connect the two spaces is not all publicly owned. To realise the link, further discussions with local landowners will be required to select the most appropriate route option, whether a roadside footpath or an off-road trail.

5.5.5.2 Lower Pond over Cappagh Mountain to the Chapel

This link sits wholly within Zone 1. However, as an out-and-back route it is considered a link rather than an integral part of recreational developments of Zone 1 as its objective is to connect people within Cappagh Village to the local chapel along a traffic-free route. Much of the connecting lands are owned and managed by FSNI (Altmore 3 and Altmore 5), but some private landowner discussions are required to realise the full value of the link as a pleasant and safe route to connect the public lands.

5.5.5.3 Lower Pond to Upper Pond

Should developments at both Zone 1 and Zone 2 be realised, a subsequent exercise to connect the two would result in a recreational product spanning a large area, thus increasing the value of the assets, particularly with a view to drawing in external visitors (e.g. day-trippers from across Northern Ireland). The feasibility of such a route would require further assessment, but high-level indications suggest it is possible from both a physical and a landownership point of view.

5.5.5.4 Upper Pond to Altmore 1

Should developments at both Zone 2 and Zone 3 be realised, a relatively short connecting link between the two is deliverable wholly within public lands.

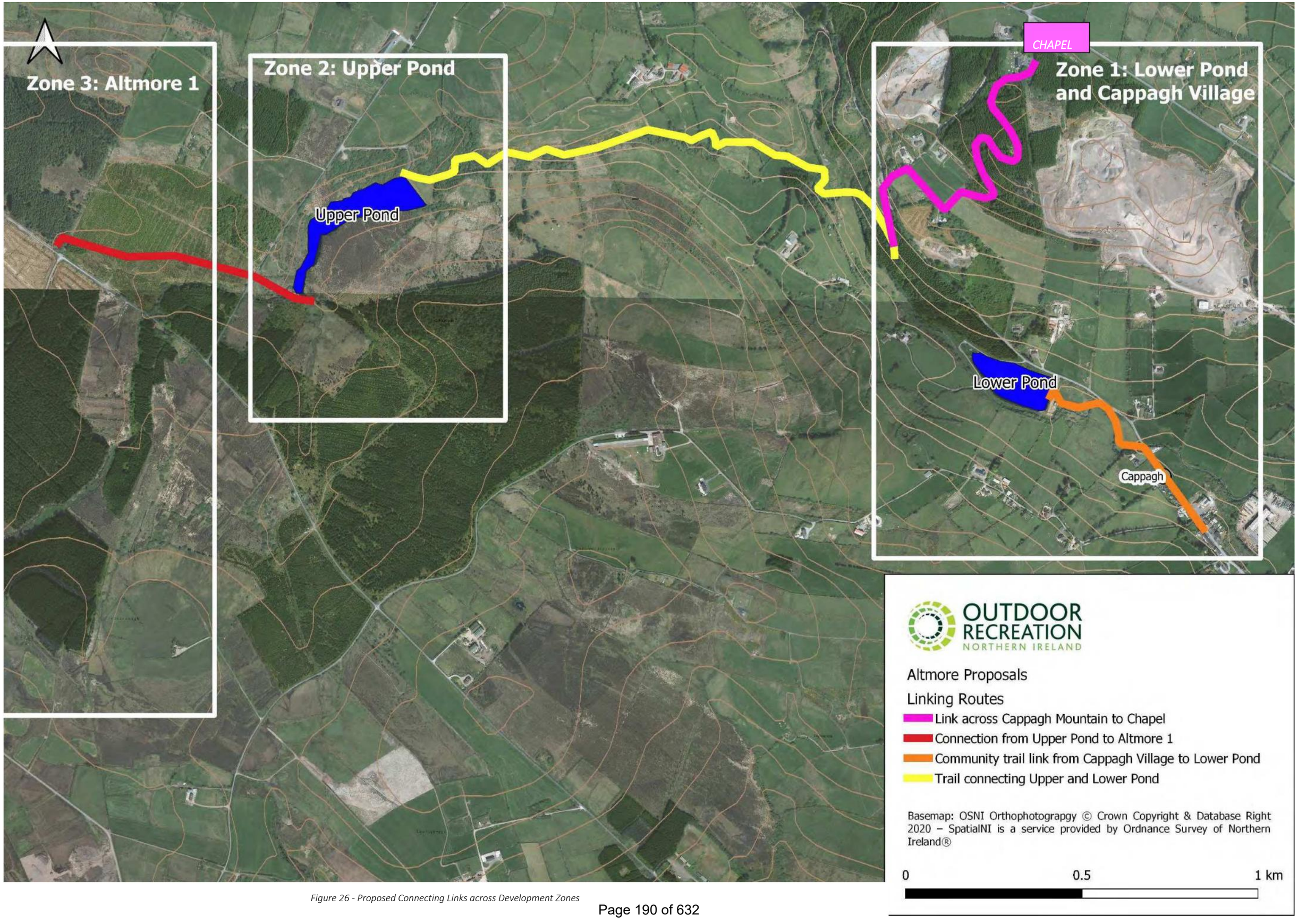


Figure 26 - Proposed Connecting Links across Development Zones

6 Phased Implementation Plan

6.1 Zone 1 Visitor Infrastructure Actions and Costs

ZONE	CATEGORY		Item	PLANNING PHASE (starts now, runs throughout)	DELIVERY PHASE 1 2023-2025	DELIVERY PHASE 2 2025-2027	DELIVERY PHASE 3 2027-2030
ZONE 1: LOWER POND AT CAPPAGH VILLAGE	Brand and Interpretation		External Navigation Signage	Brand and Signage Strategy Interpretation Framework The above may be applied across multiple forest sites as a value-for-money exercise and to deliver consistency across the Council area. They must consider the proposed two-phased development and delivery, and should identify opportunities for community co-curation. To align with respective infrastructure items and proposed phases. £20,000		Design, production, and installation x 2 £4,000	
			Welcome Signage			Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000	
			Interpretation			Design, production, and installation x 2 £5,000	
	Trail Network & Water Access		Visitor Counter	Professional fees for advancements of development concept for new build trails: - Refined cost estimate - Engineering assessments relating to reservoir structures to be advised by NIW. - Commissioning of ecological and other heritage surveys as required. - Planning Approvals. - Trail prescription for contract specification. - Contractor procurement. £30,000		Installation x 2 £6,000	
			Trailhead Panel			Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000	
			Trail Build Pond loop			New build trail 1km consisting of - 100m floating boardwalk @£800/m - 650m new build gravel trail @ £30/m - 250m existing concrete lane £99,500	
			Trail Build Altmore 5 Forest walk		*Could be delivered within Delivery Phase 1 if detailed design deems a link to Cappagh Picnic Area viable (i.e. trailhead parking availability)*	*Could be delivered within Delivery Phase 1 if detailed design deems a link to Cappagh Picnic Area viable (i.e. trailhead parking availability)* New build trail 1km with bench cut @£40/m and small areas of stone stepping @ £80/m £52,000	
			Wayfinding			Post & Disc Est. 6No @ £150 £900	
			Water Access	Professional fees for advancement of water access model, including structured ongoing engagement with NIW, detailed site risk assessment with output of mitigation measures required. £25,000			- Slipway/canoe steps: Detailed design dependent on outcomes of Risk Assessment and mitigation measures required. - Other mitigation measures may include vegetation/weed clearance and embankment works.

							Cost provided is high-level estimate only £50,000
	Trailhead Infrastructure and Visitor Services		Car Parking	Professional fees including for: - Proposed layout plans for parking area. - Engineering assessments relating to impact on reservoir structures, services, and to advise on detailed design and build-up of car park (cost also includes for access ramp, toilet and play area). - Engineering design and Roads Service approvals for access ramp. - Refined cost estimate. - Commissioning of ecological and other heritage surveys as required. - Planning Approvals. - Contractor procurement. £50,000	New build bitmac surface car park @£2,000 per space x 20 spaces. £40,000		
			New site access and earthworks ramp		Planning phase should rule out feasibility/preferred option to use existing service access ramp along face of earth dam (nb this space is also required as trail section) before proceeding as follows: New build site entrance from Cappagh Road with earthworks ramp to include vehicular restraint barriers above and below as required. Cost provided is high-level estimate only £120,000		
			Toilet Block				Toilet block architectural design and installation £200,000
	Trail Furniture and Play		Play	Specification to be fully incorporated into whole-site brand and interpretation Strategy. Professional fees for commissioning of site-appropriate play trail and site furniture features consistent with brand and interpretation strategy £10,000		Play features to be integrated into whole-site design and delivered in sequence as soon as feasible. £25,000	
			Bench Seating			8No. wooden benches throughout trail system @ £300 each £2,400	
			Picnic benches			2No. wooden picnic tables @ £600 each £1,200	
		Phased Totals		**£135,000**	**£160,000**	**£200,000**	**£250,000**
						Total	**£745,000**

6.2 Zone 2 Visitor Infrastructure Actions and Costs

ZONE	CATEGORY		Item	PLANNING PHASE (starts now, runs throughout)	DELIVERY PHASE 1 2023-2025	DELIVERY PHASE 2 2025-2027	DELIVERY PHASE 3 2027-2030
ZONE 2: UPPER POND	Brand and Interpretation		External Navigation Signage	Brand and Signage Strategy Interpretation Framework The above may be applied across multiple forest sites as a value-for-money exercise and to deliver consistency across the Council area. They must consider the proposed two-phased development and delivery, and should identify opportunities for community co-curation. To align with respective infrastructure items and proposed phases Cost excluded as already included in Zone 1 costings ~~£20,000~~	Design, production, and installation x 2 £4,000		
			Welcome Signage		Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000		
			Interpretation		Design, production, and installation x 2 £5,000		
	Trail Network & Fishing Access		Visitor Counter	Professional fees for advancements of development concept for new build trails: - Refined cost estimate - Engineering assessments relating to reservoir structures to be advised by NIW. - Commissioning of ecological and other heritage surveys as required. - Planning Approvals. - Trail prescription for contract specification. - Contractor procurement. £30,000	Installation x 1 £3,000		
			Trailhead Panel		Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000		
			Trail Build reservoir loop		New build trail 1.5km consisting of - 500m boardwalk trail with localised bridging structures @ £120/m - 1000m new build gravel trail @ £40/m priced to include vegetation clearance. £100,000		
			Fishing Platforms and associated infrastructure			Design, production, and installation (similar spec to Lough Fea delivered for MUDC by AG Wilson Civil engineering) £150,000	
			Wayfinding		Post & Disc Est. 4No @ £150 £600		

	Trailhead Infrastructure and Visitor Services		Car Parking	Professional fees including for: - Refined cost estimate. - Commissioning of ecological and other heritage surveys as required. - Planning Approvals. - Contractor procurement. £15,000	Vehicular entrance from Barnaghs Road and new gravel surface car park @£1,900 per space x 30 spaces. £60,000		
	Trail Furniture		Bench Seating	Specification to be fully incorporated into whole-site brand and interpretation Strategy.	8No. wooden benches throughout trail system @ £300 each £2,400		
			Picnic benches		2No. wooden picnic tables @ £600 each £1,200		
	Community Enterprise		Camping area with Visitor Servicing	Professional fees for specific assessment of community need, delivery models, economic sustainability etc. £10,000			Implementation – third party enterprise. Nominal cost to MUDC
			Phased Totals	**£55,000**	**£177,800**	**£150,000**	**Nominal**
						Total	**£382,800**

6.3 Zone 3 Visitor Infrastructure Actions and Costs

ZONE	CATEGORY	Item	PLANNING PHASE (starts now, runs throughout)	DELIVERY PHASE 1 2023-2025	DELIVERY PHASE 2 2025-2027	DELIVERY PHASE 3 2027-2030
ZONE 3: Altmore 1	Brand and Interpretation	External Navigation Signage	Brand and Signage Strategy Interpretation Framework The above may be applied across multiple forest sites as a value-for-money exercise and to deliver consistency across the Council area. They must consider the proposed two-phased development and delivery, and should identify opportunities for community co-curation. To align with respective infrastructure items and proposed phases Cost excluded as already included in Zone 1 costings ~~£20,000~~		Design, production, and installation x 2 £4,000	
		Welcome Signage			Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000	
		Interpretation			Design, production, and installation x 2 £5,000	
	Trail Network	Visitor Counter	Professional fees for implementation. £3,000	Installation x 2 £6,000		
		Trailhead Panel		Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000		
		Trail Build		N/A – uses existing forest roads		
		Wayfinding		Post & Disc Est. 10No @ £150 £1,500		
	Trailhead Infrastructure and Visitor Services	Car Parking	Professional fees including for: - Ground investigation for siting car park where bedrock is near-surface, to avoid deep peat and so minimise construction costs. - Commissioning of ecological and other heritage surveys as required. - Planning Approvals. - Contractor procurement. £15,000		Vehicular entrance from Barnaghs Road and new gravel surface car park @£1,900 per space x 20 spaces. £40,000	
	Trail Furniture	Bench Seating	Specification to be fully incorporated into whole-site brand and interpretation Strategy.	8No. wooden benches throughout trail system @ £300 each £2,400		
		Picnic benches		2No. wooden picnic tables @ £600 each £1,200		
		Phased Totals	**£18,000**	**£12,100**	**£51,000**	**N/A**
					Total	**£81,100**

6.4 Connecting Links

ZONE	CATEGORY		Item	PLANNING PHASE (starts now, runs throughout)	DELIVERY PHASE 1 2023-2025	DELIVERY PHASE 2 2025-2027	DELIVERY PHASE 3 2027-2030
Connecting Links	Brand and Interpretation		External Navigation Signage	Whole-site Brand and Interpretation Strategy, identifying opportunities for community co-curation. Note that this could be a piece of work common to and scalable and applicable across multiple zones and sites as a value-for-money exercise. Cost excluded as already included in Zone 1 costings ~~£25,000~~			Design, production, and installation x 2 £4,000
			Welcome Signage				Design, production, and installation x 1 £2,000
			Interpretation				Design, production, and installation x 2 £5,000
	Trail Network		Visitor Counter	Next steps: Feasibility studies required to advance links in priority order: 1) Cappagh Village to Lower Pond 2) Upper and Lower Pond (dependent on advancement of delivery) 3) Upper Pond to Altmore 1 4) Cappagh Mountain and Chapel 4 studies at £5,000-£10,000 each to include trail prescriptions for working up to shovel-ready stage if feasible. £35,000			Installation x 4 £12,000
			Trailhead Panel				Design, production, and installation x 2 £4,000
			Trail Build				Estimated 3.5km of trail. Assume new build gravel surface @ £40/m. Cost provided is high-level estimate only. £140,000
			Wayfinding				Post & Disc Est. 10No @ £150 £1,500
	Trailhead Infrastructure and Visitor Services		Car Parking				N/A uses existing/newly developed
	Trail Furniture		Bench Seating	Specification to be fully incorporated into whole-site brand and interpretation Strategy.			8No. wooden benches throughout trail system @ £300 each £2,400
			Picnic benches				2No. wooden picnic tables @ £600 each £1,200
			Phased Totals	**£35,000**			**£172,100**
						Total	**£207,100**

6.5 Altmore Management Actions and Costs

Management actions and costs are variable dependent on the eventual level of development realised, but full development is assumed.

CATEGORY		Item	PLANNING PHASE	DEVELOPMENT PHASES +
Third Party Agreements		Forest Service	MUDC to secure: - License for development of trail within Altmore 5. - Lease for development of car parking area at Altmore 1 Cost: Nominal	- Licenses relating to future development of connecting links within Altmore 2, 3, or 4. Cost: Nominal
		Northern Ireland Water	MUDC to: - Enter into a formalised and structured dialogue with NIW at the earliest opportunity, and form an agreed working relationship to advance proposals in line with NIW's organisational aims and objectives. - Secure license for activity on NIW lands - Secure license for activity on NIW Waters - Secure lease for lands at the Lower Pond close to Cappagh Village for use as car park and visitor servicing area.	
		Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	MUDC should communicate the findings of this scoping study with their nearest Council neighbours FODC to seek a joint approach to delivery of facilities within Altmore 1 that spans the council boundary.	
		Community		SLA and/or volunteer agreement for: • Waste/Litter. • Opening/closing gates. • Light maintenance of car parking and other visitor service facilities (e.g. strimming) Est. £15,000 P/A based on full development
Community Engagement			- Engage local community groups in co-curation of development features, including interpretive experiences. - Press releases to announce planned investment.	Launch event and community volunteer/'friends of Altmore recruitment. Community-led
Future Site Management		Site Management Plan	Develop a management plan that clearly outlines what all party's roles and responsibilities will be, to be agreed with all parties in advance of developments. Based on full study Area development, parties include: - MUDC - FSNI - NIW - FODC - Community groups £30,000	MUDC implementation of Site Management Plan (in addition to SLA with community groups) £10,000 P/A
		Phased Totals	**£30,000**	**£25,000 P/A**

7 Funding Streams

Options for partnership funding or development support from both NIW and FODC should be explored, given MUDC-led developments are likely to help fulfil the aims and objectives of both these organisations.

Several external funding options may be available for a project of this kind, including the following:

Initiatives to Tackle Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

DAERA TRPSI fund has the potential be a good fit for developments such as those proposed within this Scoping Study.

For example, over the past 4 years DAERA has committed £5.7m from its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme to 17 Forest Park Enhancement Schemes. This significant financial commitment has levered in a further £3.9m through partnerships formed with Councils and other grant aiding bodies. These projects contribute to the health and well-being of the residents of the surrounding areas to the Forests/Trails by developing safe, way marked, off-road cycling/walking trails that will accommodate a wide range of users and helping locals and visitors alike to stay healthy and happy, both physically and mentally.

Successful application for funding would be dependent on MUDC securing match funding of (currently 15% for 2021/22 funding programme).

Further detailed information can be found at https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/initiatives-tackle-rural-poverty-and-social-isolation-trpsi

DAERA Environmental Challenge Fund

DAERA's Environmental Challenge Fund aims to support projects that will deliver outcomes in at least one of their strategic priorities, including Implementation of actions that are essential to delivery of DAERA's strategic outdoor recreation priorities, to increase sustainable public enjoyment and understanding of land and seascapes including: a) Delivery of core path networks and strategic routes, primarily in partnership with councils; b) Promotion of environmental responsibility and good practice; c) Projects on NIEA sites, particularly for those for whom access is currently difficult.

Overarching factors that will be taken into account in shortlisting and allocating funding to projects include;

- Scale
- Evidence of need
- Environmental impacts
- Value for money (including match funding options)
- Sustainable impact

Further detailed information can be found at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/ef-environment-fund-2019-22-overarching-criteria-environmental-impact

National Lottery Heritage Fund

National Lottery funds projects that connect people and communities to the national, regional, and local heritage of the UK. They provide different levels of funding to heritage of all shapes and sizes, with grants ranging from £3,000 up to millions of pounds. The Heritage Fund prioritises heritage projects that meet six of their outcomes as follows:

- A wider range of people will be involved in heritage.
- The funded organisation will be more resilient.
- People will have greater wellbeing.
- People will have developed skills.
- The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit.
- The local economy will be boosted.

All projects are also expected to demonstrate that they are building long-term environmental sustainability and inclusion into their plans.

Appendices

Appendix A Strategic Context (Detailed Version)

The development of outdoor recreation and the supporting local community facilities fulfils the aims and agendas of a variety of several government departments, agencies and strategic organisations. Outdoor Recreation NI has taken care to ensure that the proposed development(s) outlined in this Scoping Study, aligns with these policies and strategies at a regional and local level.

The following strategies and policies were identified as having most strategic relevance.

Theme	Policy / Strategy
Overarching Strategies	– Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 (NI Executive, 2016) – Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD 2010) – Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2024 (MUDC, 2020) – Our Community Plan: 10 year plan for Mid Ulster (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)
Health & Well-being	– A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022 – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)
Economy & Tourism	– Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017) – Mid Ulster Economic Development Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	– Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland (2014) – A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021) – Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025 – Outdoor Recreation Strategy (MUDC, 2021) – Parks and Play Strategy (MUDC, 2021)
Natural Environment & Heritage	– Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050 – NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 – Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2012) – Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006 – The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011) – Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021) – Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)
Equality	– Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006)
Community Planning	– Village Plans for Cappagh & Galbally, Ballygawley and Stewartstown

Table 4: Relevant Strategies and Policies for this study

The following is a brief synopsis of each document considered in the Strategic Context to be of significance in terms of how the proposed development and recommendations made in this Scoping Study do align to and/or could contribute towards the delivery of key regional and sub-regional policies and strategies.

Regional Strategic Context
Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016) The draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework sets out the aspirations of the Executive for society and provides a strategic context for other key strategies and policies. The PfG was also to shape the development of the Executive's budget over the course of the current mandate and provide a mechanism for ensuring funds are best directed to where they can contribute most. The Framework contains 14 strategic outcomes and connect to every aspect of government, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and building confident and peaceful communities. The following outcomes are of relevance to this Scoping Study: – Outcome 2: Live and work sustainably – protecting the environment; – Outcome 4: Enjoy long, healthy, active lives; – Outcome 12: Create a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest; – Outcome 14: Give our children and young people the best start in life. These outcomes are supported by 42 indicators, with each indicator accompanied by a measure which is largely derived from existing statistics to monitor performance. The following indicators are of relevance to this Scoping Study: – Indicator 2: Reduce health inequality – Indicator 3: Increase healthy life expectancy – Indicator 6: Improve mental health – Indicator 30: Improve our attractiveness as a destination and our international reputation. Key to the success of the PfG is the ability of Departments to work collaboratively with not only themselves but also with other public bodies and the voluntary and private sector.
Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD, 2010) This Strategy is designed to deliver the spatial aspects of the PfG and is intended to inform the spatial aspects of other Government Departments, Councils' decisions and investments, and guide investment by the private sector. Relevant aims of the Strategy for this Scoping Study include: – Support towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential – Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities

– Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information
– Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake

The Strategy highlights the importance of improving facilities for walking and cycling as part of infrastructure investment.

A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022

Obesity is a major public health challenge facing Northern Ireland and this Framework aims to empower people to make healthier choices by creating an environment that supports a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet. It recognises the factors that underpin weight gain are complex and cover factors such as social and individual psychology, physiology, food consumption, individual activity and built environment.

In addition, many wider determinants of poor health such as health inequalities, poverty, mental health, deprivation and structural barriers also play an important role. Of relevance, the Strategy outlines how environmental factors affect choices and behaviours, for example lack of access to green space reduces physical activity opportunities. Other barriers include poor urban environments, limited safe play facilities and community safety, and sedentary lifestyles.

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)

The new Health Strategy recognises that the Health Service faces growing demand driven by successful interventions and improving life expectancy. As a result, there is a need to move beyond managing illness and instead ensure that people are supported to live well; physically, mentally and emotionally. To do this, the onus is on Departments and Agencies to work together to deliver the best outcomes.

Core to PfG Outcome 4 of people leading long, healthy and active lives is improving people's health. The Strategy outlines a future in which people are supported to keep well with the information, education and support to make informed choices and take control of their own health and wellbeing. This requires the circumstances for people to stay healthy, well, safe and independent in the first place. There is a need to:

– Build capacity in communities and in prevention to reduce inequalities and ensure the next generation is healthy and well
– Work with communities to support them to develop their strengths and use their assets to tackle the determinants of health and social wellbeing
– Tap into the innovative ideas and energies in communities themselves, and in the community and voluntary sectors.

- In all communities, every child and young person should have the best start in life, people should have a decent standard of living, and all citizens should be supported to make healthier and better-informed life choices
- Work alongside all communities to enable social inclusion and tackle health inequalities and the underlying contributory factors including poverty, housing, education and crime.

Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland (2014)

Commissioned by Sport NI and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), this Action Plan highlights the importance of making the outdoors accessible to everyone and the opportunities that there are to participate, not only in rural areas but also in the urban fringes.

Due to the recognition that access to green space enhances physical health and mental wellbeing, and addresses issues associated with social exclusion, rural and urban deprivation and community cohesion, the vision of the Action Plan is "a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland".

It provides key recommendations for actions and challenges that need to be addressed to make Northern Ireland a place where outdoor recreation can deliver:

- Healthy active lifestyles for local people from all communities;
- Economic growth through encouraging visitors to come and enjoy the outdoors; and
- Protection of landscapes and ecosystems for future generations.

To achieve this vision, the aim is for Northern Ireland to be a place where:
- There are increasing opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone in a broad range of outdoor recreation activities;
- There are accompanying benefits to local communities, especially those who are socially excluded in terms of health, social inclusion, cohesion, equality, and economic development;
- People enjoy the outdoors and show a high degree of responsibility for themselves, towards others and towards the environment they are using, and play their part in maintaining, supporting and enhancing our environment and heritage.

A New Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, Consultation Document, 2021)

As of April 2021, the DfC was still in the process of public consultation for this new, 10-year draft strategy. Having been drafted during the Covid-19 pandemic period, this Strategy specifically highlights that sport and physical activity and the associated benefits that these bring, will play an important role in Northern Ireland's recovery.

The draft Strategy now defines 'sport' in a broader context, as 'all forms of physical activity which, through casual organised participation, aimed at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels'.

The proposed Vision is 'Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity leads to an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence'.

To deliver this vision, six Key Themes have been identified. Goals relating to the achievement of each theme, that are relevant to this Study have been highlighted in bold and listed:

1. Recovery from the impact of the pandemic on sport and physical activity
2. **Promoting participation, inclusion and community engagement**
    - Improved physical and mental health and well being
    - Sport and physical activity is inclusive, safe, diverse, shared and offers equality of opportunity to participate for all
    - Children and young people are given the best start in life through sport and physical activity opportunities
3. Promoting excellence in sport
4. **The importance of partnership and integration**
    - Better outcomes for communities through a collaborative approach to the development of sport and physical activity
    - Outcomes for communities are improved by a focus on co-design and co-production
    - Strengthened sports and physical activity partnerships at local, regional, national and international level
    - An increasing proportion of our facilities are shared across sports, clubs, schools and communities
5. **Providing inclusive and shared spaces**
    - Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality sports and physical activity infrastructure
    - A safe, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional sports and physical activity infrastructure
    - Our sports and physical activity sector and infrastructure are enabled by innovative and emerging technologies
6. Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity

Underpinning these Key Themes and their goals, are three cross-cutting principles:

- **Developing inclusive, shared communities**
- Developing capacity and governance in sport and physical activity
- Developing national and international linkages

Those which are of relevance to this Scoping Study are highlighted in **bold.**

Sport NI Corporate Plan (Draft) 2020-2025

The vision of the Sport NI Plan is the same as the new, draft Sport & Physical Activity Strategy for NI: '...a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport'. Sport NI's mission statement is: "We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2025, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all".

To achieve this, Sport NI has identified two strategic outcomes over the next 5 years:

- Outcome 1: People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and recreation
- Outcome 2 NI Athletes among the best in the world

Sustainability for the Future, DAERA's Plan to 2050

This Plan frames DAERA's strategic priorities for the next 30 years. DAERA's vision and purpose, outlined in this Plan, is "Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone".The Plan states that a "sustainable approach creates a healthy environment to live in, which will underpin a healthy population and stimulate healthy economic rural communities" therefore acknowledging the link between a healthy environment, access to it and the health and well-being of communities. It states that "a healthy population depends on access to a healthy diet and a healthy, enjoyable environment" and "enhancing our environment matters, as a healthy environment is interlinked with our health and wellbeing".

In the Plan, the Natural Environment is one of four strategic priorities – 'to protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all'. Directly related to achieving this is one of the Plan's ten goals –

"9. Health and wellbeing for All - we will focus on using and enhancing our natural resources to improve the health and wellbeing for all of Northern Ireland. We will encourage people to spend more time in nature. We will work collectively to develop and showcase the tourism opportunities of our wonderful environment and NI's world class food and drink production".

The Plan highlights that DAERA has a responsibility for 113,000 Ha forests which represents an obvious asset and resource to achieving the above.

NIEA "Our Passion, Our Place" Strategic Priorities 2012-2022

The priorities for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency as outlined in this document, under the following themes, includes:

Healthy Natural Environment

- A well-functioning network of protected sites and areas including enhancing the management of designated sites to benefit site features and protecting and conserving the historic environment
- Sustainable, diverse landscapes with rich biodiversity which are resilient to change

People and Places

- Extensive opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the natural and built environment
- Common understanding of the role the environment plays in the health and wellbeing of people
- Greater business and community involvement in the environment including through volunteering and community stakeholder groups
- The natural environment and built heritage assets meet the needs of society and communities

Sustainable Economic Growth

- The value of natural and built assets to the economy is fully realised
- The best outcome for the environment is obtained whilst minimising cost to business.

Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2013)

This study highlighted findings from a research study that set out proposals for tourism development in Northern Ireland's forests. The study was set in the context of the Forest Service's policy to realise further opportunities for the recreational and social use of forests, in partnership with local authorities and other recreation providers.

The study established a vision for forest related tourism which was to "use the forest estate to deliver an exceptional visitor and short break experience for all, which will increase the economic impact of forest related tourism in Northern Ireland."

To achieve this vision, the study set out the following supporting aims:

- To increase the economic impact of forest related tourism
- To encourage visitor experience and product development opportunities that will provide an exceptional visitor experience in line with the Northern Ireland brand principles
- To promote and enable effective partnership working.

Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006

This Strategy aims to tackle issues of poverty and social exclusion by targeting efforts and available resources on people, groups and areas in greatest social need. The priorities identified include:

- Eliminating poverty
- Eliminating social exclusion
- Tackling area-based deprivation
- Eliminating poverty from rural areas
- Tackling health inequalities
- Tackling cycles of deprivation

The goals and targets set out include the following:

- Allowing all children and young people to experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential
- Ensuring that everyone has the potential to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

The development of community access to green space and outdoor recreation provision across the Mid Ulster forests aligns with this Strategy and has the potential to contribute to eliminating social exclusion and poverty and tackling health inequalities.

The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011)

The Northern Ireland Executive's vision for volunteering is a society where:

– Everyone values the vital contribution that volunteers make to community wellbeing
– Everyone has the opportunity to have a meaningful and enjoyable volunteering experience.

The growth and development of outdoor recreation across three forest areas provides a unique opportunity for people to volunteer and become involved in their local communities.

Our Strategy 2021-2046 (NI Water, 2021)

NI Water's Strategy have identified 5 strategic priorities – Economy ….

Much of the Strategy is heavily centred on optimising the operation, management and impacts of the water supply business of NI Water. However, under strategic priority 'Economy' there are 3 objectives:

- Funding world class economic infrastructure
- Efficient and affordable services
- Sustainable growth

Under the 'sustainable growth' and 'nature' priorities NI Water acknowledge that they are one of Northern Ireland's largest public landowners and therefore have a role to pay in tourism. One of the actions is to "seek opportunities to utilise our catchment land, raw water reservoirs and assets to maximise the community benefits, working closely with local councils'.

Recreation & Access Policy (NI Water, 2020)

This 2-year policy provides a framework defining what access is permitted to NI Water owned lands and waters, and how access arrangements for recreational use will be communicated, controlled and governed.

Key factors in determining access for recreational use are summarised here as risk, cost, sustainability, biodiversity and conservation and protection of water quality and supply.

Sub-Regional Strategic Context

Consideration is also given to relevant Council strategic documents and the positive benefits and impact outdoor recreation can make on the objectives of the Council's draft Local Development Plan, Corporate Plan, Community Plan, Economic Development Plan and Tourism Strategy.

Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024

This Plan has been influenced by the Council's Community Plan, Economic Development Plan, Tourism Strategy and draft Local Development Plan.

The Plan has 5 strategic themes, of which 'Environment' and 'Communities' are two. In addition, 'addressing rurality' and 'working collaboratively across public, private, community and voluntary sectors to achieve shared objectives' are identified as cross-cutting corporate commitments. Commitment which the recommendations for development in this Scoping Study fulfil.

Within the Environment theme, 1 of 4 priorities is to 'increase the protection of, access to and development of our heritage assets, both natural and man-made, including our strategic visitor sites'.

Within the Communities theme, the Council aim to 'make a tangible difference to the health and well-being of local people, and contribute to the creation of viable and vibrant, safe and prosperous communities'. Accessibility to the outdoors and access to opportunities to adopt a more active lifestyle in a greater range of settings are highlighted, as well as the 'benefits of the outdoors for physical and mental health'. Priorities for the Council under this theme are to –

- Open up and sustain accessible pathways to participation in leisure and outdoor recreation activities which enhance health and well-being by providing high quality, accessible facilities in local communities and through programmes tailored to community need
- Continue to support the sustainable development of our parks, forests and green spaces, together with access to outdoor assets, including walking and cycling trails, and water recreation
- Along with our community planning partners, work to address poverty and deprivation across the Mid Ulster region
- We will continue, through our community development programmes, grant aid schemes and our partnership-working, to support local communities and to build capacity in the community and voluntary sector

Our Community Plan: 10-year Plan for Mid Ulster (2017)

The Council has identified 15 outcomes structured under 5 themes to deliver the Community Plan. This Scoping Study fits into 5 themes and 11 of the 15 outcomes, as outlined below:

Theme	Outcomes
Economic Growth	– We prosper in a stronger and more competitive economy – We have more people working in a diverse economy – Our towns and villages are vibrant and competitive *Success Indicators* – *Improved attractiveness as a tourism destination* – *Increased no. of social economy businesses* – *Increased performance of our towns and villages*
Infrastructure	– We increasingly value our environment and enhance it for our children *Success Indicators* – *Increased environmental sustainability* – *Increased protection, access and enjoyment of our natural and built heritage*

Education and Skills	– We give our children and young people the best chance in life – We are more entrepreneurial, innovative and creative *Success Indicators* – *Increased number of schools which have community access* – *Improved chid development* – *Improved mental health and resilience in children and young people* – *Increased innovation in our economy*
Health and Wellbeing	– We are better enabled to live longer, healthier and more active lives – We care for those most vulnerable and in need *Success Indicators* – *Increased healthy life expectancy* – *Improved mental health* – *Increased quality of life and opportunities for people with disabilities* – *Reduced health inequality* – *Improved child development*
Vibrant and Safe Communities	– We are a safer community – We have a greater value and respect for diversity – We have stronger communities with less disadvantage and poverty *Success Indicators* – *Reduced anti-social behaviour* – *Increased respect for each other* – *Increased shared space* – *Reduced level of deprivation and poverty* – *Greater coordination of community delivery* – *Increased community capacity, volunteering and delivery* – *Increased private led community initiatives*

Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy (MUDC, 2020)

As of May 2021, the final Plan is yet to be published. This spatial plan will set out the Council's vision for planning land use up until 2030, incorporating housing, infrastructure, transport and relevant to this project – tourism, community and recreational facilities.

Our Plan to Develop Tourism in Mid Ulster to 2021 (MUDC, 2017)

Key priorities for growing tourism in Mid Ulster are:

- History and Heritage
- Outdoor Activities
- Seamus Heaney

The latter 2 propositions are described as 'significant and prominent, but so far undeveloped'. Current tourism is largely based on rural and outdoor activities and tied into the area's natural attributes - the recommendations in this Scoping Study fit this current profile.

Key issues for the growth and management of tourism that have implications for this scoping study are –

- While day visitation to the area is important, the reasons to visit are not well articulated
- The visibility of Mid Ulster's natural heritage, outdoor activity and historic and archaeological heritage are lost partly because they are spread across the area and also because these attributes haven't been pulled together into distinct propositions for visitors.
- There is a weak accommodation base, exacerbated by variable occupancy levels (and thus viability) throughout the year
- The SME and microbusiness characteristics of the tourism sector in the area exacerbate challenges of communicating and engaging with the trade and developing collaborative projects across the trade
- The geographical dispersal of the area – in terms of scale, distance and character – suggests a challenge in creating both a tourism identity for Mid Ulster itself and for a hierarchy of individual communities that have identities and propositions that could encourage visitation
- Continuing constraints in countryside access limit the opportunity to exploit the natural environment to its full potential for outdoor activities

Opportunities for the future that have been identified and align with the recommendations in this Scoping Study are –

- The opportunity exists to exploit Mid Ulster's central location within NI and improving access (completion of the Magherafelt Bypass; A6 dualling; Randalstown (M22) to Castledawson). The central location of Mid Ulster could also boost camping and caravanning based in the area. However, historically strong dependence on the NI domestic day and overnight market for visitation highlights the need to encourage more overnight stays from out-of-state markets and their greater expenditure.
- Outdoor tourism sites and experiences, including the presence of very successful outdoor activity providers, suggest that the outdoor tourism product can be exploited further right across the area
- An invigorated district wide programme of marketing and promotion is achievable, including events, enhanced signage, technology use, visitor information services and limiting print production

To grow tourism in Mid Ulster there are 5 aims and objectives that actions and development should be centred on –

1. To develop three strategic tourism strands, around which the attributes of the area and the industry can cluster and to attract visitors –
   i. Seamus Heaney
   ii. Archaeological sites, history and heritage
   iii. Outdoor Activities
2. To grow tourism as an economic driver for Mid Ulster
3. To manage the destination and create the preconditions for successful tourism
4. To profile and promote Mid Ulster to enhance the visibility of the area and boost visitation and spend
5. To support the dispersal of visitor spend and investment across the area
6.

This Scoping Study and any subsequent development of the recommendations can be tied to the 'Heritage and History' and 'Outdoor Activities' themes.
For Heritage & History, the Plan highlights that Mid Ulster is the only place to appreciate the history and importance of the O'Neill family – there are many features and remnants of the O'Neills in Cappagh area. Dunmoyle is also rich in heritage features and Drumcairne is a historic garden and demesne.

Walking, cycling, mountain biking, canoeing, angling, multi-adventure centres (e.g. Todds Leap, and Jungle NI) plus a number of activity tourism providers in the area are key propositions for outdoor activities in Mid Ulster. Horse riding and golf add further value to the product offering and visitor experience. Except for golf, all of the forests are well positioned and have the potential to provide some or all of these activities.

Lastly, for the tourism vision Mid Ulster to be achieved, the Plan highlights the importance of local communities buying into the wider 'Mid Ulster identity'. It also highlights the importance of public realm quality, quality standards, food availability, access to information, etc within each community to ensure the visitor experience is positive and consistent across the area.

Mid Ulster Economic Development DRAFT Action Plan 2021/2022 (MUDC, 2021)

The Council's previous Economic Development Plan expired in 2020. The purpose of this Draft Action Plan is to 'focus on the activity and actions that support businesses, high streets and economic recovery' in response to and amidst the backdrop of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

The Draft Action Plan has multiple themes all aimed at driving recovery during the pandemic and building the foundations for sustained recovery.

Themes and outputs relevant to this study are –

Theme	Output
Physical Regeneration / improving Infrastructure	Rural Regeneration Projects – work in partnership with RDP to deliver Village Regeneration projects in Mid Ulster over 4 years
Strategic Projects	Delivery of Mid South West (MSW) Regional Economic Strategy – Develop a range of collaborative economic development projects as part of Growth Deal, e.g. Developing the O'Neill tourism proposition
Rural Business support / attracting investment	Micro business development scheme (TRPSI) – small capital grants for business development activities
Mid Ulster LEADER RDP Programme 2016-2020	Activities relating to the final delivery of 'Rural Business Investment Scheme', 'Rural Services Scheme' and 'Village Renewal Scheme' projects before closure of programme

Mid Ulster District Council Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan (MUDC, 2020)

This report and Action Plan sets out the future direction for the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across the Mid Ulster district over a 5-year period, from 2020 to 2025.

In this strategy, outdoor recreation is recognised as having significant benefits across society, from the individual level in terms of health, to the wider society in terms of education, the economy and environment.

The report identifies the following key issues and opportunities relating to the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation that are relevant to this project:

- All 22 forests in the area provide local recreation opportunities but some, if developed appropriately, have the potential to attract visitors from outside the area
- whilst the area already has several informal walking trails around villages and along river corridors, there is an overwhelmingly demand for a formal network of Community Trails to be developed across the area
- few mechanisms exist within MUDC to encourage collaboration between the many different organisations and interest groups involved in outdoor recreation across the area. These include landowners/land managers, NGBs, private sector activity providers and service providers
- some of the more niche customers such as camping and caravans are provided with good levels of information, but the more 'mass' offering to local people or visitors on outdoor recreation and parks is insufficient.
- there is an expressed desire by local people in the MUDC area to have better access to information on the outdoor recreation opportunities available across MUDC.

The Action Plan makes 24 recommendations aimed at improving the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation over the next 5 years. 0f the 24 recommendations, 14 are relevant to this project:

Management Structures

- Put in place an adequately resourced rolling maintenance programme for all current and future outdoor recreation facilities.
- Monitor existing and develop where appropriate new SLAs with Community Groups for the ongoing maintenance of outdoor recreation facilities.

Masterplanning

- Undertake Master Planning/Feasibility Studies for six Local Sites, including
    - Altmore Cappagh (Year 1-2)
    - Drumcairne Forest (Year 3-4)
- Develop a Community Trail Plan for each DEA

Product Development

- Develop 3 regional multi-use activity hubs
- Develop 9 local multi-use activity hubs:
    - Altmore Cappagh (Year 1-2)
    - Drumcairne Forest (Year 2-3)
- Develop short and medium distance walking trails
- Develop a network of Community Trails across the area

Promotion / Marketing

- Prepare a 5-year Marketing Strategy and tactical Marketing Action Plan.
- Develop visitor information and signage guidelines for all forest recreation sites.
- Undertake a review of signage, visitor information and waymarking at all outdoor recreation sites.
- Implement new visitor information and signage guidelines at all outdoor recreation sites across the area.
- Develop an Outdoor Recreation Participation Plan.
- Develop partnerships with the private sector to deliver outdoor recreation participation programmes.

Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (MUDC, 2021)

This report and Action Plan provides a comprehensive picture of the status of current public parks and play park facilities, as well as opportunities for future development, in the Mid Ulster district.

MUDC comprises over 100 public park and play facility sites ranging from small play parks to formal pitches/MUGA's to open parkland. One of the key findings of the report is that there is a disparity in provision with some areas in greatest needs suffering from a lack of provision while other areas are over provided for. This report provided an assessment of each facility, in terms of need, condition and spatial distribution.

In addition to site-specific recommendations, 11 over-arching, strategic recommendations were made. These are summarised as:

- Thorough Community Consultation
- Play should be inclusive
- Development of 'public parks' to plug the gap in open/green space across the Council area
- Develop woodland play
    - Drumcairne Forest is recommended as a 'small woodland park' site with a budget of £25,000 to be delivered in Year 5+
    - Altmore Forest is also identified as a 'small woodland park' site with budget of £25,000 to be delivered in Year 5+
- Compatibility with other Council strategies, including ORS, Tourism Strategy and Sports Facility Strategy
- Conduct Play Value assessments which considers the 'play experience'
- Adopt a risk-benefit approach to play provision
- Consider other public land sites and working in partnership with other public bodies to develop play provision
- Planning - protect the loss of open/green space except where there is a substantial community benefit
- Staff resource/maintenance and manning should be factored into future development projects when considering the development of play facilities

OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND

The Impact & Value of

Darkley Forest Community Trail

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland conducted a New Trail Impact Survey for Darkley Forest Community Trail in February 2021 using the Social Return on Investment methodology. The approach focused on the return on investment from the path users' perspective. Key findings are below.

Launched: **2018**
Length: **5km multi-use trails**
Annual Visits (2020): **20,617**
Funders: **SportNI, DAERA & ABC Borough Council**

Social Return on Investment

£10

Positive Outcomes

87% of visits involved physical activities

69% have better health/fitness since trail opened

16% achieving CMO physical activity targets*

83% of users strongly agreed the trail gave them mental health and wellbeing benefits.

66% strongly agreed that the trail made them feel closer to nature

47% strongly agreed that they learnt about nature of their local heritage

The total social value generated over the lifespan (25 years) of Darkley Forest Community Trail will be **£2,340,275** across physical health, wellbeing, environmental and learning benefits. This means that **for every £1 spent to create the trail, it will generate £10 in return.****

Proximity of trail to users' homes

2%	7%	17%	**42%**	16%	17%
< 300m	1km	2km	5km	10km	>10km

Transport to trail

93%	6%	1%

Improves my mental wellbeing as well as fitness in a safer environment than walking on the roads.

Develops my connection to nature, helps my mental health as well as my physical wellbeing. It is a peaceful and beautiful place to spend time with friends and family, walking and exploring.

* Chief Medical Officer (CMO) recommends adults do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity every week to achieve physical health benefits. **The methodology for the Social Return on Investment framework used for this study is available at [web address to be provided later].

Appendix C Community Survey and Results

FOR GUIDANCE ONLY This sheet estimates annual expenditure required to fully develop Drumcairne, Dunmoyle, and Altmore as Local multi-activity hubs. For estimation purposes, planning and delivery costs are spread evenly across the years to which they apply. This is a high-level decision-making tool only.

	Year										
	2021	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**	**2026**	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**	**Total Cost ALL SITES**
Annual Total to deliver ALL SITES	£120,583	£175,083	£323,942	£444,683	£436,375	£314,742	£324,367	£105,525	£105,525	£105,525	£2,456,350

											Phased Sub-Totals	Total to deliver site
Drumcairne												
Phase 1 Planning	£18,250	£18,250									£36,500	
Phase 1 Delivery			£63,325	£63,325							£126,650	
Phase 2 Planning		£30,000	£30,000								£60,000	£563,850
Phase 2 Delivery				£85,175	£85,175	£85,175	£85,175				£340,700	
Annual Sub-Total Drumcairne	£18,250	£48,250	£93,325	£148,500	£85,175	£85,175	£85,175	£0	£0	£0		
Dunmoyle												
Phase 1 Planning	£17,500	£17,500									£35,000	
Phase 1 Delivery			£78,650	£78,650							£157,300	
Phase 2 Planning		£17,500	£17,500								£35,000	£476,500
Phase 2 Delivery				£83,067	£83,067	£83,067					£249,200	
Annual Sub-Total Dunmoyle	£17,500	£35,000	£96,150	£161,717	£83,067	£83,067	£0	£0	£0	£0		
Altmore ZONE 1 - Cappagh Village and Lower Pond												
Phase 1 + 2 Planning	£55,000	£55,000									£110,000	
Phase 1 Delivery			£53,333	£53,333	£53,333						£160,000	
Phase 2 Delivery					£66,667	£66,667	£66,667				£200,000	£745,000
Phase 3 Planning		£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000					£25,000	
Phase 3 Delivery							£62,500	£62,500	£62,500	£62,500	£250,000	
Annual Sub-Total Altmore Zone 1	£55,000	£60,000	£58,333	£58,333	£125,000	£71,667	£129,167	£62,500	£62,500	£62,500		
Altmore ZONE 2 - Upper Pond												
Phase 1 + 2 Planning	£22,500	£22,500									£45,000	
Phase 1 Delivery			£59,267	£59,267	£59,267						£177,800	
Phase 2 Delivery					£50,000	£50,000	£50,000				£150,000	£382,800
Phase 3 Planning		£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000					£10,000	
Phase 3 Delivery							£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	
Annual Sub-Total Altmore Zone 2	£22,500	£24,500	£61,267	£61,267	£111,267	£52,000	£50,000	£0	£0	£0		
Altmore ZONE 3 - Altmore Forest Block 1												
Phase 1 Planning	£1,500	£1,500									£3,000	

Phase 1 Delivery			£4,033	£4,033	£4,033						£12,100	
Phase 2 Planning			£5,000	£5,000	£5,000						£15,000	£81,100
Phase 2 Delivery					£17,000	£17,000	£17,000				£51,000	
Annual Sub-Total Altmore Zone 3	£1,500	£1,500	£9,033	£9,033	£26,033	£17,000	£17,000	£0	£0	£0		
Altmore CONNECTING LINKS												
Phase 1-3 Planning	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833					£35,000	
Phase 3 Delivery							£43,025	£43,025	£43,025	£43,025	£172,100	£207,100
Annual Sub-Total Altmore Zone 3	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833	£5,833	£43,025	£43,025	£43,025	£43,025		

Report on	Sperrin Partnership Project
Date of Meeting	September 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Michael Browne

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	The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on progress of the Sperrins Partnership Project and seek approval for future support funding.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The Sperrins Future Search Conference entitled 'The Sperrins – Reaching New Heights, Realising Our Potential' was held in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on 27th – 29th September 2017.
2.2	The event brought together a group of key stakeholders to draft and agree an action plan for the future development of the Sperrins and in particular the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
2.3	The Sperrins Partnership Project is a joint collaboration between four councils across the Sperrin area Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council. Each Council in 2018 committed to equal financial contribution towards the project delivery and have also funded the Sperrins Future Search initiative. The funding was originally intended to be for the financial year 2019/2020 but due to delays in recruiting staff this support was not apportioned until the financial year 2020/2021.

3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	A Sperrins Partnership Project Officer and part time Administrative Support have been appointed and took up their respective roles in October 2020.
3.2	Work completed or progressing since mid-October 2021 includes: ➢ Approval and sign off of the Sperrins Partnership Agreement between the partners councils; ➢ A Governance Structure for the project drawn up and agreed at Board level; ➢ The formation of a Sperrins Partnership Board; ➢ The development and launch of a new website dedicated to the project www.sperrinspartnershipproject.com; ➢ An official Launch of the Sperrins Future Search Report and Actions Plans; ➢ A review and update of the Brand and Tourism Action Plan. ➢ The formation of the Brand and Tourism Thematic group; ➢ Engagement with Statutory Agencies; ➢ Support, assistance and promotion of collaborative projects including, the Sperrins Sculpture Trail and IAT (International Appalachian Trail) projects.
3.3	There are a number of projects which each of the partners councils are leading on that will support the collaborative work of the partnership and enhance the product offering in the region.
3.4	The Sperrins Sculpture trail will consist of 3 iconic pieces of artwork positioned in spectacular settings within the Sperrins. The sculpture trail is designed to promote the natural and built heritage of the region and encourage rural tourism and out of state visitors whilst preserving the natural assets of the rural community. This project is a working partnership between Derry City and Strabane District, Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. The International Appalachian Trail (IAT) links the mountains in West Donegal through to Larne in Co. Antrim along the geological Appalachian trail. The route crosses 6 different council areas which include the 4 Sperrins partnership councils with varying distances in each council. The OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory located in Davagh Forest recently opened its doors to visitors and is the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland. The Park is an initiative by Mid Ulster District Council and sits within the Sperrins AONB. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council recently secured external funding for enhancement works at Banagher Glen located in the Southwest of the council area just outside Dungiven. Once complete, the project will improve and enhance the visitor experience at this stunning location. The project will create opportunities for the local community and visitors to enjoy the site on a year-round basis and also create opportunities for visitors to explore the High Sperrins on foot.

	Garvagh mountain bike trail located on the Sperrins boundary within Causeway Coast and Glens has proved to be a very popular attraction. The project has created a Community Health Hub in Garvagh Forest through the development of a multi-use walk and off-road family cycling trails. In Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area recent improvement work was completed at Gortin Glen Forest Park. The redevelopment of Gortin Glen Forest Park has transformed it into a family friendly outdoor experience and includes a destination Play Park, trim trail, additional parking and the creation of mountain biking trails. The project has a number of priorities over the coming months which include: ➢ Commencing work on the delivery of the short- and long-term actions contained within the Brand and Tourism Action Plan; ➢ Identifying funding opportunities and creating the respective business cases (HLF, RDP, Peace Plus etc) ➢ Completing an audit of the tourism product of Sperrins Region; ➢ Forming strong cross boundary partnerships; ➢ Researching and identifying the best practice delivery structure for Sperrin region; ➢ The formation and development of the remaining Thematic Groups.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
4.2 **4.3**	Financial: The Sperrins Partnership Project is presently funded by 4 councils at total annual cost of £88,000. Going forward it is anticipated that the annual operating cost will remain the same. Officers are currently looking at options to secure additional funding from external sources for relevant projects. Each council had committed circa £22,000 for the current financial year 2020-2021. This contribution includes salary and programming costs and concludes in October 2021. A further financial contribution for a further year until October 2022 and thereafter annually is requested to extend the project to maintain momentum and build on early success and allow for effective forward planning and project management
	Human: Support by council officers to manage and deliver the project
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A

	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	The members agree to continue to offer financial support for the continuation of the Sperrins Partnership Project at a cost of £22,000 annually. This funding will be vital to ensure that the Sperrins Partnership Project can deliver on its vision as outlined at the Sperrins Future Search Conference.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Sperrins Partnership Board - Terms of Reference at appendix 1 A Project Road Map is attached at appendix 2.

Sperrin Future Search – Sperrins Community Partnership

Terms of Reference

The geographical area represented by the Sperrins Community Partnership includes the council areas of:

- Causeway Coast and Glens
- Derry and Strabane
- Fermanagh and Omagh
- Mid Ulster

Definition: There is uncertainty as to what is meant by 'the Sperrins' in terms of geographical area. The discussions that took place suggest that there is a probable consensus around treating the AONB as the core while embracing the critical relationships between communities in the AONB and neighbouring larger settlements (gateway towns).

1 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the Partnership and Chair is to oversee the strategic direction and delivery of the four thematic groups Action Plans, Environment & Heritage, Infrastructure, Brand & Tourism and Community. The Partnership will provide a mechanism for interested parties/stakeholders to help preserve, enhance and manage the culture and heritage of the Sperrins by making them more accessible and enjoyable for all, in ways that address social, economic and environmental interests, and with regard to issues of particular local relevance.

Facilitate discussion through four common thematic groups, Environment & Heritage, Infrastructure, Brand & Tourism and Community. This will ensure the implementation of the Sperrin Future Search Action Plans. They will address key issues within the Sperrins area while seeking to balance social, economic and environmental interests.

Facilitate understanding of needs and aspirations of user groups, activity providers, sporting clubs, land owners, competent authorities, and statutory bodies.

2 Objectives

The Sperrins Community Partnership will aim to:

2.1 Promote and support the marketing of developments that increase and improve sustainable and responsible activities taking place in the area.

2.2 Promote the development, adoption and communication of voluntary codes of conduct that promote responsible use of the area and help create a sense of ownership by the local communities.

2.3 Encourage partnership working to avoid duplication with other relevant bodies.

2.4 The role of the board will be to drive the ideas of the wider thematic groups, overseeing budgets, employment and management responsibilities.

3 Membership

3.1 SPERRINS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP BOARD

3.2 Membership of the Sperrins Community Partnership board will comprise of 20 members including 2 Council members drawn from the membership of the all four Councils elected members. Should any party not be able to attend, they may nominate another representative from their party.

3.3 Councillors nominated will be nominated at the relevant councils Committee meetings and ratified by full council.

3.4 Thematic Group Members

Two Representative from each of the following Thematic Groups may attend:

- Environment and Heritage
- Infrastructure and Economy
- Brand and Tourism
- Community

3.5 Two representative from the Co – Coordinating Group will be nominated to sit on the board

3.6 Two representative from the Statutory Partnership group will be nominated to sit on the board

3.7 Local Government Officers are members of the board in an observer status.

3.8 The partnership board is a network of representatives of sector interests with an interest in the development of opportunities for increased participation in the Sperrins.

4 Chair

4.1 The Chair and Vice-Chair shall be appointed by voluntary nominations to the partnership board and shall hold office for up to three years or until such time as they are replaced by nominations at the first meeting following the expiry of that calendar year. Subject to their continued membership to the partnership board they shall be eligible for re-nomination thereafter.

In the case of more than one nomination being received a bi election will take place to appoint the positions of Chair and Vice – Chair.

5 Administration

5.1 An appointed secretary will have the responsibility and administration for the partnership board.

5.2 The Partnership board shall normally meet four times per annum and additional meetings may be arranged where necessary. Board meeting will rotate around each of the four council areas.

5.3 An annual open network meeting will be held once per annum to share information to sector groups by representatives.

5.4 Meeting agendas shall be agreed between the Chair and the Project Officer. Agendas, papers and minutes of the meeting shall be available to the public on request from the Project Officer.

5.5 The Partnership board may, where appropriate, formally invite observers to the meeting who shall be able to contribute at the meeting at the discretion of the board.

5.6 All papers for meetings will be sent to members at least five days in advance and should be supported by a clear recommendation wherever possible.

5.7 A consensus should be reach on all matters discussed but where this is not the case opposing views will be recorded.

5.8 The quorum for meetings of the partnership board shall be 10 members. Any member missing three consecutive meetings shall be addressed by the Chair.

6 General obligations

6.1 A member must:

- promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person
- treat others with respect
- not do anything which compromises or which is likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of the partnership board.

6.2 A member must not in his or her official capacity, or any other circumstance, conduct himself or herself in a manner that could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or the forum into disrepute.

6.3 A member must not in his or her official capacity, or any other circumstance, use his or her position improperly to confer on or secure for himself, herself or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage.

7 Disclosure of personal interests

7.1 All member must disclosure and sign a register of interest which will be maintained and updated on an annually basis.

7.2 A member with a personal interest in a matter who attends a meeting of the forum at which the matter is considered must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent and must leave the room when it is being discussed.

7.3 The declaration of interests shall be an agenda item at the start of each meeting.

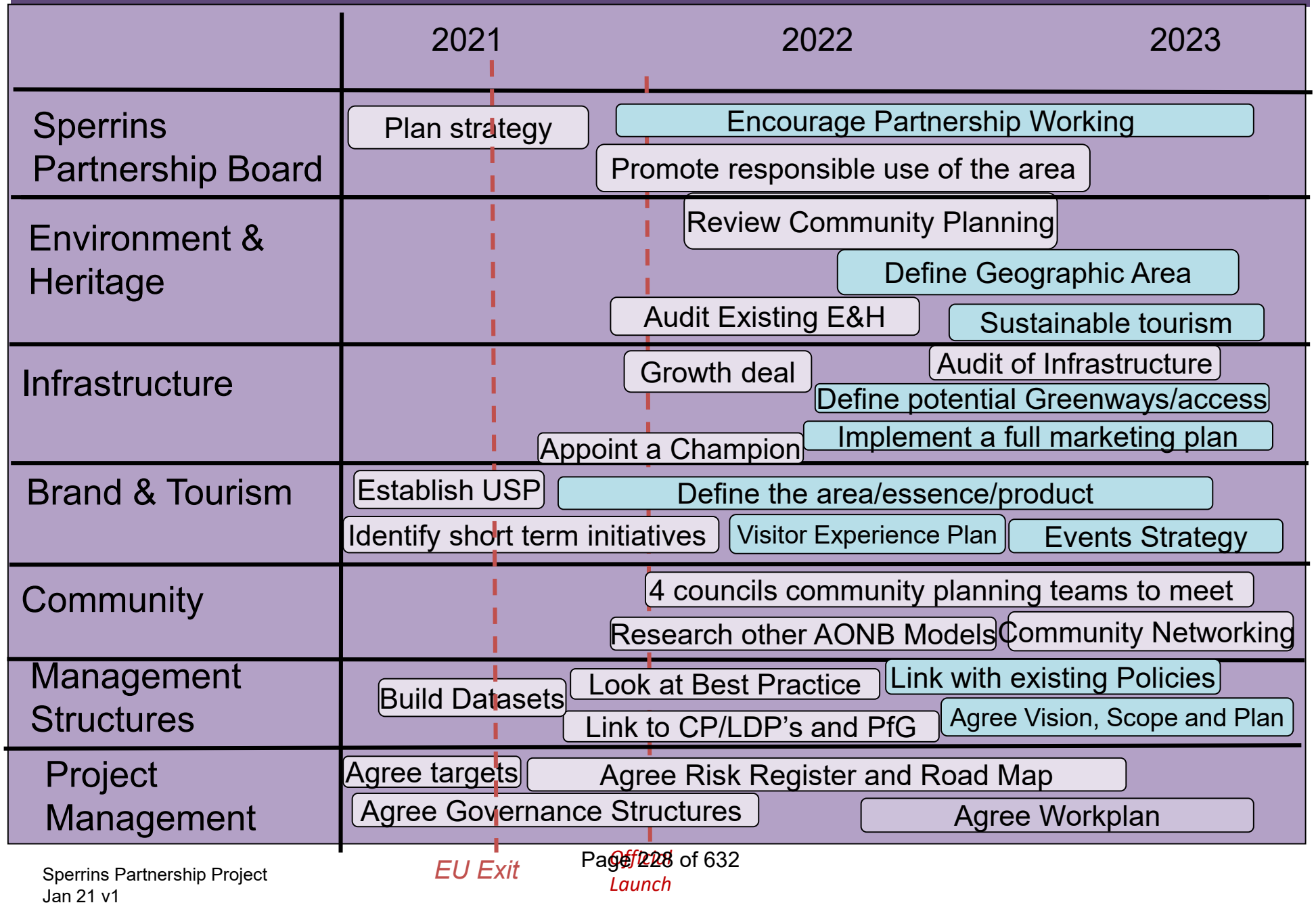
A Conflict of Interest would include, but not be limited to, direct or indirect interests of a Member in:

• A company, service or product that could be affected by a decision of the partnership board;

• A company or product that is in competition with a company, service or product that could be affected by a decision of the forum

• Acceptance of any gift, entertainment, services, loans or promises of future benefits from any person or organization that might benefit because of the individuals connection with the forum.
• Compensation in the form of fees or salaries if such payment results directly or indirectly from the Member’s work with the partnership board.

Project Road Map



Report on	Blackwater Study
Date of Meeting	September 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Michael Browne

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 from the Council to carry out a study on the economic, recreational and environmental benefits of reopening water access to the Backwater River.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The River Blackwater has its source to the north of Fivemiletown, and divides County Armagh County, Tyrone and Monaghan, entering Lough Neagh at Maghery.
2.2	The river flows into Lough Neagh, which is the biggest Lough in the UK and Ireland and is situated in the centre of Northern Ireland. The Lough has no navigation authority but has a marker system maintained at favour by the Department for Infrastructure.
2.3	The Blackwater River has a separate Canal Cut to allow navigation, rather than through its main mouth. The last record of dredging the mouth was in 2004/5 by the then DCAL.
2.4	Waterways Ireland previously carried out a survey and upgrade report in 2017 of all the markers in the Lough on behalf of then Department for Culture Arts and Leisure, now the Department for Infrastructure. Clear costed recommendations were provided with a recommendation for new lateral entrance markers at the Blackwater Canal cut entrance.
2.5	The Irish government has also announced funds to reopen the canal between Clones and Clonfad, County Monaghan. The final commitment to funding for the €12m (£10.4m) project, which includes a greenway, refurbishment, and a marina, was recently agreed.
2.6	There are no immediate plans to do any work on the Northern side of the Ulster Canal on the Blackwater River or Coalisland Canal section and this tender intends to identify potential projects that could be initially developed and supported by Mid Ulster District Council and other Councils/Departments.

2.7	Currently on water access to the Blackwater is limited due to the blockages caused by silt deposits at the entrance of the river. For nearly 15 years the section where the Blackwater River meets Lough Neagh has been virtually impassable, this subsequently discourages commercial fishing and recreational vessels to use the river and the potential tourism and economic growth along the River towns such as the Moy has not been realised.
2.8	The Lough Neagh Partnership has met with representatives from the Department for Infrastructure and lobbied extensively for the River Mouth to be dredged and new markers installed. They along with elected representatives from all parties continue to press for this action.
2.9	On Saturday 17th July this was highlighted by a flotilla of 60 boats, both commercial and recreational expressing their concerns. This event was organised by the Blackwater Community Barge Project, who are calling on Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council and Mid Ulster District Council to carry out a study that will present short term and long-term solutions for the Blackwater that will address the issues raised and realise the potential of the river.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	There is now a need for a study to be undertaken to produce a feasibility report with practical recommendations to assess the potential of opening the Blackwater River and extending and developing its navigation remit.
3.2	The study will require a consultant(s)/company to prepare a comprehensive Feasibility Study to include the following main areas, but not exclusive to: o Gathering of all relevant maps, photos of river, river mouth and Coalisland Canal including planning zoning, and environmental designations. o Identify and engage with all relevant statutory bodies with identify all legal responsibilities for boating, tourism, planning, navigation, water quality, flooding, dredging, waste disposal, and funding o Research all previous reports/studies and strategic content. o Details of current activity along the proposed area and develop a consultation programme with all relevant stakeholders o Consult with stakeholders and identify technical requirements and cost estimates for the dredging of the mouth of the river and repeat maintenance costs. Requirements for Planning, NIEA, HED and dredged waste disposal permissions to be identified. o Liaise closely with the Lough Neagh Partnership and DFI regarding proposals and support o Assessment of connectivity between River Blackwater and Ulster Canal, Coalisland Canal, main towns along river and Lough Neagh. o Provide recommendations for potential development projects along the river. o Identify potential funding sources and lobbying opportunities for all potential river and mouth project work

	○ Complete project by 30/Nov/2021 and provide a full presentation to Council elected representatives ○ The consultant(s)/company will attend an initial briefing meeting, and thereafter progress meetings as and when required, until the final completion of the study
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Financial: £12,000 from existing tourism budget.
	Human: Support by council officers to manage and deliver the project
	Risk Management:
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	To procure a company to produce a feasibility study and recommendations report to assess the potential of opening the Blackwater River.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	N/A

Report on	Market Led Product Development Programme
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Mary McKeown

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 inform members of the Tourism Northern Ireland Market Led Product Development Programme and details of application to TNI for funding.
1.2	If application is successful seek approval from Council to deliver the outputs of the application.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	Tourism NI has announced on 2nd July the Market Led Product Development Programme 2021/22 for Councils to apply. The minimum level of support for each Council is £100K.
2.2	The programme will be managed and coordinated by the Council, this will include initiatives delivered directly by Council and coordinated but delivered through collaborate partnerships through stimulus programmes.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Tourism Northern Irelands Market Led Product Development Programme launched on 2nd July 2021 with a call for programme submissions sent out to councils on this date. The completed submissions were returned via the Tourism NI CRM portal on 6th August 2021.
3.2	The overall budget for the programme is circa £3million; the minimum level of support available for any submission is £100k. This programme is 100% funded, Expenditure paid out under the programme will be based on confirmation of programme delivery and the amount awarded in SLA and amount confirmed as expended on the programme by 31st March 2022. Payment will be in arrears for programme activity undertaken. Interim payments can be agreed where programme activity is demonstrated to satisfaction of TNI.
3.3	The programme will not fund market collateral, events which have received or have applied for funding under Tourism NI or business as usual activity.
3.4	All of the above is subject to approval from council to proceed with the programme and signing of the SLA.

3.5 3.6	MUDC Tourism department has devised the following programme with the following outcomes that will provide a reason to travel to and within the district, it will enhance and animate the visitor experience for NI and ROI visitors and will encourage opportunities to spend and fully support the staycation market. Within our submission the following programme was proposed: • App Development bringing experiences alive with Augmented Reality (to include Hill of the O'Neill Dungannon and Tullaghoge, total cost £150K • Enhance the experience programme, step on stage from the DAERA programme developing and working with 5 experiences total cost £150k • Living History programme, developing scripts, costumes and actors £50K • Fed and Watered Programme – new food trail for mid ulster, working with restaurants across the district, develop a digital and printed map, linking in with the food market including Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt markets enhanced with outdoor cooking demos £30K • Living History Banquet at Hill of the O'Neill inviting tour operators and visitors, showcasing the O'Neill story. • Enhanced project video productions for OM (heritage and winter version) £15k and new audio-visual show at US Grants £50K Total project value/requested - £445,000 (subject to TNI approval) Please note that Tourism Northern Ireland may or may not offer funding for some or all the application after they have evaluated Mid Ulster District Councils application.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**<u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u>** Financial: • No match funding required, total amount requested £445,000, all funding to be spent and delivered by 31st March 2022. • No cost to council 100% funded. Human: Current staff structure sufficient to manage the project.
4.2	**<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u>** N/A

4.3	**<u>Risk Management Implications</u>** The project will be managed in accordance with MUDC policies and procedures
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	If application to Tourism Northern Ireland is successful, the recommendation to Council is to deliver the outputs of the programme.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	N/A

Report on	Corporate Events – Halloween and Christmas Update 2021
Date of Meeting	16 September 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Sharon Arbuthnot

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 update members on the proposals for both Halloween and Christmas 2021, as the district continues to move out of restrictions being mindful of the fluid environment.
1.2	To seek approval to move forward with the recommendations.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	In Northern Ireland, 1,291,417 over 18's has received a first dose of the vaccine. This represents approximately 87.5% of the adult population.
2.2	As of the figures available from the Department of Health NI on 02 September 2021; Mid Ulster District Council is rank 5th of 11 Local Government Districts with 18,711 individuals testing positive and 2nd of the 11 local government districts for cases per 100,000 of the population.
2.3	As society takes some tentative steps back towards life as we knew it pre-Covid - 19, The Events team have continued to closely monitor the evolving situation, including intensive communication with Council's Corporate Health and Safety team and regular discussions with other councils' events teams across NI. The continued outcome from these meetings is a collective approach in the delivery of safe corporate events throughout Northern Ireland.
2.4	Corporate events have both economic and social benefits to residents and businesses within Mid Ulster. The Events team will continue to work with our Regeneration Managers who provide a vital link with our Town Centre businesses.
2.5	The Council will continue to follow the both the Public Health Guidance and recommendations on managing COVID-19.
2.6	Changes will have to be made with the aim of taking small steps to creating a new way of doing things whilst rebuilding the confidence and health and wellbeing of

	residents within the Mid Ulster District at the same time as protecting the reputation and financial interests of the Council.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Even with the current relaxations of covid-19 regulations, a risk-based approach must remain. The main points to consider include: • There are still risks with proceeding with large events, which is not only a potential risk to the residents who might attend the event, but also to the Council staff, contractors, artists, statutory authorities and agencies who collaborate with Council to deliver the Halloween and Christmas Events. • Council is not in control of the external factors and in this fluid environment these could change. • In the current climate events could add additional pressures to town centre businesses. Consultation will be undertaken with town centre businesses to discuss suitable activities / entertainment that would enhance the customer experience when visiting the town centres during events. • At this time a safe social distancing distance of 2m is still recommended by the NI Executive. Taking this into consideration, attendance figures at any event would be greatly reduced. Furthermore, event budgets would not be reduced to reflect this, in fact operational and health and safety costs may increase expenditure to accommodate social distancing, queue management, first aid requirements and hand sanitising etc. • It is predicted the number of positive cases of Covid-19 will increase in the autumn and winter periods, and as a result it is difficult to accurately forecast the infection rate in October 2021. Factors such as the season, recommencement of the school year, Covid-19 restrictions/relaxations; foreign travel associated with the end of the summer holiday period and vaccine uptake in younger age profiles may influence COVID infection. • With the reduction in Covid-19 restrictions and the gradual introduction of Events attracting mass gatherings, the NI Executive recommend Rapid COVID-19 tests – known as Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests. The use of LFD testing is important as an additional measure alongside the range of existing safety measures in place across organised events. It is strongly recommended that anyone participating in, or attending, any event which will bring them into close proximity with other people from outside their existing bubble should test themselves before they attend, and on days 2 and 8 after the event. The purpose of this testing is to identify any positive cases in advance of the event and allow them to self-isolate. Post event testing will also help to identify any asymptomatic COVID-19 infections arising from the event, or social interactions that may occur before or after an organised event. • All large events which would attract mass gatherings should be ticketed to manage numbers; assist with Track and Trace and facilitate the management

	of the LFD testing. This process would increase the work pressures for staff on top of current workload, in addition to the organising the events. • With the possible introduction of LFD testing within the workplace (voluntary); we must be mindful this could potentially have an impact on staffing levels during the Autumn and Winter months.
3.2	We must also continue to move forward in rebuilding our events portfolio back up to attracting people back into our towns in a gradual, controlled, and safe manner. As part of the process these proposals will: - • Rebuilding confidence within the district by delivery a positive and attractive marketing campaign. • Increasing the atmosphere within our town centres during Halloween and the Christmas period with a combination of smaller and unique events. • Encouraging shoppers to prolong their stay in our town centres and help increase the overall attractiveness of the town centres during the Christmas shopping experience. To achieve the above the following is proposed: - • Deliver a series of thematic events during the the last weekend of October in each of the towns to mark and celebrate Halloween. • Organising a programme of safe events in each of the town's every Saturday (4th, 11th & 18th) during December to help enhance and promote our local town centre businesses. • To work collaboration with the town businesses • Organise smaller interactive pop-up events to include but not limited too; magic shows, live music, jugglers, children's workshops, play sessions etc. • Using council facilities to deliver indoor workshops and/or a Santa grotto which would enable children within the district to visit Santa in their local town centre on the run up to Christmas. • To work alongside other external organisations to enhance their Christmas celebrations. • To recruit a professional skilled and creative company to produce and film the Christmas Lights Switch on videos which will showcase the Mid Ulster District towns. Besides celebrating the town Christmas lights switch on they will also mark the start of the town centre events in the lead up to Christmas. The videos will be transmitted during the last weekend of November, with each town giving out its own unique and individual message.

4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Activities will be delivered within budgets allocated for Christmas events. Proposed budgets for Halloween Events • Dungannon - £7,000 • Magherafelt - £7,000 • Cookstown - £7,000 • Coalisland - £5,000 • Maghera - £5,000 Total £31,000 Proposed budgets for Christmas Events • Dungannon - £20,000 • Cookstown - £20,000 • Magherafelt - £20,000 • Maghera - £10,000 • Coalisland - £10,000 Total £80,000
	Human: n/a
	Risk Management: Adhering to the Executive guidance and advice from our Health and Safety team is paramount. We must continue to follow the legalisation and guidance yet be mindful restrictions could be introduced again.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	With restrictions remaining in place the primary focus in planning for this year's Halloween and Christmas Events will be a programme comprising multiple sites that accommodate footfall and social distancing while enabling people to enjoy a variety entertainment and experiences safely.
5.2	Develop a programme of events both live and online events to enhance the customer experience when visiting the town centres during last weekend of October to celebrate Halloween and the four weekends prior to Christmas.

6.0	Documents Attached & References
	N/A

Report on	Community Development
Date of Meeting	16th September 2021
Reporting Officer	Claire Linney, Head of Community Development
Contact Officers	Philip Clarke - Community Services Manager, Oliver Morgan – Good Relations Manager, Michael McCrory - PCSP Manager, Martina Totten Community Planning Coordinator

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	Community Grants - to agree the rolling grant awards - Local Community Festivals, Good Relations, and Decade of Anniversaries.
1.2	Mid Ulster Advice Service – to agree to go to tender.
1.3	Community Development - to update on Community Development.
1.4	Community Planning; Response to the Department for Health Consultation on the Integrated Care System – to agree a Council response
2.0	Background
2.1	Community Grants – Council annually delivers a number of rolling community grants programmes; Good Relations and Local Community Festivals. Council also annually delivers the Decade of Anniversaries Grant.
2.2	Mid Ulster Advice Service – Council in partnership with DFC annually delivers on general advice provision for Mid Ulster.
2.3	Community Development includes the following areas: Community Support, Good Relations, PCSP, Connecting Pomeroy and facilitation of Community Planning.
2.4	Community Planning; Council regularly responds to key consultations that impact upon the delivery of the Mid Ulster Community Plan.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The Community Festivals grant is a rolling programme – 13 applications recommended for award totalling £8,845 Good Relations – the good relations grant is a rolling programme - 3 applications are recommended for award totalling £2,167.50, 2 grants ineligible and one not minimum threshold.

	The Decade of Anniversaries grant opened in June and is a rolling programme – One application recommended for award totalling £745.00. See grant award recommendations in Appendix 1 for approval.
3.2	Mid Ulster Advice Service – Council in partnership with DFC annually delivers on general advice provision for Mid Ulster. The full budget is £220,000 with a contribution by DFC of £136.774.78. The tender award is for a 3 year period and the current contract is due to end 31st December 2021. The proposed tender is for a further 3 years; with the caveat that this is funding dependant from DFC, as above. As part of the tender an annual review is completed by an independent consultant, to date this has been David Williamson Consulting, who has specialist experience in this area as an advisor to DFC on general advice provision. All of the independent reviews have been positive to date and the final one is being completed now for the last 18 month period (due to Covid). The current delivery agents: the Mid Ulster Advice Service STEP is due to present to the Committee over the next months on the progress to date over the last 3 year period. It is proposed to proceed to tender for the Mid Ulster Advice provision as per budget. Approval is sought for the release of DfC direct funding to the current advice provider for: Welfare Reform Monies, £86,319.84 for Mitigations Extensions for face to face advice and £22,400 for Tribunal Representation, with DfC taking responsibility for directly monitoring these projects.
3.3	Community Development Community Support The Community Support team continues to work with groups regarding the delivery of grants to respond to their communities. All of the settlements across the district supported under the Festive Lights Settlement Grants have been notified in August regarding funding contributions to facilitate early planning and preparation for the annual Christmas Lights provision. As previous a total of 60 settlements are being offer financial assistance under the grant. Grant delivery is ongoing and officers are supporting groups with this. In response to a previous Council query – regarding support to strategic event St Patrick's Day Parade in Dungannon; all strategic events delivery is under a letter of offer and it is responsibility of the applicant group to oversee all delivery within the grant parameters. Officers do support, when required, with administration including claims etc. No Council resources are utilised for strategic event logistical delivery in the St Patrick's Day Parade in Dungannon. In response to the request from Council to get further information as per the letter from Antrim and Newtownabbey re engaging young people. Further information has been

	sought. Mid Ulster District Council community development and good relations are working closely to engage young people under similar schemes; A new Youth Forum has been established, fuel vouchers allocated to families on FSMs, Youth leisure vouchers and leisure discounts have been provided to Council leisure facilities, and an extensive range of play schemes have been delivered in partnership with schools, EA Youth and Council leisure services. Ongoing engagement is taking place with EA Youth. In response to the query on community group access to accounts; a virtual meeting is being arranged with the Credit Unions across the District. Good Relations Good Relations is continuing to deliver the Plan for 2021 – 2022. Peace IV Local Action Plan – the local shared space projects are all near completion. Delivery of the grants and programmes are completing, there are only 3 grants left to complete and the following programmes; cross border literary, cross border heritage, communications, and research. The towns shared space project is at design stage to deliver during October/ November. The areas are at front of Hill of The O'Neill and Ranfurly House, Coalisland at canal, Diamond in Magherafelt and Molesworth Plaza in Cookstown. Connecting Pomeroy – the projects are all at stage 4 design and planning at approval stage. PCSP – see attached previous minutes and the annual report for 2019 – 2020 for information.
3.4	Community Planning Please see a draft response to the Department for Health Consultation on the Integrated Care System for consideration and approval. This is due for submission on 17th September 2021.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**<u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u>** Community Festival awards £8,845 Good Relations awards £2,167.50 Decade of Anniversaries awards £745 **<u>Professional Support</u>** None
4.2	**<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u>** None

4.3	**<u>Risk Management Implications</u>** None
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	Rolling Grants – to agree the rolling grant awards.
5.2	Mid Ulster Advice Service – To proceed to tender for Mid Ulster Advice Service.
5.3	Community Development - To note the Community Development update.
5.3	Community Planning; Response to the Department for Health Consultation on the Integrated Care System – to agree a Council response
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix 1 Good Relations, Local Community Festivals and Decade of Anniversaries grants. Appendix 2 PCSP Minutes and annual report. Appendix 3 Community Planning; Response to the Department for Health Consultation on the Integrated Care System

Appendix 1
Community Festivals September 2021 (Maximum £1200)

No	Organisation Name	Aim	Title of Event / Project	Band	Request	Award
1	The Mid Ulster Oldtime Horse and Pony Driving Club	Sport	Horse and Community Festival Fair	5	£1,400	£720
2	Kilcronaghan Parish Church	Community	The Real Christmas Story	4	£1,200	£840
3	Newmills Football Club	Sport	Community Festival & Charity Fundraiser	4	£1,050	£735
4	Upperlands Apprentice Boys	Culture	Centenary family fun day	7	£1,200	£480
5	Pomeroy Mens Shed	Community	Pomeroy Men's Shed Open Day	6	£1,100	£550
6	Kilcronaghan Community Association	Community	Annual Vintage Rally, Craft Fair & Family Fun Day	4	£1,200	£840
7	Desertmartin Parish Church	Community	Desertmartin Community Fun Day	4	£1,200	£840
8	Killyman & District Cultural Group	Culture	Mini Tattoo	6	£1,369	£600
9	St Malachy's GAC Castledawson	Community	Family Fun Weekend	6	£1,400	£600
10	Sandholes Community Group	Community	Sandholes Sensory Garden Open Day	7	£1,200	£480
11	Friends of Glencull Parent and Community Association	Community	Patrick Farrell Poetry Festival - Music Together	4	£1,500	£840
12	Derrytresk Community Projects	Community	Halloween Ghosts and Ghouls	4	£1,200	£840
13	Watty Grahams GAC	Sport	Summer Camp	7	£2,400	£480
			Total			**£8,845**

Bands	Score	%
7	30-39	40%
6	40-49	50%
5	50-59	60%
4	60-69	70%
3	70-79	80%
2	80-89	90%
1	90+	100%

Good Relations September 2021 (Maximum £1,200)

No	Organisation Name	Aim	Title Of Event/project	Band	Request	Award
1	An Seansiopa	Community	Our Space	4	£1,200	£840.00
2	Moneymore Henry Joy McCracken's	Community	Henry Joy McCracken Historical Tour	4	£950	£665.00
3	Sperrin Men's shed Cookstown	Community	Restart & Rebuild Community	6	£1,325	£662.50
						£2,167.50

Unsuccessful

Benburb Priory	'New Beginnings' - Youth Group Visit	Ineligible Not Community & Voluntary Sector
Stewartstown & District Village Forum	Let's Get Growing (2)	Ineligible same application Arts/Community
Newmills Cultural Group	Newmill's Community Garden 'Shou Sugi Ban'	Did not meet minimum threshold

Bands	Score	%
7	30-39	40%
6	40-49	50%
5	50-59	60%
4	60-69	70%
3	70-79	80%
2	80-89	90%
1	90+	100%

Decade of Anniversaries Grant (Maximum £2,000)

No	Organisation Name	Aim	Title Of Event/project	Band	Request	Award
1	Killygulib Rural Development Association	Community	Irish History Talks - Pre-plantation to present day	5	£2,475.00	£745.00
					Total	**£745.00**

Minutes of the meeting of Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership held on Wednesday 31 March 2021 at 2.30pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:	Councillor Christine McFlynn (Chair), Councillor Frances Burton, Councillor Anne Forde, Councillor Clement Cuthbertson, Councillor Cathal Mallaghan, Councillor Dominic Molloy, Councillor Brian McGuigan, Councillor John McNamee, Councillor Sean McPeake Alexandra Black (Vice Chair), Sue Chada, Grace Meerbeek, Ciaran McElhone, Paul McErlean, Seán MacGoilla Cheara, Pearse McFlynn, Julie McKeown, Hayley Wilson, Jonathan Armour (NIFRS), Superintendent Mike Baird (PSNI), Chief Inspector Mervyn Seffen (PSNI), Inspector Gavin Sterling (PSNI)
Apologies:	Patsy Begley (NIFRS), Sharon Crooks (NIHE), Councillor Meta Graham
In Attendance:	Michael McCrory (PCSP Manager), Annette McGahan (PCSP Officer), Shauna McCloskey (PCSP Officer), Martina McCullagh (PCSP Assistant)

The Meeting commenced at 2.33pm.

PCSP178/21 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. The Chair advised Members that Inspector Danny Walsh and Inspector Andy Archibald are both soon due to retire. The Chair took the opportunity to thank them for their support and work over the years and wished them well in their retirement.

Superintendent Baird advised that Inspector Gavin Sterling has replaced Inspector Andy Archibald.

PCSP179/21 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members were reminded of their obligation in relation to declarations of interest.

PCSP180/21 MINUTES OF POLICING & COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER 2020

The Minutes of Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership meeting held on Wednesday 9 December 2020 were approved by Members.

PCSP181/21 MATTERS ARISING

Posters displayed across Mid Ulster District

Pearse McFlynn referred to threatening posters which have been displayed for a number of months across the District and asked what action is being taken by PSNI to have them removed.

Councillor Molloy also raised concerns about the 'threat of violence' displayed on posters, specifically aimed towards members of the GAA, elected Members and Mid Ulster District Council staff, stating that these threats which must be taken seriously.

Superintendent Baird advised that threats are taken very seriously and stated if a poster is illegal, it will be removed. These posters are very distasteful, but are not a criminal offence and is unaware of posters threatening MUDC staff. PSNI have been engaging with communities, encouraging the removal of posters and have had some success. This work continues.

The Chair clarified that a significant number of the posters are placed on DfI poles which are not the responsibility of Mid Ulster District Council.

PCSP172/20 – COOKSTOWN NORTHER COMMUNITY GROUP – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST - SID

The PCSP Manager advised Members that discussions have taken place with Cookstown North Community Group and funding has been agreed for the procurement of a Speed Indicator Device (SID).

PCSP182/21 SIDs REPORT

The PCSP Manager provided an update to Members in relation to where SIDs have been deployed and results gathered during the previous two years. An on-line interactive system is currently being developed which will allow instant access to view statistics of each SID and will include the time of day vehicle speeds are recorded. The feedback received from PSNI and the community both agree that SIDs do work and are having a positive impact on reducing speed on our roads.

The PCSP Officer advised Members that PWS Ireland Ltd have been awarded the tender to supply 10 SIDs, which we hope to take delivery of by the middle of April 2021. Speed Indicator Devices are currently allocated on a first come first served basis, with schools taking priority during the school year, with subsequent allocations equally spread across Mid Ulster District Council area. A site inspection is carried out to ensure the location is suitable for a SID to be installed.

Following a discussion, Members agreed that Independent Members, Elected Members and Statutory Agencies continue to contact PCSP Officers to request the allocation of a SID to a particular area. It was also agreed that if an individual or a Community Group contacted PCSP directly regarding a request for a SID, this will be discussed with the Independent Member and/or Elected Member in that particular area to ascertain need.

In response to a question from Councillor Forde regarding the availability of funding for Community Groups to assist with the purchase of a SID, the PCSP Manager referred Members to the 'Police Property Funding' which was recently launched and is providing grants of between £1,000 and £10,000. The closing date for applications is 8 July 2021.

Members made the following comments/recommendations;

Councillor McNamee suggested the development of a calendar detailing allocation dates for SIDs, therefore, Members would know in advance when a SID will be installed in a particular area.

The Chair suggested circulating all necessary requirements for the installation of a SID to Members.

Councillor Burton suggested the recording of car registration number, if technology allowed as this would assist the PSNI greatly with identifying speeding vehicles.

Alexandra Black, Vice Chair sought clarification regarding ownership, insurance and liability if a Community Group were to purchase a SID through secured funding. The PCSP Manager advised that he would check all options and update Members.

PCSP183/21 DRAFT PCSP LEAFLET

The PCSP Manager referred to the draft PCSP Leaflet and asked Members if they wished to have their contact number or e-mail address included in the leaflet.

Following a discussion it was agreed that the leaflet be amended to include Members e-mail addresses. It was also agreed to include the 101 non-emergency number and Crimestoppers number 0800 555111, as suggested by Councillor Burton.

PCSP184/21 PROJECTS UPDATE

The PCSP Manager referred to the Project Report Cards for Quarter 3 and asked if Members required clarification or had any questions relating to the projects. No clarification was sought by Members.

Alexandra Black, Vice Chair advised that she recently attended the OBA Training provided by the NIPB and informed Members that the Project Report Cards formed part of the training.

PCSP185/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Anti-Social Behaviour – College Gardens area in Magherafelt

Councillor McPeake referred to anti-social behaviour at College Gardens in Magherafelt, in a section of green space which backs onto houses facing Westland Road. Councillor McPeake is working with Councillor Totten to help get this issue addressed. The anti-social behaviour is happening in a

small area of green space close to an NIE Sub Station and a gable wall of a premises owned by Clanmill Housing Association. There is alcohol being consumed, drug-taking and extensive graffiti on both the Sub Station and the gable wall of the premises. Clanmill Housing Association have agreed to paint the wall and NIE have agreed to paint the Sub Station which will remove the graffiti, however, Councillor McPeake stated that it would help if this area could be fenced off.

The PCSP Officer advised Members that it has been determined that Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) owns this area of green space. Councillor Totten has been updated and he intends contacting NIHE to request fencing for the area. PCSP will continue to provide assistance if necessary.

NTE Meeting held on 15/09/2020 – Discussion regarding the development of a 'Good to Go' sign for night time economy premises

Councillor Mallaghan referred to a discussion which took place at a Night-Time Economy meeting held on the 15 September 2020 regarding the development of a 'Good to Go' sign, which Vintners could display and would give confidence to patrons that the premises is Covid compliant. Councillor Mallaghan asked for an update.

The PCSP Manager advised that this initiative was discussed with the relevant statutory agencies, who were unable to stand over the content of the sign, therefore, it did not proceed. He referred to a Northern Ireland wide Tourism initiative called 'Good to Go' which restaurants and pubs can apply for free of charge.

Superintendent Baird advised that this initiative was discussed, but PSNI as a service were not prepared to endorse it, as they were unable to view the risk assessments carried out by Vintners and, therefore, could not state with absolute certainty that the premises were fully Covid compliant.

Councillor Mallaghan said given the enthusiasm at the time it was initially discussed, it is disappointing that the initiative will not proceed.

RAPID Bin in Maghera

Councillor McGuigan referred to the RAPID Bin which was recently installed in Maghera and the very negative feedback it is receiving on social media. Councillor McGuigan also referred to a very informative video produced by another Council area promoting RAPID bins and asked if PCSP could utilise this medium to educate the public regarding the positive benefits of this initiative.

The PCSP Manager advised Members that work is currently taking place in conjunction with Start360 and PSNI with a view to installing a further 5 RAPID bins in various locations across the District. Under normal circumstances a community consultation is carried out prior to a RAPID bin being installed, but due to Covid this was not possible. In relation to the video referred to, the production company involved have been contacted and are in the process of tailoring its content to suit Mid Ulster. When

finalised, this video will be made available to PSNI and other Partners to help promote RAPID bins in a positive way.

Do-nuts on Rural Roads & Incidents of Dog Theft

Councillor Burton referred to the increase in 'do-nuts' on rural roads and named 'Hollands Crossroads' as being particularly bad at present, stating it is only a matter of time until someone is seriously injured or killed.

Superintendent Baird advised Members to continue to report when and where incidents of 'do-nuts' are happening and they will do their best to attend the area.

Councillor Burton referred to the increase in dog theft and asked if there has been many incidents reported in Mid Ulster.

Superintendent Baird stated there has been no dog thefts reported across the District. There is a lot of information on social media regarding dog theft, but there is no evidence of large numbers of dogs being stolen in Northern Ireland at present.

Councillor Burton thanked the Clogher Valley Neighbourhood Policing Team for the help and support provided recently to a lady who reported suspicious vehicles in their area. She also expressed thanks to Agewell and PCSP Officers for their assistance in the matter.

Superintendent Baird thanked the Member for the positive feedback and stated that this would passed on to the Clogher Valley Team.

Councillor Burton referred to the retirement of Chief Inspector Roy Robinson and proposed sending a card wishing him all the best in his retirement.

Superintendent Baird advised that Roy Robinson, Danny Walsh and Andy Archibald all retired today and that he would pass on the well-wishes.

Litter Picking

In response to a query from Grace Meerbeek regarding the issue of excessive amounts of litter discarded along our roads, the Chair referred to a Council run scheme where communities are provided with litter pickers and bags to carry out a 'litter pick', Council then collect the bags of litter. This has already taken place in numerous areas across the District and is being very well supported by the community.

The Chair advised that a 'litter pick' has been arranged for Moneymore on the 17 April 2021.

Drink Driving Sentences

Alexandra Black, Vice Chair commended the PSNI on apprehending a drunk-driver at the week-end, and stated as a fifth time offender is the message not getting through or should sentencing be reviewed.

In response, Superintendent Baird agreed as this was a fifth time offender, who was driving without a driving licence PSNI would be pushing for a custodial sentence, but sentencing remains with the judiciary.

Covid-19 figures in Mid Ulster

Superintendent Baird advised that Covid-19 figures are currently the highest in Mid Ulster compared to other Districts. A meeting has been arranged with the Public Health Agency, Environmental Health and the Chief Executive of MUDC to discuss the current situation, and to try to identify the reason for the high number of cases across Mid Ulster.

Superintendent Baird asked Members to continue to encourage communities to abide by Covid regulations especially over the Easter period.

Information issued to Members by e-mail

The PCSP Manager referred to the following documents which were circulated to Members recently by e-mail. Members were advised to contact the PCSP Manager if they have any queries or require further information regarding any of the documents issued.

- Police Property Funding
- Mid Ulster Support Hub Evaluation
- Findings from the Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey focusing on perceptions of crime

PCSP186/21 IMPACT ON DELIVERY OF PCSP ACTION PLAN DUE TO REDUCTION IN STAFF

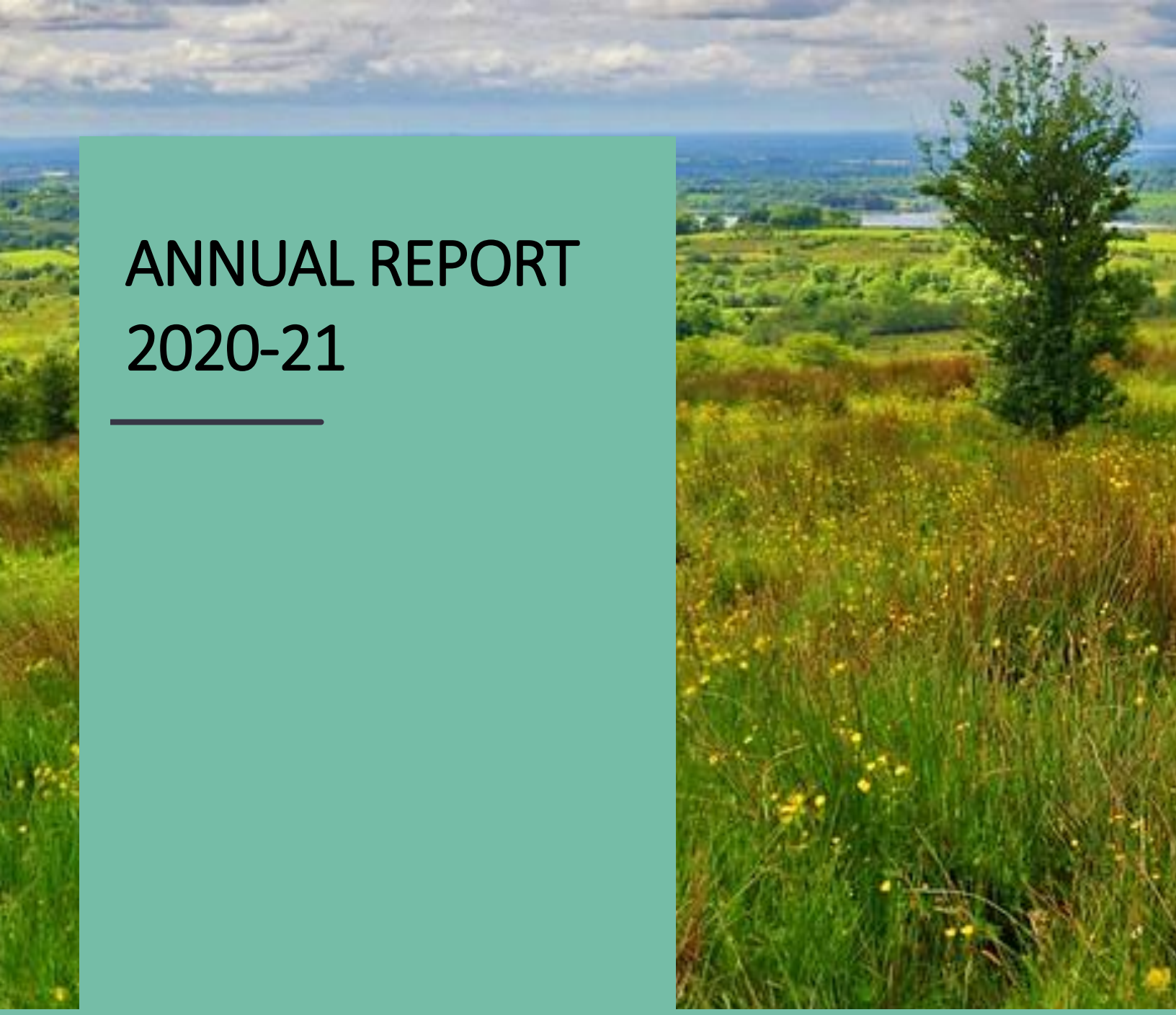
In response to a question from the Chair regarding impact on the delivery of the PCSP Action Plan due to the reduction in staff, the PCSP Manager advised that it is difficult to quantify at present due to Covid Restrictions. The impact will become more evident when restrictions are eased sufficiently to allow the resumption of Youth Projects and engagements.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

PCSP187/21 The next PCSP meeting will take place on Wednesday 26 May 2021 at 2.30pm.

The Chair thanked Members for attending the meeting and wished everyone a very Happy Easter.

The meeting ended at 3.48pm.



ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Policing & Community Safety Partnership
making Mid Ulster safer

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) for 2020– 2021.

The last year has been difficult for many people due to Covid, isolation, loneliness, and the fear of the unknown. We hope that there are brighter days ahead as families are able to meet their loved ones again.

Covid has had an impact on our local areas and to comply with regulations the PCSP has had to restrict its normal activities.

Mid Ulster PCSP is made up of statutory and community members who work together to help make Mid Ulster a safer place to live. As Chair, I would like to express my thanks to our elected, independent and statutory members for their commitment to the PCSP.

As a PCSP, we are committed to engaging and developing solutions that address the community safety issues that matter most in our communities.

The PCSP also has a duty to monitor the performance of the police against the local policing plan. Members continue to do this and regularly meet with the PSNI to review this.

I would like to express my thanks to all who have engaged and worked with us over the past year.

Cllr Christine McFlynn
Chairperson
Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership 2020-21

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FUNCTIONS AND PROCESSES

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) aim to make our communities safer. They are statutory bodies established under the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

PCSPs work in a joined-up way to the benefit of local communities. They are funded jointly by the Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

There are 11 partnerships, one for each council area.

Each PCSP has a Policing Committee to take forward specific police monitoring and engagement functions, with the wider PCSP taking forward community safety related functions.

PCSPs may also establish delivery groups to address particular community safety issues that arise in their areas.

WHAT PCSPS DO

PCSPs aim to make our community safer by focusing on the policing and community safety issues that matter most in each local council area.

In making communities safer PCSPs will:

- Consult and engage with the local community on the issues of concern in relation to policing and community safety. The Policing Committee has a responsibility to provide views to the district commander and the Policing Board on policing matters
- Identify and prioritise issues of concern and prepare plans for how these can be tackled
- Monitor **-** a Policing Committee comprising the political and independent members will monitor the performance of the police and work to gain the co-operation of the public with the police in preventing crime
- Deliver a reduction in crime and enhance community safety in the district, directly through its own actions, through the work of the delivery groups or through support for the work of others.

JOINT COMMITTEE

PCSPs receive annual funding from the Joint Committee (the Department of Justice and NI Policing Board) with a legislative aim to work with their local community to help address crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour issues.

There have been many examples of good practice highlighted to Joint Committee by PCSPs throughout the year which showcase the good work being carried out on the ground. Joint Committee has also provided support to PCSPs to use an Outcomes Based Approach (OBA) as a more consistent and better means of measuring impact and improving transparency and accountability in the delivery of their work in local communities.
PCSPs now routinely use all aspects of OBA in their work, with an action plan being completed using indicator and performance measure information; a project card template being used for each initiative and thematic report cards being submitted to Joint Committee every quarter from a governance perspective.

To support PCSPs in their transition to this new way of working, the Joint Committee developed PCSP planning guidance which incorporates the following:

- Information on the OBA process;
- An action plan template which includes a review and summary synopsis to capture the rationale for continuing, amending, or not progressing projects from one year to another;
- A set of agreed performance measures for generic projects;
- A project card template to be completed for each initiative;
- A thematic report card template to be used to help highlight impact at a more strategic level; and
- A framework showing how the work of PCSPs and their use of OBA supports the common Programme for Government Outcome 7 - We have a safe community where we respect the law and each other.

MEMBERS

The size of each PCSP varies across Northern Ireland. Mid Ulster PCSP has ten political members appointed by Mid Ulster District Council and nine independent members of the community who are appointed by the NI Policing Board.

Together these members form the Policing Committee of the PCSP. In addition, PCSPs have representatives from seven designated bodies.

The Chair of each PCSP is a councillor and the Vice Chair is an independent member.

In 2020-21 Mid Ulster PCSP consisted of the following members:

Ten local Councillors;
Councillor Christine McFlynn (Chair)
Councillor Frances Burton
Councillor Clement Cuthbertson
Councillor Anne Forde
Councillor Meta Graham
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan
Councillor Dominic Molloy
Councillor Brian McGuigan
Councillor John McNamee
Councillor Sean McPeake

Nine independent members of the public;
Alexandra Black (Vice Chair)
Sulakashana Chada
Grace Meerbeek
Seán MacGíolla Cheara
Ciaran McElhone
Paul McErlean
Pearse McFlynn
Julie McKeown
Hayley Wilson

And representatives from designated statutory bodies;
Education Authority
Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)
Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)
Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)
Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)
Youth Justice Agency

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The PCSP agreed the following strategic objectives and priorities for 2020-21

Strategic Objective 1 – to successfully deliver the functions of the Policing and Community Safety Partnership for the area
Key priorities:

- Engage with local community and statutory groups
- Implement the PCSP's plan
- Put in place relevant implementation structures and delivery mechanisms
- Raise awareness of PCSP, crime problems, and projects

Strategic Objective 2 – to improve community safety by tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
Key priorities:

- To reduce the level of ASB, including anti-social driving
- To reduce the level of violent crime, including alcohol related crime
- To reduce fear of crime and reduce the risk of being a victim of crime, especially among older people

Strategic Objective 3 – to improve community confidence in policing
Key priorities:

- Ensure local accountability
- Ensure that policing delivery reflects the involvement, views, and priorities of local communities
- Ensure improved policing service delivery in partnership with local communities
- Ensure effective engagement with the police and the local community
- Ensure engagement with police is built into projects

Mid Ulster PCSP consults and engages with the local community on policing and community safety issues of concern. The PCSP then identifies and prioritises these and prepares plans for how they can be tackled.

The PCSP aims to deliver a reduction in crime and enhance community safety, directly through its own actions, through the work of delivery groups or through support for the work of others.

DELIVERING

The projects listed below have been developed or funded by the PCSP in response to the priorities identified through the consultation. These activities also provide the PCSP with an engagement opportunity that informs its future work.

PCSP Structure

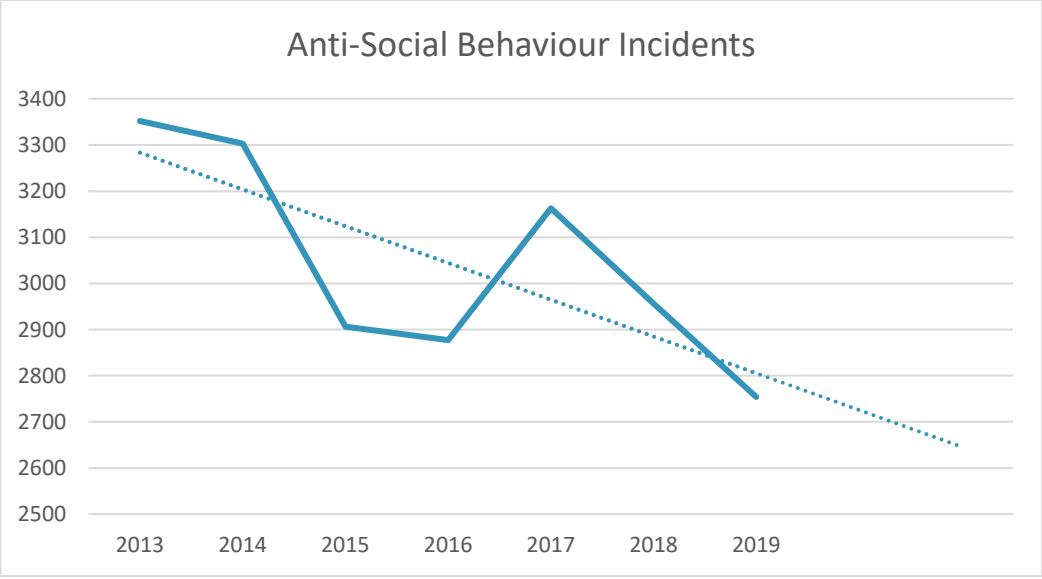
The PCSP has an overall main body, the PCSP itself. It also has three thematic groups to deliver on their relevant action plan, these are:

- Anti-social Behaviour Group
- Night-time Economy Group
- Vulnerable Victims of Crime Group

Under the PCSP, the Policing Committee has a separate and distinctive role to monitor the performance of the police against the local policing plan. The Policing Committee will pass on any relevant issues that arise to the thematic groups or main PCSP for delivery. Targeted engagement with community was delivered through each of the thematic groups

Anti-Social Behaviour

Since 2015, Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) has decreased consistently across the district. The Mid Ulster area now has the lowest levels of ASB across NI.



However, ASB remains a concern for our community and Mid Ulster PCSP's long-term strategy is for targeted initiatives to engage with those involved with antisocial behaviour and create a change.

Projects implemented in 2020/21:

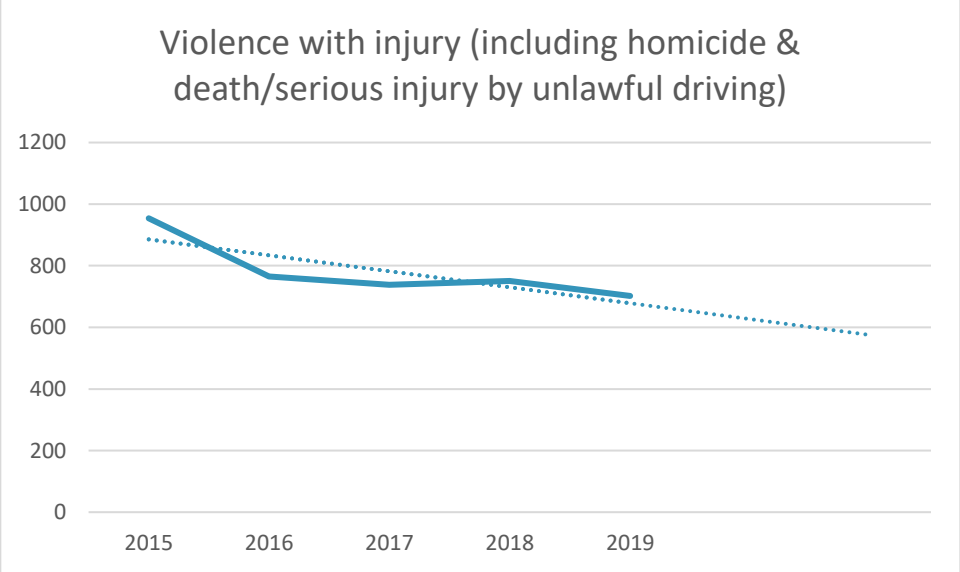
The Youth Engagement Programme (YEPs) are delivered by PSNI, EA Youth Service, Youth Justice Agency and PCSP Officers to targeted areas across Mid Ulster. In 2020/21 one programme was commenced. However due to coronavirus the PCSP were not able to complete the course or finalise the results for the year.

Crash Car Simulator: The Crash Car Simulator provides four people at a time the opportunity to experience a simulated car crash. This project was delivered to five schools across the district, with 150 participants. It provides a hard hitting road safety education, with 100% stating that it had increased their knowledge of road safety issues.

Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) – The devices measure and display the speed of oncoming vehicles in areas with restricted speed limits. They were erected at sites throughout the district and provided an average speed reduction of 5pmh. Feedback from the local communities and partners was very positive.

Nighttime Economy

In 2015 Mid Ulster PCSP developed a strategy to engage with and work with stakeholders in the Nighttime Economy, including Coach operators, vintners, voluntary and statutory partners. The strategy was to develop an enhanced co-ordinated approach to the issues associated with the Night-time economy. The PCSP wanted more people to enjoy the District's night-time economy but in a safer way.



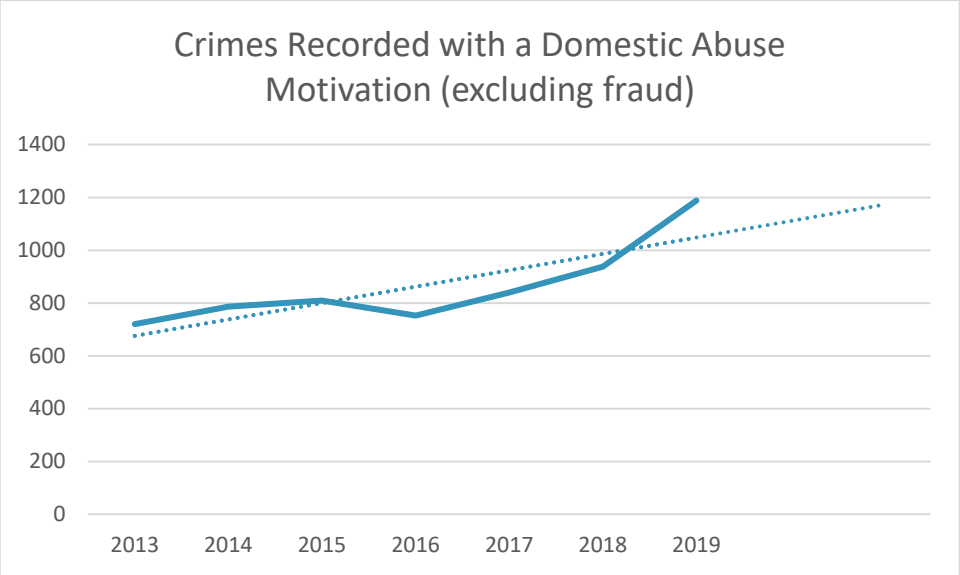
Over the last four years the crime profile of our largest night-time economy town, Cookstown town centre, has changed from one of violent crime to low level crime. This is positive for the residents and business owners in the town. It is now one of the safest places in Northern Ireland

Defibrillators: Defibrillators have been installed and are all operational in the main night-time economy towns, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Dungannon and the Moy.

Cost of Your Night Out campaign ran over Christmas 2020. The aim of the campaign was to highlight that Penalty Notices would be given out for public urinations, disorderly behaviour, criminal damage, and being drunk.

Vulnerable Victims of Crime

Crimes with a domestic violence motivation are still high and increased over the lockdown periods.



The PCSP aims to reduce fear of crime and reduce the risk of being a victim of crime, especially among older people. During 2020/21 the PCSP implemented the following:

Behind Closed Doors - A 'Behind Closed Doors' domestic violence bus and adshel advertising campaign was delivered over the Christmas period. This campaign highlighted the issue of domestic violence during its peak period. The message was for both male and female victims and signposted them to the 24 Hours Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Helpline **0808 802 1414**

High Risk DV Victims Security - The PCSP provided security equipment for High Risk Domestic Violence Victims. 8 security installations were completed in 2020/21, with 100% of installation delivered within one week of the referral. 100% of recipients stated that they feel safer.

Positive Relationships Programme - The PCSP Positive Relationships programme which was delivered to 473 pupils in 4 post primary schools

across Mid Ulster. This project was delivered by Mid Ulster Women's Aid in partnership with PSNI CASE Officers.

Participants reported the following increase in their awareness:

- Positive/Healthy Relationships (88.1%)
- Unhealthy Relationships (88.1%)
- Warning signs of abuse (90.48%)
- Dating Violence (92.86%)
- Risks & consequences associated with sexting (80.95%)
- Cyberbullying (66.67%)
- Controlling behaviours (85.71%)
- 92.86% agreed or strongly agreed that domestic violence can happen to anyone
- 88.1% agreed or strongly agreed that they could identify support services
- 86% of teachers said the programme increased their awareness

Bike Marking: Three events were held with 100% of attendees stating that it had increased their awareness of bike security.

Agewell - PCSP support Agewell to contribute to a reduction in fear of crime and being a victim of crime for older people. 456 home maintenance visits were carried out in 2020/21. 100% stated their feeling of safety has increased due to the project.

Who's at the Door: This Internet Safety Programme was delivered in partnership with PSNI Case Officers - "Who's at The Door" was delivered by Beam Creative Network in 16 schools to 216 key stage 2 pupils across Mid Ulster.
96% said the session taught them more about internet safety and how to keep themselves safe online. 83%said the session taught them more about the dangers of cyberbullying. 77% said the session taught them more about where to access help and support services.

Policing Committee

Mid Ulster PCSP's Policing Committee provides views on local policing to the District Commander and to the Policing Board and monitors performance of the police against the local policing plan. At its policing performance meetings, the PCSP scrutinises the District Commanders reports and highlights areas of concern.
The PCSP held three Policing Committee meetings during the year. In February 2021, the Policing Committee met with the PSNI Area Commander to discuss the draft Local Policing Plan and take onboard the views of members.

The PCSP increased community confidence in PSNI through targeted engagement events across the district and integrated PSNI engagement into delivery projects where possible.

Awareness

The PCSP undertakes several awareness raising schemes to help disperse community safety messages

Text Alert: PCSP has a text alert scheme that provides community safety alerts to those who register on it. 191,101 text alerts on community safety messages were sent in 20-21.

Behind Closed Doors: DV Awareness Campaign ran at Christmas

Cost of your Night Out: Penalty Notice Awareness Campaign ran at Christmas

School Screens 20 post primary schools have PCSP screens displaying multiple community safety campaigns

Safer U App provides information on crime prevention, scans and support services and is unique to the Mid Ulster area.

MEMBERS ATTENDANCE 2020/21

Elected Members	Meetings Held	Meetings Attended	Attendance Percentage
Councillor Christine McFlynn (Chair)	4	4	100%
Councillor Frances Burton	4	4	100%
Councillor Clement Cuthbertson	4	4	100%
Councillor Anne Forde	4	4	100%
Councillor Meta Graham	4	3	75%
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan	4	4	100%
Councillor Dominic Molloy	4	4	100%
Councillor Brian McGuigan	4	3	75%
Councillor John McNamee	4	4	100%
Councillor Sean McPeake	4	3	75%
Independent Members			
Alexandra Black (Vice Chair)	4	4	100%
Sulakashana Chada	4	3	75%
Grace Meerbeek	4	3	75%
Seán MacGíolla Cheara	4	4	100%
Ciaran McElhone	4	4	100%
Paul McErlean	4	3	75%
Pearse McFlynn	4	2	50%
Julie McKeown	2	2	100%
Hayley Wilson	4	3	75%
Designated Members			
Education Authority	4	1	25%
Health & Social Care Trusts	4	3	75%
NI Fire & Rescue	4	2	50%
NI Housing Executive	4	2	50%
Probation Board NI	4	3	75%
Police Service of Northern Ireland	4	4	100%
Youth Justice Agency	4	3	75%

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Department of Health Consultation on
Future Planning Model: Integrated Care System NI Draft Framework
Mid Ulster District Council Response
September 2021

Introduction

Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Department's Consultation on Future Planning Model: Integrated Care System NI Draft Framework. MUDC supports a health service model that enables collaborative working. The Mid Ulster Community Plan, which MUDC are the legislative facilitators of, is also founded upon the principles of collaboration, integration and partnerships which reach across traditional boundaries, with organisations, groups and individuals coming together to collectively plan and deliver services and interventions. Council itself has a strong record of working with health partners to improve health and social wellbeing outcomes for our population and would welcome any framework that strengthens this working and maximises the benefits of these outcomes to the people of Mid Ulster.

The Mid Ulster Community Plan is also underpinned by the identification of the needs of individuals and communities and one of its 15 outcomes is to ensure that right services are provided in the most appropriate place, at the right time. MUDC are keen to see how this Framework will attribute to the achievement of this outcome.

As an advocate for the benefits of Community Planning, MUDC fully endorses a model that is based on the principle of local level decision making. Community Planning clearly demonstrates the benefits to delivering services at a local level to meet local need.

Values and Principles

Many of the values and principles detailed in the Framework mirror those of the Mid Ulster Community Plan and once again MUDC welcomes a Framework that will support the full realisation of the Mid Ulster Community Plan within the district.

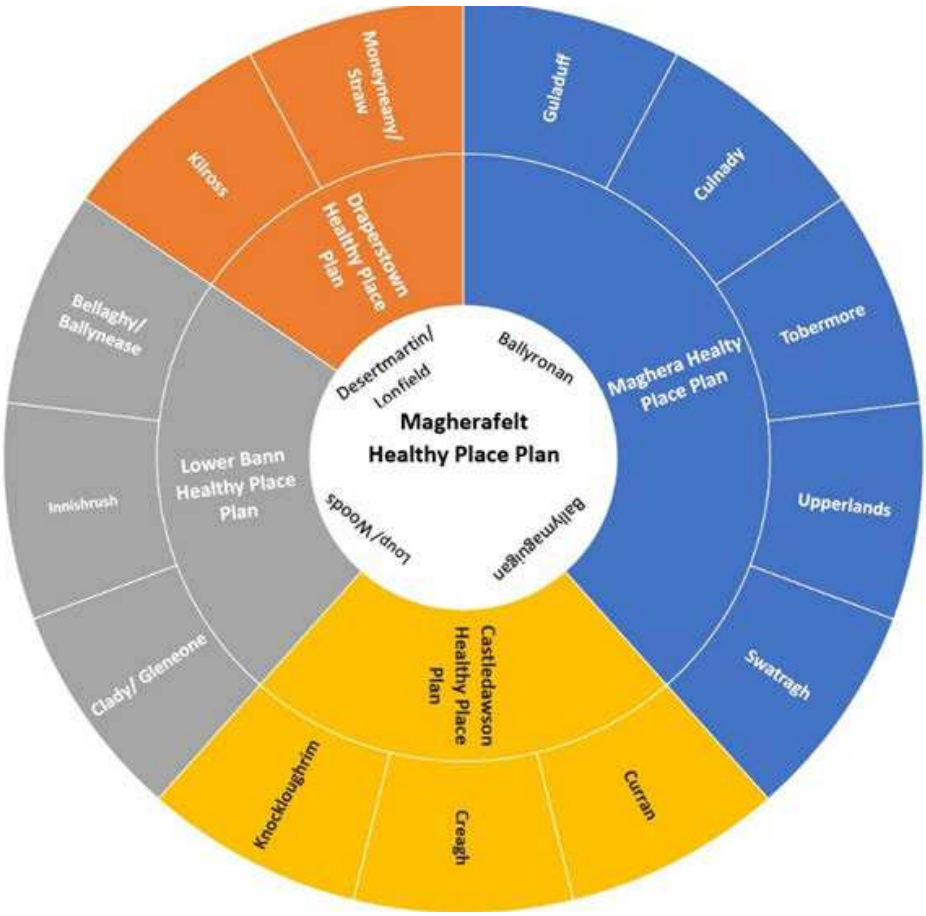
However, as the lead facilitator for Community Planning, Council is all too aware how difficult these principles are to deliver in reality. In order to ensure they are fulfilled throughout the sector, will require it to be strongly endorsed by all levels, from Minister to administrator. It will require a significant change in organisational culture. Health services require a level of specialism and rightly so considering the importance of an individual's health. However, this has at times led to a culture that can be reluctant to work with those outside the sector, regardless of the common goal. MUDC would offer its assistance in any way, to support the sector in fulfilling these values and principles.

Integrated Care System NI Model

Whilst MUDC fully supports a model that **is based on the principle of local level decision making which is underpinned by a population health,** it has significant concerns regarding the formation of both the Area Levels and Locality Levels and how they align to the Mid Ulster Council area. The Council believes that a significant barrier to addressing the health needs of the Mid Ulster population is because the district straddles two Health Care Trusts. When developing and delivering health programmes in the district, in partnership with the Health partners, its is for the majority of cases, only with one Trust. Gaining the participation of both trusts to deliver a district wide service or programme is often challenging and it can prove frustrating as to how different the two Trusts operate and are managed. The details provided in this paper does not provide MUDC with confidence that this practice will cease under a new Framework. MUDC would seek greater assurances that the new structure has considered in detail, how council areas that sit across more than one Health Trust, will be better served.

MUDC also has reservations to the reference made to Local District Electoral Areas (DEAs) within the structure. Whilst Council is aware that a few Councils have adopted a DEA approach to certain services, mainly community development, it also understands that this approach is not without its challenges. MUDC can see merit in engaging with communities and citizens through a DEA fora but would not support a DEA structure for decision making or delivery purposes.

Mid Ulster Community Planning currently considering the development of Health Place Plans across the district. As oppose to a DEA model, initial concepts look at developing Healthy Place using a Hub and Spoke model as illustrated in the example below:



Each town would act as the main service ‘Hub’ for the villages and settlements that make up the ‘Spokes’ of this service wheel. The ‘Hubs’ will provide a full array of health & wellbeing services such as, GPs, dentists, other Health Trust services, leisure centres, sporting grounds etc. However, it is important the ‘Spokes’ provide a level of adequate services to meet the health & wellbeing needs of their communities. The ‘Spoke’ Healthy Place Plans would analyse health data for the area, looking specifically at evidence relating to any health inequalities experience in the geography, map current service provision (supporting the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing), identify gaps and develop actions to fill these gaps and improve the health & wellbeing outcomes for the community. Development

and delivery of the Healthy Place Plans would operate on a Community Planning approach, bringing statutory service providers and local communities together to design services and projects to best suit the needs of the people living there, promoting community development led health and wellbeing interventions. Whilst this action is only in a conceptual phase, Mid Ulster District Council feels that there is potential within the Integrated Care System Framework to bring it to fruition.

MUDC agrees with the inclusion of Community Planning Partnerships in the AIPB membership. However, MUDC also feels that Council should be a represented at this Board, given its integral part to service delivery at a local level. MUDC are aware that frameworks and policies often mistake Councils and Community Planning Partnerships as one and this is not the case. After fulfilling its role a facilitator of the Community Planning process, Council are an equal partner in terms of delivery and fulfilment of the Plan. Again, MUDC would stress its position that both Community Planning and local government needs to be represented at the board, as separate entities.

The paper states that **Involvement** (in the ICS model) **goes beyond the HSC sector, bringing in all partners who can help to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, reduce health inequalities, and tackle wider issues which can affect our health and wellbeing.** MUDC would reinforce the importance that the Regional Group will need to incorporate departments across the NI Executive. It has been clearly underlined in numerous health reports, that health is not just a health problem and cannot be addressed by the health sector alone. MUDC therefore seeks strong cross departmental representation at this level.

Report on	1. Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme 2. Future Business Start Provision Research 3. NI Chamber of Commerce: Regional Networking Event 2021 4. DAERA Rural Policy Framework for NI – Consultation 5. Skills Strategy for NI – Consultation 6. MEGA Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan 7. ESF Call 3 Match Funding Requests (2022-23) 8. Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021 9. Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) 10. Mid Ulster Business Excellence Awards 2021
Date of Meeting	16 September 2021
Reporting Officer	Head of Economic Development

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 provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	**Mid Ulster Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme Phase 4** The Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme offered discretionary grants of up to 75% eligible costs, capped at £5,000 per property for external and/or internal improvements. The Scheme was available to both occupied commercial premises and vacant/derelict units within the town centre boundary of each of the towns (Coalisland, Cookstown, Dungannon as per Area plan 2010; Maghera and Magherafelt as per Area Plan 2015) and development limits of the eligible villages as per the proposed Mid Ulster Settlement Report within the draft Local Development Plan (2030), published in February 2019, under the Mid Ulster Settlement Hierarchy, with the additional village of Moygashel. The scheme opened for applications on Monday 19 August 2019 and closed for applications at 4pm on Wednesday 18 September 2019.

	Knox & Clayton Chartered Architects were appointed to assist in the delivery of the Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme, including assessment of applications and management and monitoring of the successful projects. Applications, which proceeded to assessment, had to achieve a minimum threshold of 40% to be eligible for grant aid. 253 applications achieved over the 40% threshold to value of £912,306.29. In the financial year 2019-2020, under **Phase 1** of the scheme there were 32 applicants accepted Letters of Offer and completed works to the value of grant aid of £112,771.42. In the financial year 2020-2021, under **Phase 2** of the scheme there were 72 applicants accepted Letters of Offer and completed works to the value of grant aid of £250,812.13. In the financial year 2021-2022, **Phase 3** is currently being delivered with up to 79 Letters of Offer issued to the value of £250,000. In the financial year 2022-2023, there remains 42 projects to be completed in **Phase 4**, to the value of £148,484.
2.2	**Future Business Start Provision Research** On 1 April 2015, local economic development functions were transferred from DETI to local Councils, including that of business start. This has been delivered via the 11 Council NIBSUP ('GoForIt'); the current Programme is part funded (80%) by Invest Northern Ireland and the European Regional Development Fund under the Investment for Growth and Jobs Northern Ireland (2014-2020) Programme and Mid Ulster District Council (20%) and is due to end on 31 March 2023. In May 2020, Belfast City Council commissioned a team from the Enterprise Research Centre (ERC) and Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) to carry out a study providing the evidence base for the future provision of business start-up support in Northern Ireland.
2.3	**NI Chamber of Commerce: Regional Networking Event 2021** Mid Ulster District Council has been a member of the NI Chamber of Commerce since 2016. The Chamber have hosted three of their Regional Network events in Mid Ulster over the past 4 years (in the Burnavon Theatre and Hill of the O'Neill, and one virtual in 2020), and have advised that they would like to deliver another Regional Networking event in Mid Ulster on Monday 8 November 2021.
2.4	**DAERA Rural Policy Framework for NI – Consultation** A public consultation on the draft Rural Policy Framework for NI was launched on the 7th July 2021 and closes for responses on 6th September 2021.
2.5	**Skills Strategy for NI – Consultation** The Department for the Economy (DfE) has launched a consultation paper for a new Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland: 'Skills for a 10x Economy'. 'Skills for a 10X Economy' is DfE's strategy to support more people to improve their job prospects and fulfil their economic potential.

2.6	**MEGA Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan** MEGA is supported by both Mid Ulster District Council and Invest NI. Its purpose is 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 working towards attracting, retaining and upskilling the region's engineering and manufacturing workforce. In April 2021, the MEGA Network submitted a request for funding support to develop a strategic review and three year action plan for the next phase of industry development.
2.7	**ESF Call 3 Match Funding Requests (2022-23)** In May 2021, the Economy Minister launched a third and final call for projects to apply for funding under the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NI ESF) programme. The extended funding period is from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and a competition for funding opened to applications on 14 June 2021 for a period of four weeks.
2.8	**Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021** Council previously agreed to procure the services of an organisation(s) to co-ordinate, manage, promote and evaluate all virtual events during Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021. An estimated global budget of £28,000 has been allocated for Enterprise Week 2021 within Council's economic development budget and proportion of these costs will be used to employ a management agency to carry out the services as outlined above.
2.9	**Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** The Department for Communities (DfC) is working with all NI Councils in the establishment of Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs). There will be one regional LMP, supported by local LMPs within each Council area. The aim of LMPs is to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions locally by working through coordinated, collaborative, multiagency partnerships. The Labour Market Partnership (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.
2.10	**Mid Ulster Business Excellence Awards 2021** Historically, Mid Ulster District Council has provided funding towards the annual Mid Ulster Business Awards, which highlight and reward the achievements of local companies over the previous 12 months. Following receipt of JPI Media's Proposal for the 2020 Awards, Council's Development Committee agreed in principle to support the Category Sponsorship £1,750 – SME Business of the Year – subject to JPI's responses to the two issues below: i) Clarification provided from JPI Media of all other sponsors involved in the event, when available; and ii) Further detail being provided by JPI Media in relation to how they plan to promote the categories, which are awarded by public vote across the entire District, to take account of the Mid Ulster Mail not having as large a

	circulation in some areas of the District as others, (notably the Clogher Valley).
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme Phase 4** Phases 1 and 2 of Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme are complete with 104 schemes successfully finished. An evaluation report for Phase 2 was carried out by Chartered Architects, Knox & Clayton, a copy of which is attached at **Appendix 1.** Phase 3 of the scheme is currently being delivered in this financial year (2021/2022) with 79 letters of offer issued to the value of £250,000. In Phase 4 (2022-23) there remains 42 projects to be completed to the value of £148,484. Members may recall that the Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme was originally estimated to complete within a 3 year period, however, due to the sheer volume of applications received when the scheme opened to public call in 2019, in order to fund all the successful applications, the scheme had to be delivered over a 4 year period instead. Back in 2019, a tender exercise was conducted to appoint a Chartered Architect to oversee the scheme and Knox and Clayton were appointed to undertake this role for a 3 year period also. In light of having 42 successful applicants remaining on the ranked reserve list for 2022-2023 for schemes totalling £148,484, approval is sought for the following: • To ring-fence funds in the economic development budget in 2022/2023, totalling £148,484, to fund the remaining successful businesses in Phase 4, currently held on the ranked reserve list. • To seek quotations and appoint an independent Chartered Architect to manage the delivery of the scheme for the final phase (Phase 4 - 2022/2023).
3.2	**Future Business Start Provision Research** The 11 Council SOLACE Economic Recovery Group has now established a Working Group to progress the recommendations of the Report and Belfast City Council plans to appoint a service provider on behalf of the 11 Councils to undertake an options analysis to inform the potential delivery of business start-up support post 2023. The analysis will build on the research undertaken by ERC on the Future Provision of Business Start Up Support in Northern Ireland (2020). It will include a range of costed delivery options to be used to inform a business case for a future operating model, enabling Councils to understand the potential scale of the financial requirements and informing positioning and engagement with DfE, DfC and other potential funders.

	The substantive work to produce a draft report outlining a future operating model/ plans is to be completed by November 2021, to allow time for refinement with Councils and discussion in December 2021. It has been proposed that this consultancy stage is delivered through a Framework managed by Belfast City Council which will cost in the region of £19,075 (excluding VAT) requiring a contribution of £1,735 from each Council.
3.3	**NI Chamber of Commerce: Regional Networking Event 2021** As part of their Business Development & Networking Series, the NI Chamber of Commerce is proposing to deliver a physical event in the Hill of the O'Neill, Dungannon on Monday 8 November 2021 from 10.30am to 12 noon. This event is highly popular and could attract 100+ business delegates. The event will be delivered in compliance with Government's Covid regulations (at that time) so whilst it is planned for a blended physical/virtual event, if needed, there is the ability to switch to a full virtual event, if circumstances change. The event occurs at the start of Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021, and the theme will focus on entrepreneurship, with speakers including a local Mid Ulster Business person (to be confirmed), Mid Ulster Council Chairman, NIE Networks representative (NI Chamber's networking partner); and an NI Chamber representative. Approval is sought for Council to fund the event for a fee not exceeding £700 (excluding Vat).
3.4	**DAERA Rural Policy Framework for NI – Consultation** DAERA published a consultation on the draft Rural Policy Framework for NI (**Appendix 2**). The Framework has been developed in the context of the current Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 coming to an end and to support the emergence of a new Rural Business and Community Investment programme as the successor to LEADER. The Framework aims to create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active. Five thematic pillars are included in the Framework which include: 1. Innovation and Entrepreneurship 2. Sustainable tourism 3. Health and wellbeing 4. Employment 5. Connectivity Feedback from the consultation will inform the proposed Rural Policy Framework and the subsequent interventions and Programme of support stemming from it. DAERA's 8 week consultation period closed on 6th September 2021 at 23:59. Due to responses needing to be submitted by 6th September 2021, the Chief Executive approved Council's *draft* Consultation Response (**Appendix 3)** to allow it to be submitted before the deadline, as the Development Committee was not due to meet again until 16 September 2021. If any Member wishes for additional comments to be submitted to DAERA to supplement Council's consultation

	response, these should be forwarded to the Head of Economic Development by 22 September 2021.
3.5	**Skills Strategy for NI - Consultation** The Department for the Economy (DfE) launched a consultation paper for a new Skills Strategy for NI: 'Skills for a 10x Economy' **(Appendix 4)**. 'Skills for a 10X Economy' is DfE's strategy to support more people to improve their job prospects and fulfil their economic potential. In July 2021 Council approved that delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to approve the response and submit to DfE before the deadline of 19th August 2021. A copy of Council's response is attached in **Appendix 5**. If any member wishes for additional comments to be forwarded to DfE to supplement Council's consultation response, these should be forwarded to the Head of Economic Development by 22 September 2021.
3.6	**MEGA Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan** In April 2021, the MEGA (Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement) Network submitted a funding request to Council seeking £5,000 financial support to prepare a Strategic Review and 3 year Action Plan for the next phase of the MEGA project to support Mid Ulster's manufacturing and engineering sector. The Council approved a funding contribution of £5,000 from Council's economic development budget, subject to MEGA securing match funding from Invest NI (circ. £15,000) under the Collaborative Growth Programme (Phase 1). It was also agreed to hold discussions first with MEGA at a strategic level to encourage Trade Union involvement. MEGA have now confirmed receipt of a letter of offer for £15,000 from Invest NI and that a Trade Union representative will be invited on to the Steering Group. It is therefore recommended that Council's match funding contribution of £5,000 be released for the preparation of MEGA's Strategic Review and 3 year Action Plan.
3.7	**ESF Call 3 Match Funding Requests (2022-23)** The European Social Fund (ESF) is designed to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion. It supports participants to progress into further education, training and ultimately employment through funding organisations to deliver programmes for the unemployed and the economically inactive as well as people with disabilities and young people not in education, employment or training. The lead organisations require match funding support as part of a wider cocktail of funding to allow the employability schemes to commence. In July 2021, the Council agreed to support the following 4 projects, which requested match funding from Council. The full amount of match funding each

	organisation requested from Council was reduced to fit within Council's £50,000 available budget. 1. Step Up to Sustainable Employment Programme (SUSE+). 2. Up for Work Programme (UFWP) 3. Job Match Programme (JMP) 4. Women Towards Education and Employment Programme (WTEEP) It was noted at the meeting that lead organisations may have the opportunity to secure match funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and this option is being explored by the Department for the Economy. Council officers are awaiting further information and direction from both the Department for Economy and Department for Communities in relation to match-funding. Council has received three additional match-funding requests from Enterprise NI, NOW Group and Specialisterne Northern Ireland. It is therefore recommended to defer consideration of the three match-funding requests until further information on match funding is received from the Department for Economy and Department for Communities. A further report will be brought to committee once the outcome of match funding is known to enable Council to make a definitive decision.
3.8	**Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021** On 15 July 2021, eight organisations were issued with quotation documents. By the closing date of 12noon on 5 August 2021, one submission was received. The evaluation panel consisted of the Economic Strategies Manager, Funding and Investment Manager, Programme and Policy Officer and Project Officer. The contract award is based on the most economically advantageous quote. Following assessment of quotations, it is recommended to appoint ND Events at a cost of up to £8,000 (including expenses and excluding Vat).
3.9	**Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** Council, in February 2021, agreed to participate as a key stakeholder in the planning and development of Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs), which will coordinate activities relating to skills development, training and employability programmes in Mid Ulster. It was also agreed that when the new partnership is set up that a strong worker focus be included with a strategic input from the trade union movement. A key objective of the LMP approach is to develop a two year Interim LMP Action Plan (2021-23) which will be locally focused and aligned to key strategic objectives identified within the Programme for Government, Community Plan, Mid Ulster Skills Action Plan and LMP member organisations' corporate plans. In July 2021, Council agreed to procure external professional support to assist preparation of an Interim LMP Action Plan 2021-23. Following a procurement

process, “Food for Thought” is recommended for appointment at a cost of £14,900 (including expenses and excluding vat). Once Council is in receipt of Mid Ulster’s LMP budget for 2021/22, officers will seek to ensure the costs for this assignment are recoverable from DfC’s budget allocation.

3.10 **Mid Ulster Business Excellence Awards 2021**

Due to the pandemic, no Business Awards event was held in 2020. This year a live event is planned, which will be the 10th Annual Mid Ulster Business Excellence Awards, scheduled for Thursday 18 November 2021 at 7pm in Corick House Hotel and Spa.

Council received a response from JPI Media, in relation to the two queries that Members sought clarification upon.

Query 1 – JPI Media to clarify details of all event sponsors

The status of each category and sponsors confirmed to date are provided below. Most are currently under discussion as first refusal to previous sponsors is always given as a courtesy. Further updates to be provided as more sponsors come on board.

Headline Sponsor	Henry Brothers	Confirmed
Associate Sponsor		Unconfirmed

Category Sponsors	**Sponsor Name**	**Allocation Status**
Best Manufacturer	Riada Resourcing	Confirmed
Best Start-Up Business	ASM Chartered Accountants	Confirmed
Excellence in Innovation	SWC Innotech Centre	Confirmed
Lifetime Achievement Award	Henry Brothers	Confirmed
Excellence in People Development	Steelweld Fabrications	Awaiting Confirmation
Business Person of the Year	Bank of Ireland	Awaiting Confirmation
SME Business of the Year		Provisionally held for Mid Ulster District Council – Awaiting Decision
Best Retailer		Unconfirmed
Excellence in Health and Wellbeing		Unconfirmed

Readers' Favourite Eating Establishment		Unconfirmed
Best Customer Service		Unconfirmed
Best Community Impact		Unconfirmed
Excellence in Tourism		Unconfirmed
Best Digital		Unconfirmed
Key Workers of the Year		Unconfirmed
10 Year Anniversary Special Award		Unconfirmed

JPI are unable to confirm any other sponsors at this juncture, however, 'SME Business of the Year' is being held provisionally for Mid Ulster District Council.

Query 2 – JPI Media to provide further details in relation to how they plan to promote the categories, which are awarded by public vote across the entire District, to take account of the Mid Ulster Mail not having as large a circulation in some areas of the District as others, (notably the Clogher Valley).

JPI Media has advised a range of actions is being proposed to promote the award categories, which are by public vote across the entire District (including the Clogher Valley) as follows:

a) During Reader Vote time, a member of the JPI team will spend time in the Clogher area promoting the Awards, visiting businesses, coffee shops, community meeting places etc.

b) JPI will explore if there's an option of increasing coverage in the Clogher Valley area with a local radio station

c) People will be encouraged to sign up to and follow JPI's Mid-Ulster Mail Facebook and Twitter feeds and visit JPI dedicated Awards Website to sign up to receive information about the awards

d) Emails sent to events database encouraging entries with sponsor logos featuring in each mailer;

e) Regular editorial features in print, online and across social media platforms, and;

f) This year, to help attract more entries, businesses and organisations entering, our JPI have joined forces with Pure Awards who will host a 'free' entry writing webinar to give hints and tips on submitting the very best entry possible. People will be invited to register for their free spot on the online workshop, which will take place in October. They will also hear from JPI's Editor on the key points that judges look for, and from a past winner who will be sharing their own experiences.

	JPI have also advised that, alongside the live event this year, they will offer a complementary virtual element allowing live and online audiences to have a similar experience, which will significantly increase the potential audience reach.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: **Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme** Grant Aid £148,484 (2022/2023 budget); Architect Fees To Be Confirmed (2022/2023 budget) **Future Business Start Provision Research** £1,735 is available from within the Economic Development budget 2021/22 **NI Chamber of Commerce: Regional Networking Event 2021** £700 is available from within the Economic Development budget 2021/22 **MEGA Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan** £5,000 has been provisionally ring-fenced in Council's economic development budget (2021/22) as match funding towards MEGA's Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan. **Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021** Provision of £8,000 for "ND Events" to act as management agents for Enterprise Week. These costs (£8,000) have been ring-fenced within the overall estimated budget for Enterprise Week (circ. £28,000). **Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** Provision of £14,900 to "Food for Thought" for preparation of a two year Interim LMP Action Plan for the period 2021-2023. **Mid Ulster Business Excellence Awards 2021** Provision of Category Sponsorship costs can be funded at £1,750+vat, should Members agree to award funding.
	Human: **Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme** Officers' time **Future Business Start Provision** Officers' time **NI Chamber of Commerce: Regional Networking Event 2021** Officers' time **Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021** Officers' time.

	Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) Officers' time **Mid Ulster Business Excellence Awards 2021** Officers' time
	Risk Management: **Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme Phase 4** Funding required in 2022/23 to meet the demands of the reserve list **Future Business Start Provision Research** Funding required to support the report being developed **NI Chamber of Commerce: Regional Networking Event 2021** Funding required to support the event in Dungannon **DAERA Rural Policy Framework for NI – public consultation** Need to submit a Council response **MEGA Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan** The risk level is mitigated as Council's contribution has been subject to confirmation of funding from Invest NI. **Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021** Due to the Covid19 pandemic, all events apart for the NI Chamber of Commerce event have been organised as virtual this year. **Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** Consultant will be managed on a weekly basis against a delivery framework and timeline.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments** **Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** To be considered.
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: **Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** To be considered.
	Rural Needs Implications: **Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** To be considered.

5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	**Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme** **5.1.1** **Note** Evaluation Report for Phase 2 of Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme (2020/2021) **5.1.2** **Approval** to ring-fence funds in the economic development budget in 2022/2023, totalling £148,484, to fund the remaining successful businesses in Phase 4, currently held on the ranked reserve list. **5.1.3** **Approval** for officers to seek quotations to appoint an independent Chartered Architect to manage the delivery of the scheme for the final year (Phase 4 - 2022/2023).
5.2	**Future Business Start Provision Research** **Approve** a financial contribution from Mid Ulster District Council of £1,735 (excluding Vat) towards the costs of undertaking an options analysis to inform the potential delivery of business start-up support post 2023 using Belfast City Council's Consultancy Framework to appoint a service provider on behalf of the 11 Councils.
5.3	**NI Chamber of Commerce: Regional Networking Event 2021** **Approve** request from NI Chamber of Commerce to fund a Mid Ulster Regional Networking Event on 8 November 2021 at Hill of the O'Neill, Dungannon, for a fee not exceeding £700 (excluding Vat) for catering and room hire, subject to the alignment of attendee numbers being in accordance with government guidelines.
5.4	**DAERA Rural Policy Framework for NI – Consultation** Retrospectively **approve** Council's consultation response to DAERA's Rural Policy Framework as the response had to be submitted by the deadline of 6th September 2021. If any Member wishes for additional comments to be forwarded to DAERA to supplement Council's consultation response, these should be forwarded to the Head of Economic Development by 22 September 2021.
5.5	**Skills Strategy for NI – Consultation** Retrospectively **approve** Council's consultation response to the NI Skills Strategy: Skills for a 10x Economy, which was submitted to the Department for the Economy by the deadline of 19 August 2021. If any member wishes for additional comments to be forwarded to DfE to supplement Council's consultation response, these should be forwarded to the Head of Economic Development by 22 September 2021.

5.6	**MEGA Strategic Review and 3 Year Action Plan** **Approve** Council's match funding contribution of £5,000 is released to the MEGA Network for the preparation of MEGA's Strategic Review and 3 year Action Plan.
5.7	**ESF Call 3 Match Funding Requests (2022-23)** To defer consideration of match-funding requests from Enterprise NI, NOW Group and Specialisterne Northern Ireland, until further information on match funding is received from the Department for Economy and Department for Communities. A further report will be brought to committee once the outcome of match-funding is known.
5.8	**Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021** **Approve** appointment of "ND Events" to co-ordinate, manage and organise all virtual events and promote and evaluate Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2021 at a cost of up to £8,000 (including expenses and excluding vat) subject to the completion of all contract requirements.
5.9	**Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs)** **Approve** the appointment of "Food for Though" to prepare an Interim LMP Action Plan for 2021-2023, at a cost of up to £14,900 (including expenses and excluding Vat).
5.10	**Mid Ulster Business Excellence Awards 2021** **Consider** if Mid Ulster District Council wishes to sponsor the 'SME Business of the Year' category at the Mid Ulster Business Awards 2021 at a cost of £1,750+Vat, based on the information received from JPI Media. A decision is now time critical.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix 1 – Mid Ulster Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme Phase 2 (2020/2021) Evaluation Report **Appendix 2 -** DAERA Rural Policy Framework for NI – Consultation Document **Appendix 3 -** Mid Ulster Council's Consultation Response to DAERA's Rural Policy Framework for NI **Appendix 4** - DfE's Skills Strategy Consultation Document - Executive Summary **Appendix 5** – Mid Ulster Council's Consultation Response to DfE's NI Skills Strategy

Appendix 1

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
MID ULSTER TOWN & VILLAGE BUSINESS SPRUCE UP SCHEME

(PHASE 2- 2020/2021)

Completed by Lawrence Power of Knox & Clayton Architects – June 2021

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11.0 Case studies

I. Project No 99 – Tommy McGrath Menswear, 91 Main Street, Maghera

II. Project No 171 – Rossmore Bar, 13-19 The Square, Coalisland & Project No. 298 – Rossmore Guest Accommodation, 11 Barrack Street

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1.0 Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme, 2019-2022 (Phase 2- 2020/2021). It presents a breakdown of the applications received, a synopsis of a number of successful projects and the impact of the scheme.

Mid Ulster District Council supports the improvement and enhancement of business/commercial properties within the town centre boundary of each of the towns (Coalisland, Cookstown and Dungannon as per Area Plan 2010; Maghera and Magherafelt as per Area Plan 2015 of each town) and development limits of each village as identified in the attached maps.

The Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme is a pilot project and offers discretionary grants of up to 75% eligible costs, capped at £5,000 per property for internal and/or external improvements. The Scheme is available to both occupied business/commercial properties and vacant business/commercial properties within the town centre boundary of each of the towns (Coalisland, Cookstown and Dungannon as per Area Plan 2010; Maghera and Magherafelt as per Area Plan 2015) and the development limits of each village. Whilst the Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme is intended to aid minor works to business/commercial premises, large scale schemes may apply however please note the maximum grant aid is up to 75% eligible costs, capped at £5,000 per property.

The allocation of grant was a competitive process and limited funds were available. Applicants were made aware that this would potentially be the only funding opportunity for the next 3 years (Subject to funding).

Successful applications were scored and ranked highest to lowest.

2.0 Aims and Objectives of the Scheme

The aim of the Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme is to improve the competitiveness and economic sustainability of the identified towns and villages in the Mid Ulster District Council area by:

1. Making external improvements to the built environment in the towns and villages.
2. Encouraging the improvement of the internal appearance of properties visible to the public.

The objectives of the scheme are:

1. To enhance and improve the attractiveness of business/commercial properties.
2. To deliver high-quality external and internal improvements to properties in the towns and villages.
3. To attract new business and investment through improvements to vacant properties.
4. To stimulate private sector investment.
5. To assist businesses in each town and village to increase competitiveness and sustainability.
6. To improve user perceptions of each town and village.

3.0 Who Could Apply?

- Business/commercial properties within the town centre boundary of each of the towns (Coalisland, Cookstown and Dungannon as per Area Plan 2010; Maghera and Magherafelt as per Area Plan 2015) as identified within scheme maps

- Business/Commercial properties within the development limits of villages under the Mid Ulster Settlement Hierarchy, draft Local Development Plan (2030) as identified within scheme maps.

TOWNS: - Coalisland, Cookstown, Dungannon, Maghera and Magherafelt.

VILLAGES:- Aghaginduff/Cabragh, Annaghmore, Ardboe, Augher, Aughnacloy Ballinderry, Ballygawley, Ballylifford, Ballynakilly, Ballyronan, Bellaghy, Benburb, Brockagh/Mountjoy, Caledon, Cappagh, Castlecaulfield, Castledawson, Churchtown, Clady, Clogher, Coagh, Creagh, Desertmartin, Donaghmore, Draperstown, Drummullan, Edendork, Eglish, Fivemiletown, Galbally, Granville, Gulladuff, Killyman, Moneymore, Moortown, Moy, Moygashel, Newmills, Orritor, Pomeroy, Sandholes, Stewartstown, Swatragh, Tamnamore, The Bush, The Loup, The Rock, Tobermore and Upperlands.

The grant was available to:

- Business/commercial premises
- Shops (including hairdressers, beauty salons, dry cleaners, clothing retailers etc).
- Financial and Professional services (e.g. estate agents, insurance companies etc).
- Restaurants, Public houses, Cafes and Food takeaways.
- Vacant premises. For a vacant property to be eligible evidence was to be provided that:

  1) The property is used as a business/commercial property. If this was not evident from the supplied photograph then evidence (old photographs, rates bills, etc.) was to be provided.
  2) If the vacant property existed as a residential property with plans to change use to a commercial property, a change of use planning permission should be submitted to Council prior to commencement of works.
  3) That it will be marketed/let as a business/commercial property after improvement works are complete. Evidence must be provided of how this will be achieved and actively promoted, such as letter from proposed letting agent, letter from property owner of actions that will be taken to seek a tenant.

Application forms were acceptable from the property owner/s or tenants. If a tenant made an application, it had to be co-signed by the property owner(s) otherwise the application was deemed incomplete and subsequently rejected.

Individual applications from owners/tenants whose properties were adjacent to each other were welcome. Where two or more applications adjacent to each other were made they were defined as ‘Multiple Applications’. These applications were viewed as having a greater positive effect on the appearance of a street and were scored as per page 5 of the Guidance Document ‘How do we assess your application’.

4.0 Scope of Works Eligible for Funding

The property owners/tenants of eligible business/commercial properties in the designated areas could apply for grant-aid to carry out the following:

Internal Works eligible for grant-aid include repair and refurbishment of:

- Walls, ceilings, doors, floors and stairs.
- Internal redecoration work e.g. repainting of walls, ceilings etc
- Rewiring and plumbing.
- Access improvements.
- New interior window display lighting, where shutters are not in use.
- Subdivision to form smaller units.
- Restructuring to form larger units.
- Permanent (i.e. not loose fitted or mobile) display cases/built-in furniture and joinery.
- Please note that internal works to a business/commercial property which is above ground floor level will be considered.

External works eligible for grant-aid include repair and refurbishment of the following:

- Shop fronts, including fascia, signage and lighting.
- Windows.
- Doors.
- Rainwater goods; guttering or downpipes on shopfronts.
- Redecoration (including painting, signage etc.).
- Pedestrian access improvements.
- Security measures (including security glazing/laminated glass which allows window shopping to take place in the evening e.g. open or lattice shutters/door grilles-NOT solid shutters).
- Virtual graphics / hoardings.
- Equipment and associated labour costs as deemed appropriate for preparation of work e.g. power washing, hire of lift equipment etc.
- Please note that external works to a business/commercial property which is above ground floor level will be considered.

Ineligible Works included:

The scheme did not support:

- Works which required planning permission which was not in place at the Application stage.
- Routine maintenance such as clearing of debris from gutters, cleaning tarmac, cleaning of roofs, chimneys etc.
- Improvements to residential property, including residential property located above commercial premises.
- Retrospective applications (for work already completed or underway).

- CCTV / Alarm systems.
- Mobile/loose fixtures and fittings or furniture.
- Internal work which was not in the public area of the property.
- Mannequins.

The grant did not include:

- Statutory fees (e.g. Building Control Approval), professional fees etc.
- Insurances
- Interest (on loans taken out to fund your building project)
- VAT (except if the applicant is not VAT registered)

5.0 Procurement

Completed applications had to be accompanied by competitive quotations/tenders from bona- fide reputable contractors. If a contractor is not employed to complete all works, the appropriate number of quotations/tenders had to be submitted for each element of the scheme.

The scheme required:

- 2 Written Quotations for project elements costing up to £4,999.99
- 4 Written Quotations for project elements costing from £5,000-£30,000

All quotations had to be dated and on headed paper and the funder reserved the right to have an independent quantity surveyor check the validity of quotations/tenders.

6.0 Application Process

Completed application forms were to be returned to Knox Clayton Architects, or alternatively, one of the Council Offices (Dungannon, Cookstown or Magherafelt), by 4pm on Wednesday 18 September 2019. Only fully completed Applications were validated and late submissions were not accepted.

12 No. Business Clinics were held at various public locations spread around the Council area. This provided the opportunity for those interested in applying for funding to drop-in without appointment and receive advice on their application. Representatives from the scheme's Chartered Architect and Mid Ulster District Council were present at each business clinic.

7.0 Assessment of the Applications:

The following criteria was used by the assessment panel to score the application for a grant:

i) Current Condition of the elements of work requesting funding (25%)
Scoring ranged from 0%-25%, for example, if the current condition of the elements of work requested for funding to the property was considered very poor, the maximum 25% was allocated.

ii) Impact the proposed element of works will make (25%)
Scoring ranged from 0%-25%, for example, if the proposed element of works would have a transformation impact on the property, the maximum 25% would be allocated.

iii) Value for Money (25%)
This was calculated based on the formula: - Impact (points) ÷ Grant Sought = Weighted Criteria. Weighted criteria achieved ranged from 5%-25%, with excellent Value for Money allocated the maximum 25%.

iv) Multiple Application Status (10%)
Multiple applications received a favourable weighting, where individual applications were received from owners/tenants whose properties were adjacent to each other. These applications would be viewed as having a greater positive effect on the appearance of a street and as a result were scored highly by the assessment panel, being allocated a further 10%.

v) Vacant Business/Commercial Property (10%)
Vacant Business/Commercial Property favourable weighting were allocated 10%.

vi) Property's first submission (5%)
A Favourable weighting of 5% was granted to any property which had not previously been awarded funding under a Mid Ulster District Council Improvement Scheme. *Any property which had previously received funding under a Mid Ulster District Council Improvement Scheme will be allocated 0%.*

All applications had to score a minimum of 40% to be considered for funding.

There was no internal appeal or review process for unsuccessful applications. The decision of the Independent Chartered Architect was final.

8.0 Successful Applicants – "Your Letter of Offer"

If an application was successful, the applicant was issued with a 'Letter of Offer'. This was a form of contract that stated:

- The amount of grant awarded
- The terms and conditions associated with the grant

It was made clear to the successful Applicants that no works could commence until a signed 'Letter of Offer' was returned to Mid Ulster District Council within the allocated timescale.

9.0 GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS (Completed Schemes)

Valid Applications were received from the following villages (in alphabetical order):

Location	Number of approved & completed schemes
Augher	1
Aughnacloy	2
Ballinderry	1
Ballygawley	4
Ballyronan	2
Brockagh	1
Castledawson	2
Clogher	5
Coagh	1
Coalisland	4
Cookstown	2
Donaghmore	1
Draperstown	2
Dungannon	9
Fivemiletown	8
Maghera	6
Magherafelt	10
Moneymore	1
Moy	3
Moygashel	1
Pomeroy	1
Stewartstown	3
The Loup	1
Tobermore	1
TOTAL	**72**

10.0 Payment of Grant

It was stipulated that payment of grant would only be made once Mid Ulster District Council was satisfied that all the terms and conditions in the 'Letter of Offer' had been fulfilled. A site visit was carried out by Knox & Clayton Architects to verify that the works had been completed as stated at application stage and to the required standard. Applicants were advised that they would be asked to amend work which does not comply with or falls below the agreed standard

Payment of grant was be made on receipt of a single claim following a successful site visit. This claim had to include the submission of original invoices and proof of payment.

11.0 Case Studies of selected completed projects

We have selected the following projects for a brief Case Study of Phase 2 of Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme. These have been selected for the reason as noted below:

i) Project No 99 – Tommy McGrath Menswear, 91 Main Street, Maghera – Reason selected: How to turn a very dull uninspiring shopfront into much more appealing shopfront.

ii) Project No 171 – Rossmore Bar, 13-19 The Square, Coalisland & Project No. 298 – Rossmore Guest Accommodation, 11 Barrack Street - Reason selected: Multiple/adjacent Projects. How a very prominent site incorporating 2 related businesses, can enhance its offering with a paint freshen up.

iii) Project No 267 – Milk & Honey 155 Main Street, Fivemiletown - Reason selected: Scheme involved both internal and external works.

iv) Project No 132 – The Corner Barber Shop, 33A The Square, Moy - Reason selected: How to completely transform a previously unused space into something that epitomizes what a proper traditional barber shop should look and feel like.

11.1 Project No 99 – Tommy McGrath Menswear, 91 Main Street, Maghera

Scope of Works: Remove front facade and replace with tiling and signage.

Before:

After:

Impact of the Works:
The building is located on a prominent site in Maghera. Prior to works the external appearance of the building was dated and unappealing. The Applicant completely removed existing tiling and signage and replaced with more modern materials leaving it bright and attractive and presenting a positive image in the area.

11.2 **Project No 171 – Rossmore Bar, 13-19 The Square, Coalisland & Project No. 298 – Rossmore Guest Accommodation, 11 Barrack Street**

Scope of Works: Power wash walls and roofs and re-paint facade

Before:

After:

Impact of the Works

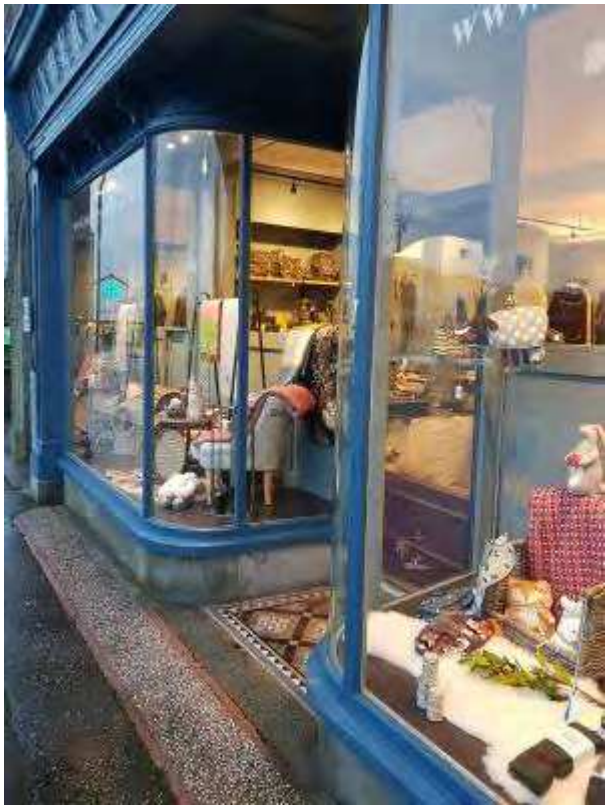
The building is located on a prominent site in Coalisland. Prior to works the external appearance of the building was run down and in bad repair. The new paintwork is bright and attractive and presents a positive image in the area.

11.3 Project No 267 – Milk & Honey 155 Main Street, Fivemiletown

Scope of Works: Internal replastering works; Built in counter and wall paneling; Repairs and refurbishment of internal surfaces and painting; Lighting; Painting of front woodwork, adjoining door and gold hardware; New door

Before:

After:



Impact of the Works:

This scheme was very tastefully done. The combination of colors and layout, both internally and externally, would draw you to these premises. Due to its appearance and layout, it is the type of shop that invites you in and encourages you to browse. Lovely!

11.4 <u>Project No 132 – The Corner Barber Shop, 33A The Square, Moy</u>

Scope of Works: Damp Proof Walls (secondary Hallway); Re-fit back rooms (elect. Fit out, plumbing, re-plaster walls, new tiling floor and walls Supply wall / floor tiles

Before:

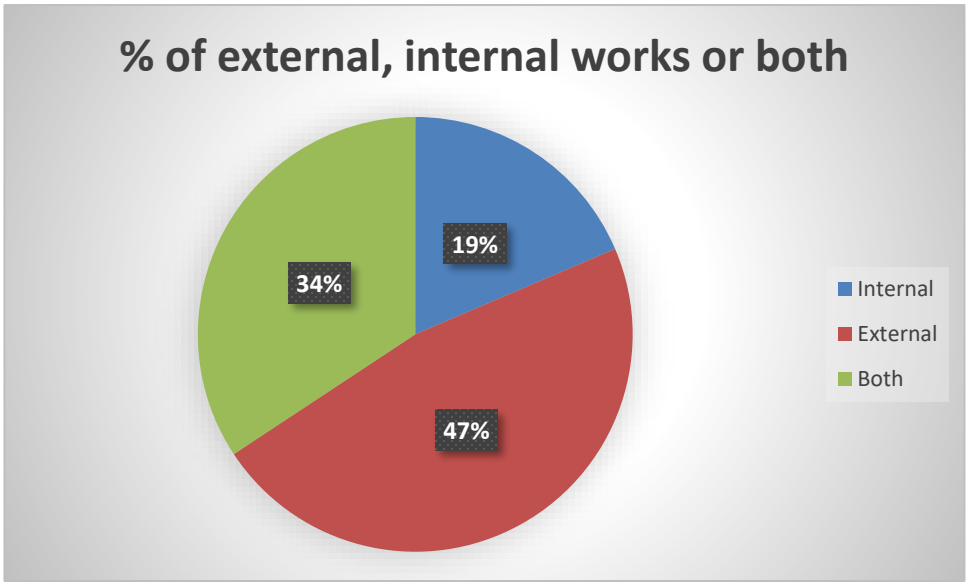
After:

Impact of the Works:

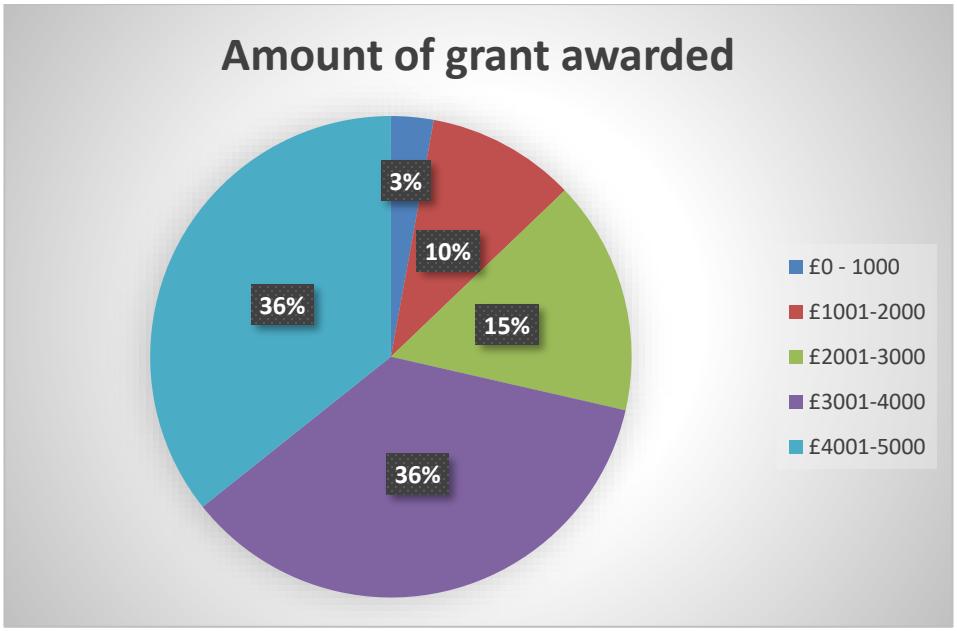
This applicant converted previously unused rooms within the property to offer additional grooming services. This is what a traditional barbers shop should look like. Fantastic job!

12.0 Statistical Data

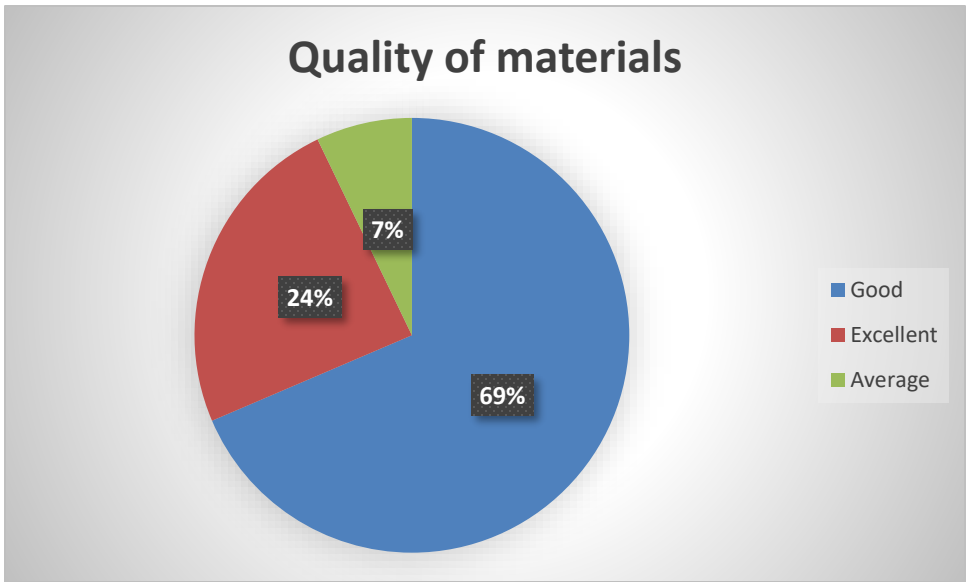
In terms of the ratio of projects that were funded for Internal and External works, 47% carried out External works only, 19% interior works only and 34% carried out both (total of 72 schemes).



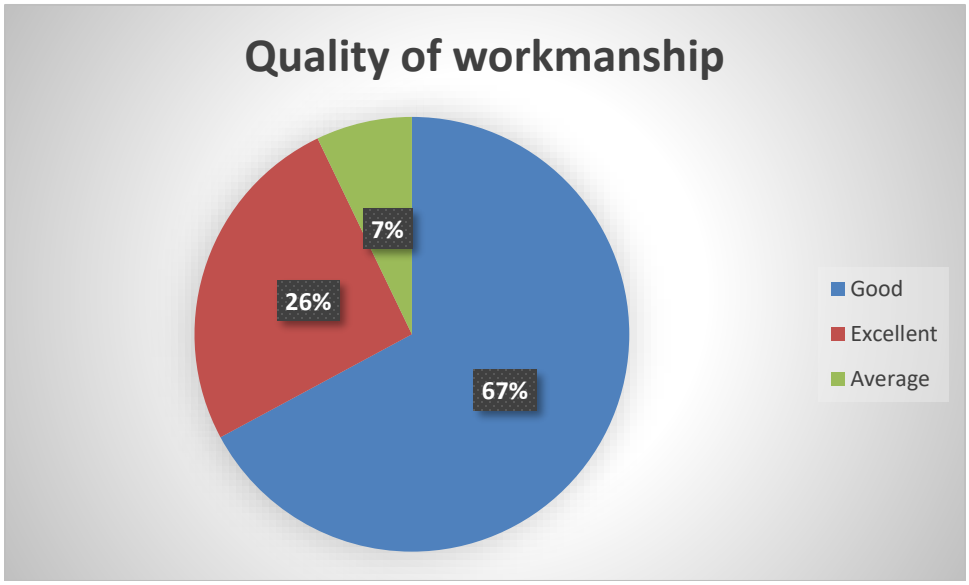
The Scheme provided a grant of up to 75% eligible costs, capped at £5,000. As can be seen from the pie chart below, the biggest percentage of grants were awarded in the £3,001 - £4,000 (36%) and the £4,001 - £5,000 ranges (36%). The lowest awards were in the £0 - £1,000 range (3%).



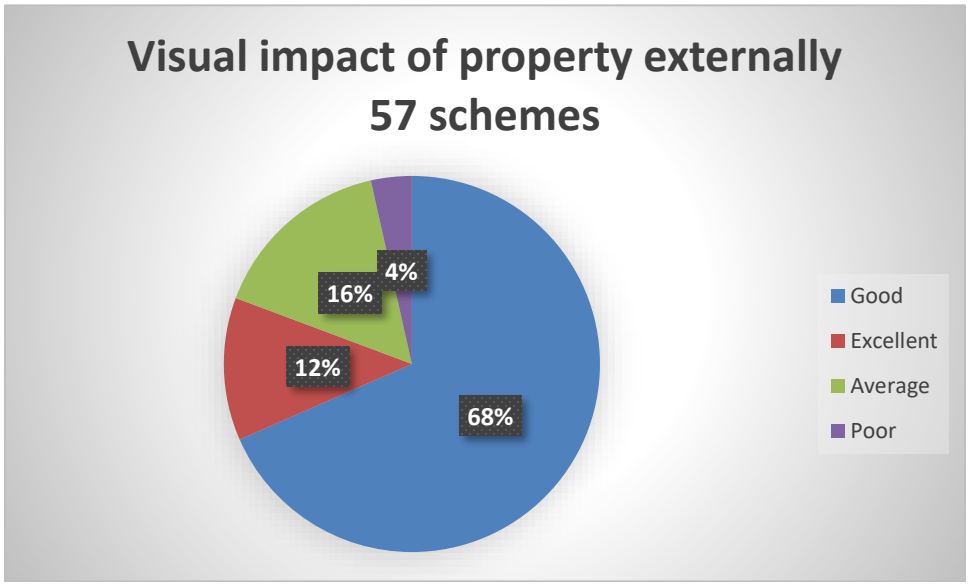
The quality of the materials used overall were rated as 69% excellent, 24% deemed good and 7% average (total of 72 schemes).



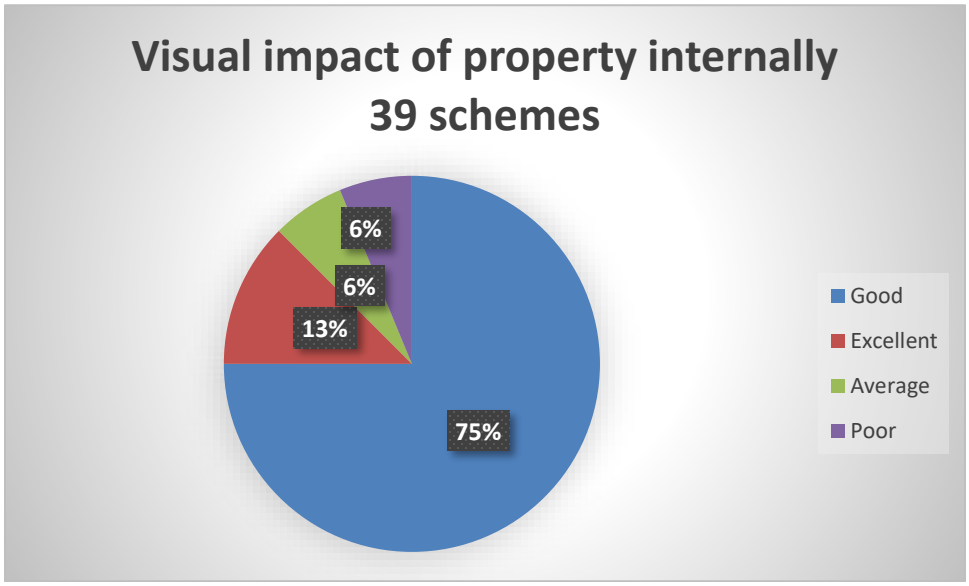
The quality of workmanship overall was rated as 67% Good, 26% deemed excellent and the remaining 7% deemed average (total of 72 schemes).



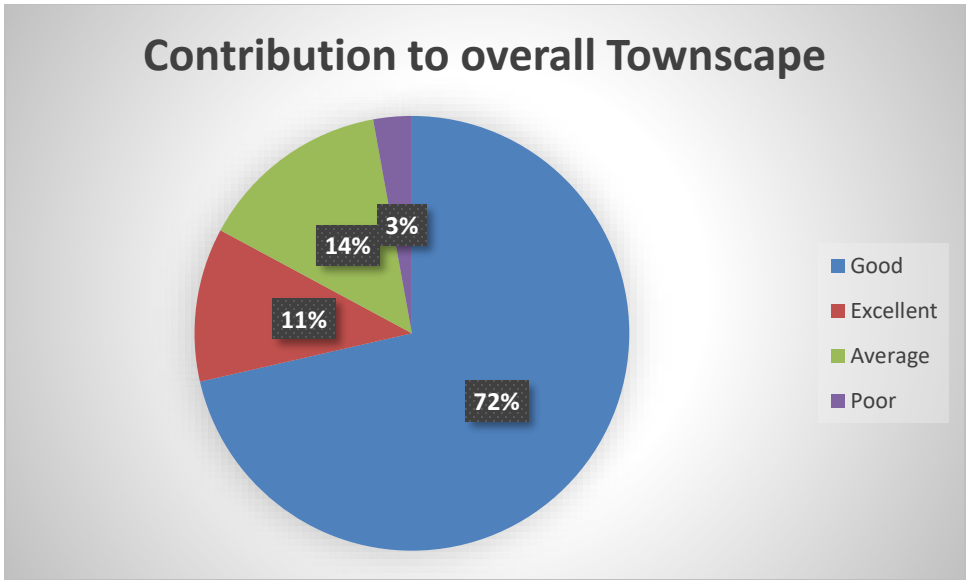
The Visual Impact of the majority of external works rated overall as Good, 68%, 16% rated as average, 12% rated excellent. 13 of the 72 schemes did not have external works as part of their project.



The Visual Impact of the majority of internal works rated overall as good, 82%, 14% as excellent, 4% as average. 33 of the 72 schemes did not have internal works as part of their project.



An important and key statistic in the delivery of the scheme is the Contribution to the Overall Townscape. 72% of schemes had a good impact, with 14% deemed average, 11% deemed excellent.



13.0 Overview of Scheme

The Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme aimed to improve the competitiveness and economic sustainability of the eligible towns & villages. Through the delivery of the scheme properties awarded funding strived to achieve a comprehensive improvement to building frontage, internal repairs and refurbishment. The wider impact on each town & village aimed to visibly enhancing the townscape and improving local infrastructure.

A final evaluation of each completed property was carried out with a score awarded between 1 (very poor) and 5 (excellent) to measure the visual improvement to the property on an individual basis, and also to measure the contribution of the improvement works to the overall townscape. The overall impact of the scheme has been, in the main, very positive. It is doubtful whether such works would be carried out to the participating towns & Villages, to the extent they were, if it were not for the grant being offered by the Council.

The Business Clinics that were held in the various locations were well attended, and many of the successful Applicants had attended these clinics.

Phase 2 resulted in £250,812.13 of Grant Aid awarded to 72 properties across the Council area, with private sector leverage of £148,059.12. Grants ranged from £390.00 to the £5,000 maximum with the average being £3,483.50. 20 applications received the maximum £5,000 grant.

Phase 1 and 2 of the Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme has resulted in £363,094.55 of Grant aid awarded to over 100 properties across the Council area. The private sector leverage amounts to £236,611.08.

KnoxClayton Architects believe that the budget for the scheme was put to excellent use as it helped 72 (mostly small) businesses improve their premises and enhance the visual appearance of their towns & villages.

14.0 Conclusion

The Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme has made a significant impact to the properties and contributed to the enhancement of their respective Villages.

Phase 3 of the scheme, involving 73 further properties, will be rolled out between April 2021 to September 2021. Following completion of Phase 3, an evaluation will be completed and presented to Mid Ulster District Council. The funding provided by the scheme has unquestionably improved the external frontages and internal areas of each property.

The scheme has certainly succeeded in offering local business a significant and meaningful support. The monetary incentive has encouraged property owners to carry out improvement works to their properties which, in today's economic climate, may not otherwise have been feasible. It was encouraging that the economic impact of Covid19 did not discourage property owners from completing their works.

The total amount of private investment in the scheme to date (Phase 1 & Phase 2) amounts to £236,611.08 which shows a commitment from the property owners and tenants to successfully deliver the scheme.

The impact this had made across the Mid Ulster District Council towns and villages has been significant and will assist the local economy to remain competitive in the current market.

Appendix 1 Guidance Notes

Guidance Notes for Applicants

Welcome to the Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme Guidance Notes for applicants. Before you complete your application form, you must take time to read this document carefully.

These guidance notes are provided to help you understand the aims of the Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme and how you can make a grant application.

Background

Mid Ulster District Council supports the improvement and enhancement of business/commercial properties within the town centre boundary of each of the towns (Coalisland, Cookstown and Dungannon as per Area Plan 2010; Maghera and Magherafelt as per Area Plan 2015 of each town) and development limits of each village as identified in the attached maps.

The Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme is a pilot project and offers discretionary grants of up to 75% eligible costs, capped at £5,000 per property for internal and/or external improvements. The Scheme is available to both occupied business/commercial properties and vacant business/commercial properties within the town centre boundary of each of the towns (Coalisland, Cookstown and Dungannon as per Area Plan 2010; Maghera and Magherafelt as per Area Plan 2015) and the development limits of each village. Whilst the Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme is intended to aid minor works to business/commercial premises, large scale schemes may apply however please note the maximum grant aid is up to 75% eligible costs, capped at £5,000 per property.

Please note that allocation of grant is a competitive process and limited funds are available, therefore not all applications will be funded.

Applicants MUST be aware that this will potentially be the only funding opportunity for the next 3 years (Subject to funding).

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme is to improve the competitiveness and economic sustainability of the identified towns and villages in the Mid Ulster District Council area by:

1. Making external improvements to the built environment in the towns and villages.
2. Encouraging the improvement of the internal appearance of properties visible to the public.

The objectives of the scheme are:

1. To enhance and improve the attractiveness of business/commercial properties.
2. To deliver high-quality external and internal improvements to properties in the towns and villages.
3. To attract new business and investment through improvements to vacant properties.
4. To stimulate private sector investment.
5. To assist businesses in each town and village to increase competitiveness and sustainability.
6. To improve user perceptions of each town and village.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS A 'SPRUCE UP' SCHEME INTENDED TO AID MINOR WORKS TO BUSINESS/COMMERCIAL PREMISES IN THE IDENTIFIED TOWNS AND VILLAGES. IT IS NOT ENVISAGED THAT WORKS INCLUDED IN THE SCHEME WILL NEED STATUTORY APPROVALS SUCH AS PLANNING PERMISSION, LISTED BUILDING CONSENT, BUILDING CONTROL ETC. HOWEVER IF ANY OF THE PROPOSED WORKS DO NEED STATUTORY APPROVALS THESE *MUST* BE IN PLACE PRIOR TO WORKS COMMENCING AND A COPY OF APPROVAL ISSUED TO KNOX & CLAYTON ARCHITECTS.

Who Can Apply?

- Business/commercial properties within the town centre boundary of each of the towns (Coalisland, Cookstown and Dungannon as per Area Plan 2010; Maghera and Magherafelt as per Area Plan 2015) as identified within scheme maps

- Business/Commercial properties within the development limits of villages under the Mid Ulster Settlement Hierarchy, draft Local Development Plan (2030) as identified within scheme maps.

TOWNS: - Coalisland, Cookstown, Dungannon, Maghera and Magherafelt.

VILLAGES:- Aghaginduff/Cabragh, Annaghmore, Ardboe, Augher, Aughnacloy Ballinderry, Ballygawley, Ballylifford, Ballynakilly, Ballyronan, Bellaghy, Benburb, Brockagh/Mountjoy, Caledon, Cappagh, Castlecaulfield, Castledawson, Churchtown, Clady, Clogher, Coagh, Creagh, Desertmartin, Donaghmore, Draperstown, Drummullan, Edendork, Eglish, Fivemiletown, Galbally, Granville, Gulladuff, Killyman, Moneymore, Moortown, Moy, Moygashel, Newmills, Orritor, Pomeroy, Sandholes, Stewartstown, Swatragh, Tamnamore, The Bush, The Loup, The Rock, Tobermore and Upperlands.

Please note that the inclusion of a building within an eligible area does not give any automatic entitlement to a grant. This is a competitive process.

The grant is available to:

- Business/commercial premises
- Shops (including hairdressers, beauty salons, dry cleaners, clothing retailers etc).
- Financial and Professional services (e.g. estate agents, insurance companies etc).
- Restaurants, Public houses, Cafes and Food takeaways.
- Vacant premises

PLEASE NOTE:
For a vacant property to be eligible evidence must be provided that:
1) The property is used as a business/commercial property. If this is not evident from the supplied photograph then evidence (old photographs, rates bills, etc.) must be provided.
2) Should the vacant property currently exist as a residential property with plans to change use to a commercial property, a change of use planning permission should be submitted to Council prior to commencement of works.
3) That it will be marketed/let as a business/commercial property after improvement works are complete. Evidence must be provided of how this will be achieved and actively promoted, such as letter from proposed letting agent, letter from property owner of actions that will be taken to seek a tenant.

Application forms will be acceptable from the property owner/s or tenants. If a tenant makes an application, it must be co-signed by the property owner(s) otherwise the application will be deemed incomplete and subsequently rejected.

Please note should your application be successful; evidence of ownership must be provided at Letter of Offer stage. If the tenant is applying, the tenant will have to request such information from the property owner.

Individual applications from owners/tenants whose properties are adjacent to each other are welcome. Where two or more applications adjacent to each other are made they will be defined as 'Multiple Applications'. These applications will be viewed as having a greater positive effect on the appearance of a street and will be scored as per page 6 'How do we assess your application'.

Properties that are <u>ineligible</u> to apply for grant aid include banks, building societies, charity shops, government organisations, political organisations, community groups/clubs, sports groups/clubs and social clubs.

Eligible Expenditure - what we can fund…

The property owners/tenants of eligible business/commercial properties in the designated areas may apply for grant-aid to carry out the following:

Internal Works eligible for grant-aid include repair and refurbishment of:

- Walls, ceilings, doors, floors and stairs.

- Internal redecoration work e.g. repainting of walls, ceilings etc
- Rewiring and plumbing.
- Access improvements.
- New interior window display lighting, where shutters are not in use.
- Subdivision to form smaller units.
- Restructuring to form larger units.
- Permanent (i.e. not loose fitted or mobile) display cases/built-in furniture and joinery.
- Please note that internal works to a business/commercial property which is above ground floor level **will** be considered.

External works eligible for grant-aid include repair and refurbishment of the following:

- Shop fronts, including fascia, signage and lighting.
- Windows.
- Doors.
- Rainwater goods; guttering or downpipes on shopfronts.
- Redecoration (including painting, signage etc.).
- Pedestrian access improvements.
- Security measures (including security glazing/laminated glass which allows window shopping to take place in the evening ,e.g. open or lattice shutters/door grilles-NOT solid shutters).
- Virtual graphics / hoardings.
- Equipment and associated labour costs as deemed appropriate for preparation of work e.g. power washing, hire of lift equipment etc.
- Please note that external works to a business/commercial property which is above ground floor level **will** be considered.

Ineligible Expenditure - what we cannot fund…

The scheme will not support:

- Works which require planning permission which is not in place prior to works commencing.
- Routine maintenance such as clearing of debris from gutters, cleaning tarmac, cleaning of roofs, chimneys etc.
- Improvements to residential property, including residential property located above commercial premises.
- Retrospective applications (for work already completed or underway).
- CCTV / Alarm systems.
- Mobile/loose fixtures and fittings or furniture.
- Internal work which is not in the public area of the property.
- Mannequins.

The grant **will not** include:

- Statutory fees (e.g. Building Control Approval), professional fees etc.
- Insurances
- Interest (on loans taken out to fund your building project)
- VAT (except if the applicant is not VAT registered)

Procurement Guidelines

Completed applications must be accompanied by competitive quotations/tenders from bona-fide reputable contractors. If a contractor is not employed to complete all works, the appropriate number of quotations/tenders must be submitted for **each element** of the scheme: **Please cost each element of work separately in Section 3.1 of Application Form, Pages 5 & 6, and ENCLOSE the appropriate number of quotes for each element of work with your application. Quotes must be for comparable elements. (Failure to do so will result in your application being deemed incomplete)**

- 2 Written Quotations for project elements costing up to £4,999.99 (please note if one quotation is over £5,000, four quotations will be required.)
- 4 Written Quotations for project elements costing from £5,000-£29,999.99 (please note if one quotation is £30,000 or over but below EU thresholds you must appoint using publicly advertised open or restricted tender competition)
- For any items over £30,000 but below EU thresholds you must appoint using a publicly advertised open or restricted tender competition.

All quotations should be dated and on headed paper. All quotations/tenders will be assessed by an independent Chartered Architect to check the validity and the costings of each quotation/tender. The funding will be allocated accordingly. Failure to provide adequate numbers of quotations/tenders will result in the application being deemed incomplete and subsequently rejected.

PLEASE NOTE THAT A QUOTATION/TENDER WILL BE DEEMED INVALID IF THE APPLICANT IS DEEMED TO HAVE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST (A PERSONAL, PRIVATE OR FAMILY INTEREST) IN RESPECT OF THE COMPANY(S) QUOTING FOR WORK AND/OR DEEMED TO BE A 'LINKED COMPANY' (EU RECOMMENDATIONS 2330/361/EC). COMPANIES ARE LINKED IF ONE OF THEM DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY CONTROLS, OR HAS THE CAPACITY TO CONTROL THE AFFAIRS OF THE OTHER.

How do we assess your application?

The following criteria will be used by the assessment panel to score the application for a grant:

1 Current Condition of the elements of work requesting funding (25%)
Scoring will range from 0%-25%, for example, if the current condition of the elements of work requested for funding to the property are considered very poor, the maximum 25% will be allocated.

2 Impact the proposed element of works will make (25%)
Scoring will range from 0%-25%, for example, if the proposed element of works will have a transformation impact on the property, the maximum 25% will be allocated.

3 Value for Money (25%)
This will be calculated based on the formula: - Impact (points) ÷ Grant Sought =

Weighted Criteria. Weighted criteria achieved will range from 5%-25%, with excellent Value for Money allocated the maximum 25%.

4 Multiple Application Status (10%)

Where two or more application adjacent to each other are made, these applications will be defined as a 'Multiple Application' and will be viewed as having a greater positive effect on the appearance of a street. Therefore, Multiple Applications will be scored accordingly by the assessment panel and will be allocated a favourable weighting of up to 10%

5 Vacant Business/Commercial Property (10%)

Vacant Business/Commercial Property favourable weighting allocated 10%.

6 Property's first submission (5%)

Favourable weighting of 5% will be granted to any property which has not previously been awarded funding under a Mid Ulster District Council Improvement Scheme. *Any property which has previously received funding under a Mid Ulster District Council Improvement Scheme will be allocated 0%.*

Please note all applications must score a minimum of 40% to be considered for funding.

There is no internal appeal or review process for unsuccessful applications. The decision of the Independent Chartered Architect is final.

Successful Applications - your 'Letter of Offer'

If your application is successful, you will be issued with a 'Letter of Offer'. This is a form of contract that states:

- The amount of grant awarded
- The terms and conditions associated with the grant

IMPORTANT - NO WORKS CAN COMMENCE UNTIL A SIGNED 'LETTER OF OFFER' AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS ARE RETURNED TO MID ULSTER DISTRICT COUNCIL WITHIN THE TIMEFRAME NOTED ON THE LETTER OF OFFER.

Please note all successful applicants issued Letters of Offer in November 2019 must have works completed and claimed by 20th March 2020.

Payment of Grant & financial considerations

Payment of grant will only be made once Mid Ulster District Council is satisfied that all of the terms and conditions in the 'Letter of Offer' have been fulfilled.

A site visit will be carried out to verify the works have been completed as stated at application stage and to the required standard. You may be asked to amend work which does not comply with or falls below the agreed standard.

Payment of grant will be made on receipt of a single claim following a successful site visit. This claim will include the submission of original invoices and proof of payment. Proof of payment should be in the form of copy cheques/copy of BACS payment and original bank statements/online bank printouts from a reputable financial institution (clearly showing the name of account and account number).

Insurance, Liability and Indemnity

The applicant, agent and/or contractor is responsible for all risks in connection with public or employer liability associated with the building works under the scheme and will fully indemnify the Council. The applicant, agent and/or contractor shall maintain such insurance policies as are necessary to cover all possible liabilities to the Council arising under the Scheme.

How do I apply?

Complete the attached application form and return, with relevant documentation listed in section 6 of the application form. Completed application forms should be returned in a sealed envelope marked **Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme** to the address below by **4pm on Wednesday 18th September 2019**:

KNOX & CLAYTON ARCHITECTS, 2A WALLACE AVENUE, LISBURN, BT27 4AA

Or alternatively,

Council Offices Burn Road Cookstown BT80 8DT	Council Offices Circular Road Dungannon BT77 6DT	Council Offices Ballyronan Road Magherafelt BT45 6EN

Please note only fully completed applications will be considered. Any application submitted with missing information or incomplete questions will be deemed incomplete and subsequently rejected. A fully completed application constitutes:

- **A fully completed application form - the following sections must be completed in full to warrant a fully completed application:**
  - **Your Details**
  - **Property Details**
  - **Project Details**
  - **Project Costs & Administration (including adequate quotations/tenders)**
  - **Declaration**
  - **Completed Property Owner Declaration**

- **Submission of all necessary documents as per section 6 page 13 of the application form, prior to 4.00pm on Wednesday 18th September 2019.**

LATE OR INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED

Business Clinics

Property Owners/Tenants are invited to attend drop in business clinics to find out more about the scheme and to get advice/assistance in completing application forms. Representatives from the scheme's Chartered Architect will be present. These clinics will be held on two consecutive weeks. The dates and venues for these meetings are as follows:

Date	Town	Time	Venue
Tuesday 27th August 2019	Tobermore	10am-1pm	**The Kilcronaghan Centre** Rectory Road, Tobermore
Tuesday 27th August 2019	Bellaghy	2pm-5pm	**Seamus Heaney Homeplace** Main Street, Bellaghy
Wednesday 28th August 2019	Aughnacloy	10am-1pm	**Aughnacloy Youth Hall** Sydney Street, Aughnacloy
Wednesday 28th August 2019	Dungannon	2pm-5pm	**Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House** Market Square, Dungannon
Thursday 29th August 2019	Ballygawley	10am-1pm	**Ballygawley Community Hall** Fairfield House, Main Street, Ballygawley (Located in playing fields off Main Street)
Thursday 29th August 2019	Donaghmore	2pm-5pm	**The Torrent Complex** Hillview Avenue, Dungannon
Tuesday 3rd September 2019	Coalisland	10am-1pm	**Cornmill Centre** The Corn Mill, Lineside, Coalisland, BT71 4LP
Tuesday 3rd September 2019	Stewartstown	2pm-5pm	**Crieve Centre** 2 Hillhead, Stewartstown
Wednesday 4th September 2019	Moneymore	10am-1pm	**Moneymore Recreation Centre** Moneyhaw Road, Moneymore
Wednesday 4th September 2019	Maghera	2pm-5pm	**Walsh's Hotel** Main Street,

			Maghera
Thursday 5th September 2019	Cookstown	10am-1pm	**The Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre** Burn Road, Cookstown
Thursday 5th September 2019	Magherafelt	2pm-5pm	**The Bridewell** Church Street, Magherafelt

Who do I contact for more information?

If you need any assistance on any aspect of the Mid Ulster Town and Village Business Spruce Up Scheme, please contact:

Knox & Clayton Architects,
Laura McIlwrath laura@knox-clayton.co.uk Tel: 028 9267 4312

Or alternatively,

Mary McCullagh mary.mccullagh@midulstercouncil.org Tel: 03000 132 132
Lynn Shiels lynn.shiels@midulstercouncil.org Tel: 03000 132 132

All documents can be downloaded at
www.midulstercouncil.org/spruceupscheme

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Appendix 2 Application Form

Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme 2019-2022
Application Form

Applications should be completed in conjunction with the attached Guidance Notes.
Only fully completed application forms submitted with the required documentation (as per page 13) will be considered –Any application submitted with missing information or incomplete questions will be deemed incomplete and subsequently rejected.

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS
The closing date for applications is **4pm on Wednesday 18th September 2019**, and the applicants MUST be aware that this will potentially be the only funding opportunity for next 3 years (Subject to funding).

NB: The Council will process your personal data in accordance with Mid Ulster District Council privacy statement. For further details go to https://www.midulstercouncil.org/privacy

1. YOUR DETAILS
1.1 Applicant Details (The applicant must be the key contact to discuss all details of this application)

Name			
	Are you the property owner or tenant? *(Delete as applicable)* Property Owner ~~Tenant~~		
Address			
Telephone	Phone:	Mobile:	
Email		Website	

2. PROPERTY DETAILS

2.1 Please provide details of the property for which the grant is being sought

Name of Business Trading in Property:	
Property Address:	
Please provide a short description of the business for which the grant is being sought.	
Are you the owner of the property? *(delete as applicable)*	Yes/No
Is the business/commercial property currently vacant? If Yes, please provide details of the vacant business/commercial property indicating: 1) The property's previous use as a business/commercial property 2) Should the vacant property currently exist as a residential property with plans to change use to a commercial property, a change of use planning permission should be submitted to Council prior to commencement of works 3) How it will be marketed/let as a business/commercial property after	Yes/No

improvement works are complete			
Are you registered for VAT?	Yes/No	If yes, please provide VAT registration number.	
Has the building got 'Listed Building Status'?	Yes/No Status Type: - _____		
Have you received Listed Building Consent for the proposed works? Please note that Consent **MUST** be obtained prior to commencement of works	N/A		
Please state the current number of employees			

Type of Business (Please Tick the appropriate box):	Sole Trader	
	Business Partnership	
	Limited Company	
	Registered Company	
	Other (Please specify)	

2.2 Previous Funding Received

Has this property been awarded Grant Aid under previous improvement schemes? I.e. Mid Ulster Town Centre Shop Improvement Scheme / Mid Ulster Village Spruce Up Scheme	Yes / No
Please detail which scheme(s) applied for and please provide details of work completed	N/A

2.3 Please describe the current condition of the **element(s) of work** proposed to be improved/refurbished ***(a current colour photograph must be attached to your application of each element of works proposed. NB: Please ensure the photograph is of high quality as it will be used for assessment purposes)***

3 PROJECT DETAILS

3.1 Please provide a full description of work to be carried out and the associated cost under each of the relevant headings in the tables.

Please Note:

1. Quotations **MUST** be comparable, like for like.

2. If one quote is over £4,999.99, 4 quotations must be provided; if one quote is over £29,999.99 but below EU thresholds you must appoint using a publicly advertised open or restricted tender competition.

3. All quotations should be dated and on headed paper. The funder reserves the right to have a chartered architect to check the validity of quotations/tenders. Please note that professional fees will not be eligible for grant aid and you employ such services at your own risk, whether or not your application is successful. **PLEASE NOTE THAT A QUOTATION/TENDER WILL BE DEEMED INVALID IF THE APPLICANT IS DEEMED TO HAVE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST (A PERSONAL, PRIVATE OR FAMILY INTEREST) IN RESPECT OF THE COMPANY(S) QUOTING FOR WORK AND/OR DEEMED TO BE A 'LINKED COMPANY' (EU RECOMMENDATIONS 2330/361/EC.):- COMPANIES ARE LINKED IF ONE OF THEM DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY CONTROLS, OR HAS THE CAPACITY TO CONTROL THE AFFAIRS OF THE OTHER.**

4. Costs should not include VAT regardless if the company is VAT registered or not.

5. All projects which receive a letter of offer in November 2019 must have works completed and claimed for by 20 March 2020.

Element of Work	Description of Work (e.g. repair, replacement of new feature, materials to be used, colour schemes)	Cost (as per quotations / tenders obtained) Excluding VAT Please cost each element of work separately and ENCLOSE the appropriate number of quotes for each element of work with your application. ***(Failure to do so will result in your application being deemed incomplete)*** 2 Written Quotations for elemental costs up to £4,999.99 4 Written Quotations for elemental costs from £5,000-£29,999 For any items over £30,000 but below EU thresholds you must appoint using a publicly advertised open or restricted tender competition)			
		Quote 1 (Chosen Contractor) Contractor Name	Quote 2 Contractor Name	Quote 3 Contractor Name	Quote 4 Contractor Name
Internal Works					
	TOTAL COST £				

Element of Work	Description of Work (e.g. repair, replacement of new feature, materials to be used, colour schemes)	Cost (as per quotations / tenders obtained) Excluding VAT. Please cost each element of work separately and ENCLOSE the appropriate number of quotes for each element of work with your application. ***(Failure to do so will result in your application being deemed incomplete)*** 2 Written Quotations for elemental costs up to £4,999.99 4 Written Quotations for elemental costs from £5,000-£29,999 For any items over £30,000 but below EU thresholds you must appoint using a publicly advertised open or restricted tender competition)			
		Quote 1 (Chosen Contractor) Contractor Name	Quote 2 Contractor Name	Quote 3 Contractor Name	Quote 4 Contractor Name
External Works					
	TOTAL COST	**£**			

3.2 Please identify if the proposed project is part of a Multiple Application (See note on page 3 of Guidance Notes)

Is project part of a Multiple Application	Yes/No
If yes please give details below naming adjacent business/commercial premise applying	

3.3 What is the planned start and completion date for the project?

Expected Start Date:		Expected Completion Date:	

NB: All applicants issued a Letter of Offer in November 2019 must have works completed and claimed by 20 March 2020. If successful, no works should commence prior to receipt of Letter of Offer.

3.4 Statutory Approvals

Is Planning Permission required for the project?	Yes/No	If yes, please state the status of your Planning Application: (Please tick)	Application to be submitted	
			Application submitted	
			Approval Received (Please enclose a copy of Planning Approval)	

NB: Planning Approval must be in place BEFORE works commence. In addition to this, any signage alterations must have approved consent to display an advertisement prior to works commencing (a copy of the approval must be sent to Knox & Clayton Architects prior to commencement of works).

Is Building Control approval required for the project?	Yes/No	If yes, Building Control Approval must be in place BEFORE payment of grant.

Is Listed Building Consent required for the project?	Yes/No	If yes, a copy of the Listed Building Consent MUST be submitted prior to commencement of works.

3.5 Please state how your scheme meets the objectives as stated in the Guidance Notes (See note on Page 2 of Guidance Notes)

4 PROJECT COSTS AND ADMINISTRATION

4.1 Please provide details of total project cost and grant aid sought:

Total Project Cost: If VAT registered please detail Net Cost, If Not VAT Registered please quote Gross Cost	£
Grant Aid Sought: If VAT registered please detail Net Cost, If Not VAT Registered please quote Gross Cost	£

Details regarding the amount of grant-aid available through this scheme are detailed in the Guidance Notes Page 1.

4.2 Please complete details of remaining funding for the project:

Are you able to provide the remaining funding for the project? *(Proof of available match funding may be required on request from Mid-Ulster Council)*	Yes / No
Anticipated Project Duration *NB: Work should not commence until a 'Letter of Offer' for grant aid is received and you have signed and returned the 'Form of Acceptance' in compliance with the terms and conditions of this grant.*	Number of Weeks

5. DECLARATION

Notes to Applicants:

a. Only owners/tenants of properties located **within the scheme boundaries** included within the Guidance Notes and associated maps are eligible to apply.

b. Please note that completion of this application does not guarantee an award of grand aid.

c. Any costs incurred in the completion of this application will be at your own expense and will not be refunded.

d. Please note that if your application is successful you will be required to provide documentation to Council for funding purposes before any funds can be released (e.g. bank account details, confirmation of VAT status, original bank statements)

e. No funds can be issued until all the necessary information required by Mid Ulster District Council has been received (NB: the Council may ask for additional information at any stage of the application process).

f. If approved, Council will issue a formal Letter of Offer for your scheme – works must not commence until a formal Letter of Offer has been signed and returned to Council. Grant aid cannot be awarded for works already carried out.

g. Work commenced prior to a Letter of Offer being signed and returned to Council or work commenced before the required statutory approvals are in place will be deemed ineligible and will not be funded.

h. All projects must meet the required timescales.

i. Applicants must comply with publicity arrangements: - Consent to the business being named in and participating in any publicity produced in relation to this Scheme.

j. It is the applicant's responsibility to comply with all relevant health and safety, including in particular The Construction (Design & Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 for any works being carried out. For more information please visit https://www.hseni.gov.uk/publications/simple-guide-cdm-regulations-ni-2016

k. It is the applicant's responsibility to comply with all other relevant legislation.

I/We confirm that the information contained in this Application is true and accurate to the best of my/our knowledge and belief. I/We understand and agree to the above Notes and Guidance and I/We acknowledge that if false or misleading information is provided that the Council may exclude me/us from the Scheme. I /We further acknowledge that in the event that it comes to light, following the issuing of the Letter of Offer, that false or misleading information was provided, the Council reserves the right in its absolute discretion to refuse to withhold grant monies or seek to recoup grant monies already paid.

I/We hereby apply for Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme

Signature(s)……..
(PROPERTY OWNER(S)/TENANTS)

…….

Name(s) (Print)…….

Date…….

IF THE APPLICANT IS A TENANT, THE PROPERTY OWNER(S) MUST COMPLETE THE SECTION BELOW

I/We the property owner(s) give permission to_____ (tenant) to conduct and complete the works as detailed in the attached application form to:-

Property Address:

_____

_____

_____

Name of Business currently located in property: _____

Signature(s)…….
(PROPERTY OWNER(S))

Completed application forms should be returned to the address below in a sealed envelope marked

Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme

KNOX & CLAYTON ARCHITECTS,
2A WALLACE AVENUE, LISBURN, BT27 4AA

Or alternatively,

Council Offices
Burn Road
Cookstown
BT80 8DT

Council Offices
Circular Road
Dungannon
BT77 6DT

Council Offices
Ballyronan Road
Magherafelt
BT45 6EN

Please note ONLY fully completed applications will be considered. Any application submitted with missing information or incomplete questions will be deemed incomplete and subsequently rejected

PLEASE NOTE

- **A Fully Completed Application Form - the following sections must be completed in full to warrant a fully completed Application:**
  - **Your Details**
  - **Property Details**
  - **Project Details**
  - **Project Costs & Administration (including adequate quotations/tenders)**
  - **Declaration Completed**
  - **Completed Property Owner Declaration**

- **Submission of all necessary documents as per section 6 page 13 of the application form – Please ensure all required documentation required is enclosed with your application, as no documents will be accepted after 4pm on Wednesday 18th September 2019.**

LATE OR INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED; THEY WILL BE DEEMED INCOMPLETE AND WILL SUBSEQUENTLY BE REJECTED.

CLOSING DATE FOR COMPLETED APPLICATIONS
WEDNESDAY 18th SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 4PM

6 DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED

Failure to fully complete the application form and submit the required documentation below will result in your application being deemed incomplete and will subsequently be rejected.

6.1 Please provide the following documentation as part of your application:

	Attached (Please tick)
Completed application form, signed appropriately by the tenant/property owner as per page 11	
Colour photograph showing the element(s) of works proposed to be improved / refurbished.	
Detailed costs for any works to be completed in Section 3.1. Please ensure to cost each element of work separately and ENCLOSE the appropriate number of quotes for each element of work with your application.	
If applying for a property which is currently vacant evidence must be provided that: 1) The property's previous use as a business/commercial property 2) Should the vacant property currently exist as a residential property with plans to change use to a commercial property, a change of use planning permission should be submitted to Council prior to commencement of works 3) How it will be marketed/let as a business/commercial property after improvement works are complete	
If proposed works require planning permission this must be in place prior to works commencing - a copy of permission **MUST** be attached if planning approval has been granted	
If proposed works require consent to display an advertisement this must be in place prior to works commencing – a copy of approval **MUST** be attached if it has been granted	
If proposed works require listed building consent, this must be in place prior to works commencing – a copy of approval **MUST** be attached if it has been granted.	
Property owner has signed the declaration.	

NB: Make a copy of this application and any supporting documentation for your own records as we do not intend to return any information supplied unless specifically requested.

Appendix 3 Assessment document

Mid Ulster
Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme
Supporting Local Business

Individual Scoring Assessment Sheet

SECTION A:

1. Applicant Details:

Name of Applicant:			
Address of Applicant:			
Tel No:		Email Address:	
Name of Business:			
Property Address:			
Total Project Cost:		Grant Aid Requested:	

2. Checklist

Eligibility Criteria	Yes	No
Is the property located within the boundary of the scheme as defined in the Guidance Notes.?		
Is the property type eligible for the scheme? (I.e. Commercial, NOT a bank, building society, charity shop, government organisation, community groups / clubs, sports groups / clubs, or social clubs?)		
Has the application form been signed by tenant and / or property owner?		
Has a colour photograph of the element of works proposed to be improved/refurbished been provided? (Interior and/or Exterior)		
Are written quotations from bonafide reputable contractors, of which there is no conflict of interest between the applicant and the companies who have the provided quotations?		
If for a vacant business/commercial property, has the following evidence been provided:-		

1) That it was previously used as a business/commercial property (If this is not evident from the supplied photograph then evidence (old photographs, rates bills, etc.) must be provided 2) Should the vacant property currently exist as a residential property with plans to change use to a commercial property, a change of use planning permission should be submitted to Council prior to commencement of works. 3) That it will be marketed/let as a business/commercial property after improvement works are complete. Evidence must be provided of how this will be achieved and actively promoted.		

3. Assisting documents checklist

	YES	NO	Is this permission needed for this scheme
Has a copy of planning permission been submitted?			
Has a copy of listed building consent been submitted?			
Has a copy of building control consent been submitted?			
Has a copy of advertising consent been submitted?			

Have detailed costs been provided (two/four written quotations / tenders as appropriate)?
NB: <u>Both</u> written quotations for elementary costs up to £4,999.99 MUST be less than £5,000.00 or 4 quotations are required.

Individual Element	2 Written Quotations for elementary costs up to £4,999.99			4 Written Quotations for elementary from £5,000-£29,999			For any items over £30,000 but below EU thresholds you must appoint using a publicly advertised open or restricted tender competition)		
	Yes	***No***	***N/A***	***Yes***	***No***	***N/A***	***Yes***	***No***	***N/A***

For Section B, please provide a score for each question in the box provided. Weighting criteria is provided for each question individually.

Please note all applications must score a minimum of 40% to be considered for funding.

SECTION B

1 – CURRENT CONDITION OF ELEMENT(S) TO BE GRANT AIDED (25%)

Scoring Breakdown

Weighting Criteria	Assessment Comments
Very Poor / Non-Existent	Element(s) not fit for purpose / have an unsightly visual contribution to the street scape
Poor	Element(s) are in bad repair / have an unsightly visual contribution to the streetscape
Average	Element(s) in need of repair / works will improve the visual impact of the street scape
Very Good	Element(s) are in good condition, but minor works will improve the visual impact of the street scape
Excellent	Element(s) do not have a negative impact on current street scape / any works will not improve the visual impact of the street scape

Weighting Criteria	Score	Comments
Very Poor/Non-Existent 25%		
Poor 20%		
Average 15%		
Good 10%		
Very Good 5%		
Excellent 0%		
Score in this Section		

2 – IMPACT PROPOSED ELEMENT/ELEMENTS OF WORK WILL MAKE (25%)

Scoring Breakdown

Weighting Criteria	Assessment Comments
None	Works will not improve the visual contribution to the street scape
Minor	Works will have a minor contribution to the visual impact of the street scape / will not drastically change the street
Average	Works will have a positive impact on the visual aesthetics of the street scape / noticeably enhance the street scape
Good	Works will improve the attractiveness of the street scape
Very Good	Works will greatly improve the visual impact of the street scape / noticeably change the street elevation

Transformation	Works will transform the street scape completely / element(s) will be unrecognisable

Weighting Criteria	Score	Comments
None 0%		
Minor 5%		
Average 10%		
Good 15%		
Very Good 20%		
Transformation 25%		
Score in this Section		

3 –VALUE FOR MONEY (25%)

Value for money calculated as: Impact (points) ÷ Grant Sought (in thousands to nearest £500)

EXAMPLE 1 Average Impact(12) ÷ Grant Sought(£5000) = 12÷5 = 2.4 =Score of **10%.**

EXAMPLE 2 Very Good Impact(24) ÷ Grant Sought(£2000) = 24÷2 = 12 =Score of **25%.**

Weighting Criteria	Score	Comments
0-1.999 - 5% Poor		Impact =
2-3.999 - 10% Average		----------
4 – 7.999 - 15% Good		Grant Sought =
8 – 11.999 - 20% Very Good		
12 – 30 - 25% Excellent		Value for Money =
		Score =
Score in this Section		

4 –MULTIPLE APPLICATION (10%)

Weighting Criteria	Actual Score	Comments
Not Multiple Application 0%		
Multiple Application as part of 2 properties 5%		
Multiple Application as part of more than 2 properties 10%		
Score in this Section		

5- VACANT BUSINESS/COMMERCIAL PROPERTY (10%) No Commercial activity taking place at time of application, can be long or short term vacant

Weighting Criteria	Actual Score	Comments
Not Vacant Business/Commercial Property 0%		
Vacant Business/Commercial Property 10%		
Score in this Section		

6- PROPERTY'S FIRST SUBMISSION (5%)

Weighting Criteria	Actual Score	Comments
No previous grant aid has been awarded to this property under previous improvement schemes 5%		
Grant aid has been awarded previously under an improvement scheme by Mid Ulster District Council 0%		
Score in this Section		

Summary:

		Maximum Score	Actual Score
1	CURRENT CONDITION OF ELEMENTS TO BE GRANT AIDED	**25**	
2	IMPACT OF PROPOSED ELEMENT	**25**	
3	VALUE FOR MONEY	**25**	
4	MULTIPLE APPLICATION STATUS	**10**	
5	VACANT BUSINESS/COMMERICAL PROPERTY	**10**	
6	PROPERTY'S FIRST SUBMISSION	**5**	
	Total Score:	**100**	

Recommended Grant Aid:	

Signatures of Assessment Panel:	Date:

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Appendix 4 Commencement Inspection Report

Mid Ulster
Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme
Supporting Local Business

Commencement Inspection Report

Application Ref No.			
Applicant Name			
Business Name			
Property Address			
Photograph (Before Works Commence)			
Is the photo supplied with the application a true reflection of the current condition of the premises	Yes		
Have any of the funding works been carried out (if yes list within comments section)	No		
Planning Approval Granted	Ref No:	Building Control Approval Granted	Ref No:
Listed building Consent Granted	Ref No:	Advertising Consent Granted	Ref No: -
SUMMARY OF WORKS			
Element of Works	Description of Works		
Internal Works	•		

External Works	•
Other (Please Specify)	
Comments	
Date Works Due to Commence	
Date Works Due to Complete	
Inspection Conducted by	
Inspection Date	
Signed (original)	

Appendix 5 Final Inspection Report

Mid Ulster
Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme
Supporting Local Business

Section B: Final Site Inspection

Application Ref No.	
Applicant Name	
Business Name	
Property Address	
Photograph of Property before Works	
Photograph of Property on Completion	
Date of Completion	
Has the work been carried out within the required timescale (30th March 2020)	
Verification of Statutory Approvals attached	
Has the works been completed in accordance with the application	

Summary of Works

Element of Works	Description of Works	Progress of Works
Internal Works		
External Works		
Other (Please Specify)		

QUALITY OF WORKS

	1 Very Poor	2 Poor	3 Average	4 Good	5 Excellent
Quality of materials					
Quality of Workmanship					
Comments					

IMPACT OF SCHEME IN RESPECT TO:

	1 Poor / No Impact	2 Little Impact	3 Average	4 Good	5 Excellent
Visual Improvement of the external structure of the property					
Visual Improvement of the internal structure of the property					
Contribution to overall townscape					
Comments					

Final Inspection Conducted by	
Final Inspection (date)	
Grant Offered	
Recommendation to Pay Grant	

Comments on impact of Scheme	
Signed	
Date	

Appendix 2

Rural Policy Framework *for NI*

July 2021

Sustainability *at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

This document is also available on the DAERA website at:
http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations

You can get a copy of this document in other formats, such as:

- Paper Copy
- Large Print
- Braille
- Other Languages
- Easy Read

To get a copy of this document in another format contact:

Rural Policy and Delivery Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Or alternatively, by:
Email: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk
Tel: 028 7744 5113 (This is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back)

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Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted to present the draft Rural Policy Framework for public consultation and I look forward to hearing your views. This framework has been developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholder organisations in the context of formulating a policy response to the cessation of the NI Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 and identifying rural needs and opportunities going forward.

As a rural dweller myself I am very aware of the challenges facing our rural communities today. I am also greatly encouraged by the ingenuity, resilience and drive of rural people. I know with targeted investment we can sustain and grow the rural and Northern Ireland Economy. These have been challenging times, but we must now look to a post Covid-19 future and embrace the opportunities that green growth, globalisation and technological innovation present.

I hope that, with your support and input, a new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme will emerge from the Framework and this will succeed the current RDP 'LEADER' and Rural Tourism schemes when investment ends in 2022. Of course the wide range of challenges facing rural society are not for DAERA alone to address. We will work in partnership with other Government Departments, Statutory Bodies, Councils and the private and community/ voluntary sectors to ensure that they continue to focus on addressing the needs of rural dwellers and businesses.

I encourage you to respond to this consultation so that we can support a sustainable rural Northern Ireland going forward where people want to live, work and be active.

Edwin Poots MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has a vision for sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone. Around 670,000 people, i.e. over a third (36%) of the population live in rural areas in Northern Ireland (NI). The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 provides a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs which should deliver better outcomes for people in rural areas and help make rural communities more sustainable. The impact of a policy or the delivery of a public service can be different for people in rural areas to those in urban areas and a one size fits all approach may not always be appropriate.

Development work on the Rural Policy Framework for NI including extensive stakeholder engagement commenced prior to COVID-19, however, we have since taken into account feedback received throughout the pandemic including outcomes from a number of pilot schemes we launched. Whilst we are still in the midst of the worst global health pandemic in 100 years, there have been a number of emerging positives. It is clear that there is a renewed appreciation for access to nature, Green Growth, and sustainability in a post COVID-19 world. It has been reaffirmed to us that partnership working, not just across central government but also including local government, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector is fundamental to fostering sustainability within rural communities and ensuring the best possible outcomes for people in rural areas. The pandemic required quick and decisive responses to emerging need in rural areas, which would not have been possible without partnership working across all sectors. We have experienced a true willingness to work in new and innovative ways and will continue to nurture this going forward.

Funding via the Priority 6[1] (LEADER and Rural Tourism) of the European Union (EU) approved Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 (hereinafter Priority 6) is coming to an end. Priority 6 has provided around £80 million over the course of its lifetime attributed to non-agricultural activities supporting wider rural development. This includes ongoing work that currently supports rural businesses, rural tourism, basic services in rural areas, rural broadband and village renewal. It is clear that new opportunities now exist to proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward. The need for a highly flexible yet responsive approach has been magnified further with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

1 Priority 6 (promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas) includes LEADER and Rural Tourism aspects of the EU approved Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and any subsequent EU Common Agricultural Policy development post 2020.

A Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland provides rural communities an opportunity to review the approach to rural policy and what is needed to support rural communities within the context of the following main strategic drivers:

- The impact of COVID-19 on rural communities, in particular the need for flexibility to respond quickly to emerging needs;
- Green Growth including the need for access to nature whilst ensuring sustainability in a post COVID-19 era;
- Opportunities for new ways of working and funding post priority 6 funding under EU Rural Development Programme;
- The priorities set out in the draft Programme for Government (PfG); and
- The New Decade, New Approach Deal.

The Rural Policy Framework for NI is ambitious in regards to both its scope and remit, recognising rural areas as places of opportunity. The Framework sets a challenging vision and aim for rural NI, complementing any future Green Growth Strategy and focusing on sustainability. The Framework has also taken into account City and Regional Growth Deals. Whilst a living document, in so far as possible, consideration has been given to current emerging needs impacting on rural areas, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Our rural areas and rural communities make an important contribution to the social and economic life of the region and it is important that governments, rural communities and the voluntary and community sector continue to work together to help sustain rural communities; support balanced regional growth; and to help tackle rural disadvantage.

Key Statistical Rural Issues Findings - NI Region

Around 670,000 people (36%) of the NI population live in a rural area, and although their circumstances are in many ways very similar to those of urban dwellers, there are also distinct urban/rural differences which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas outside of Belfast. Rural industry and employment differ in nature from that of towns and cities, and difficulties with accessibility and connectivity, social and digital, are almost uniquely rural. The cost of living tends to be higher in rural than urban areas and rural households are more likely to experience fuel poverty. Nevertheless, the rural population on average enjoy a better quality of life than their urban counterparts, in terms of health, happiness and life satisfaction. Figure 1 provides a brief overview of the key issues affecting both urban and rural areas and the differences between the two.

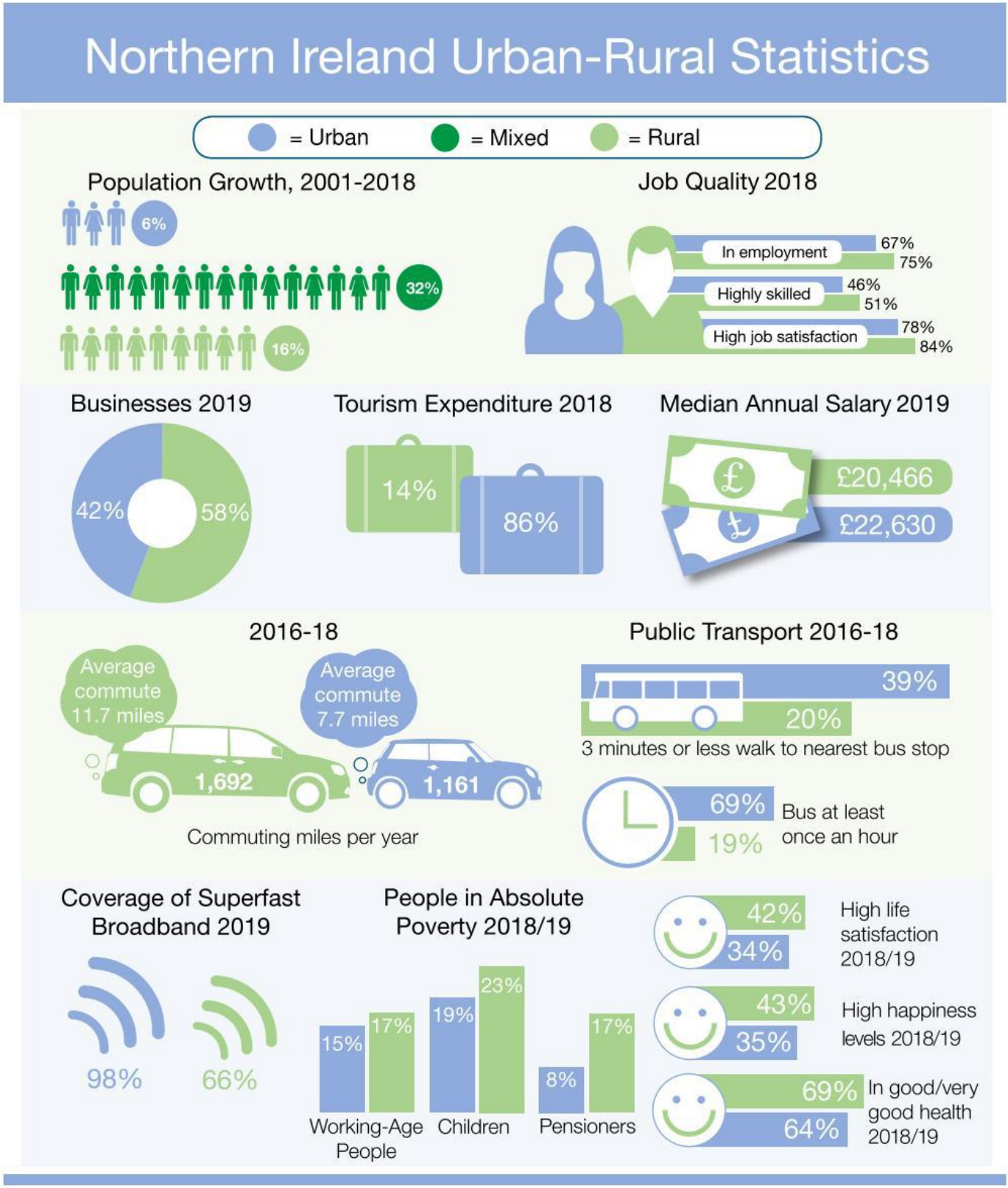


Figure 1: Taken from Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2020 report available at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Key%20Rural%20Issues%202020%20Infographic_0.pdf

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

The Rural Policy Framework for NI has been underpinned by engagement, partnership and flexibility throughout its development with extensive engagement incorporating a wide range of rural stakeholders. Many of the issues identified throughout the stakeholder engagement process will require inter-departmental co-operation and joint working to ensure strategic delivery in addressing those issues. The Framework has also adhered to the cross-cutting horizontal principles of sustainability, equality and equal opportunities.

Figure 2 below provides a brief summary of the stakeholder engagement on the Draft Rural Policy Framework for NI up until now.

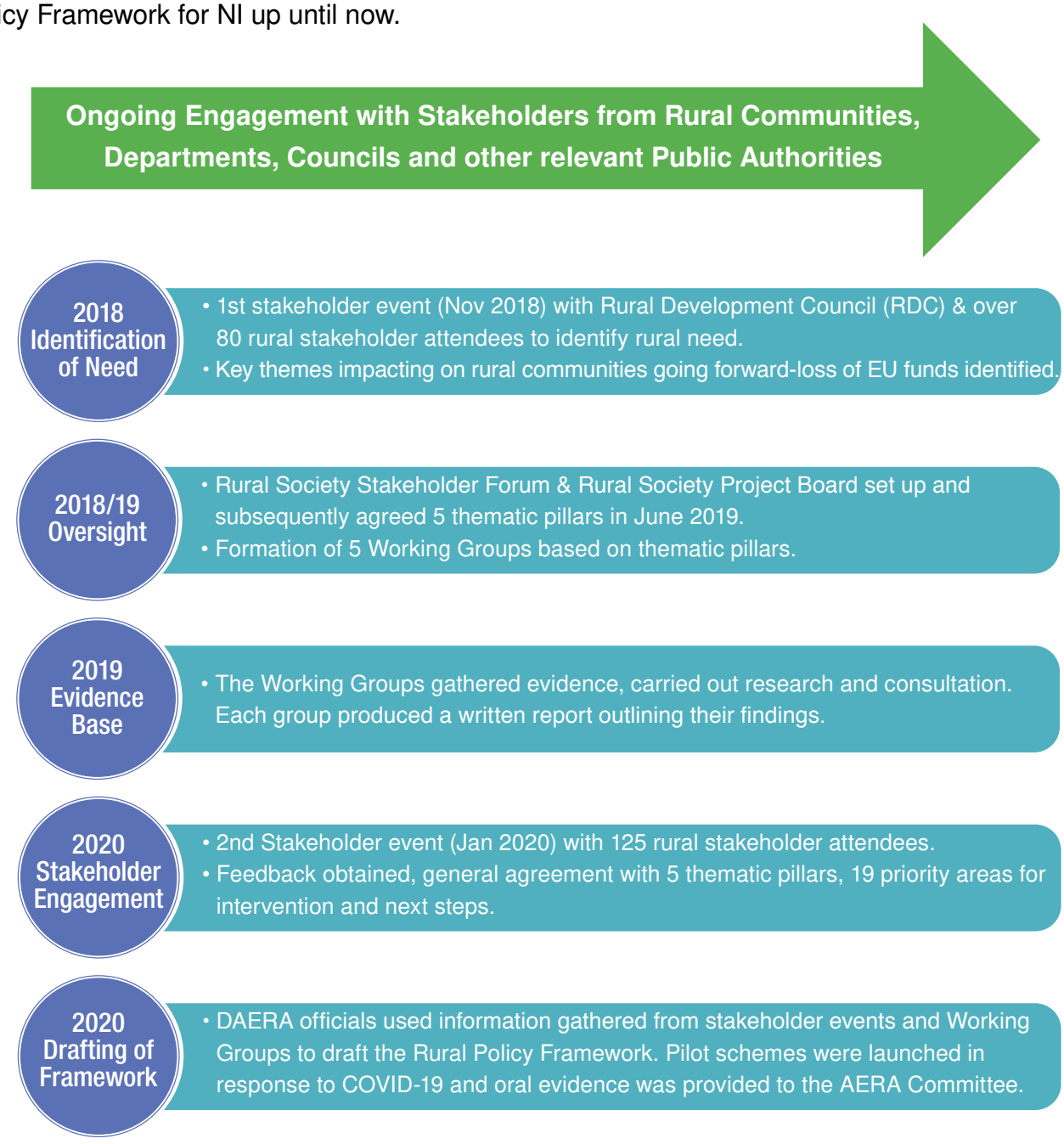


Figure 2: Summary of Stakeholder Engagement.

The Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland

Framework Overview

Figure 3 below demonstrates how each of the thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention feed into the overarching Rural Policy Framework for NI. Subject to approval of the proposed Rural Policy Framework for NI, individual schemes will then be developed into a new Programme entitled 'Rural Business and Community Investment Programme'.

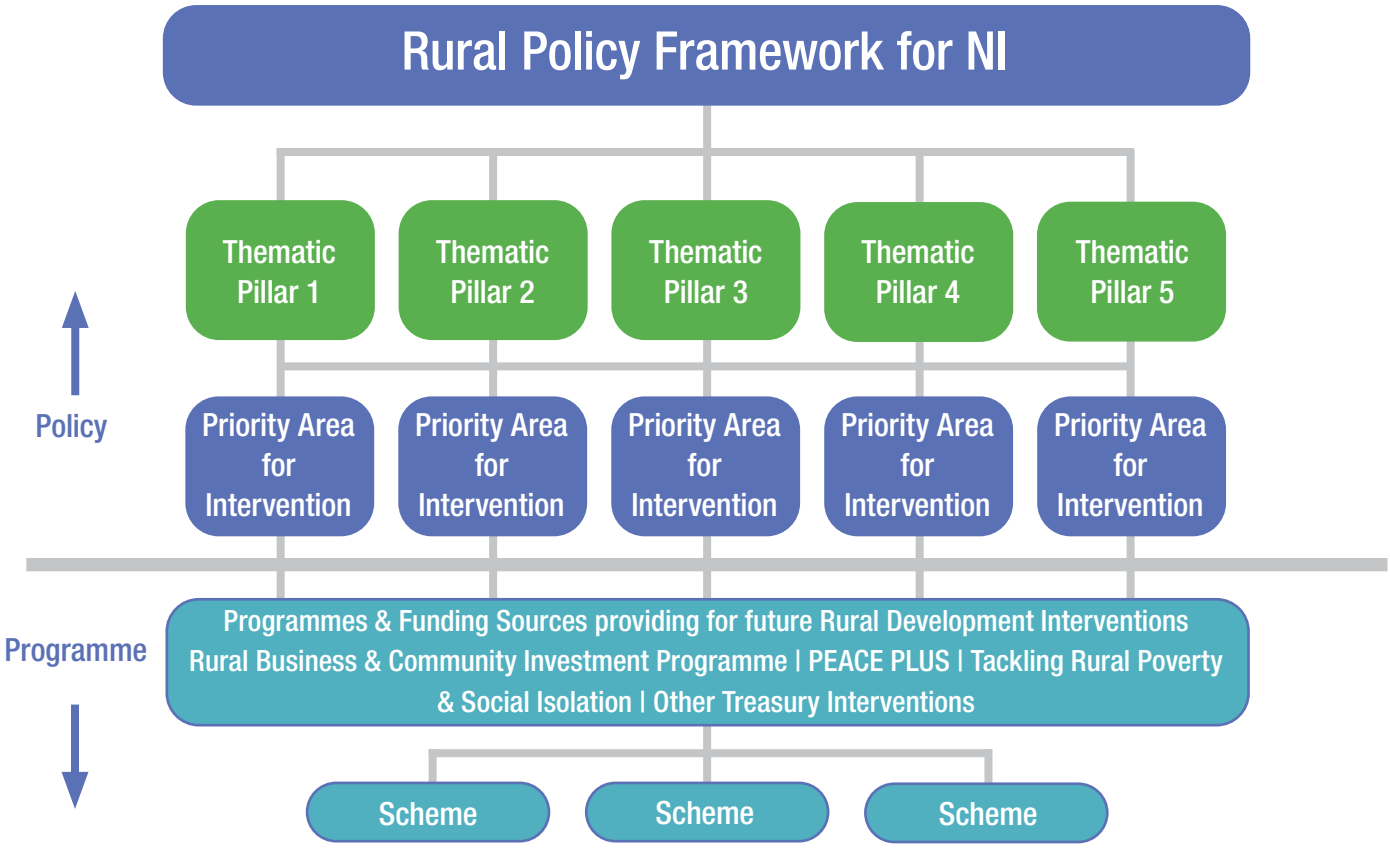


Figure 3: Overview of Rural Policy Framework for NI.

A Vision for Rural

DAERA's vision is:
Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape, valued by everyone.

Overarching Aim

The aim for the Draft Rural Policy Framework for NI is:
To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work, and be active.

Thematic Pillars and Priority Interventions

The table below provides a summary of the five key thematic pillars and the nineteen associated priority interventions that make up the Rural Policy Framework for NI. Whilst each of the five thematic pillars will incorporate a number of priority areas for intervention, it is recognised that there is potential for significant overlap between the five thematic pillars and that individual priority areas may address more than one thematic pillar.

Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship
To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.

Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 5:** We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.

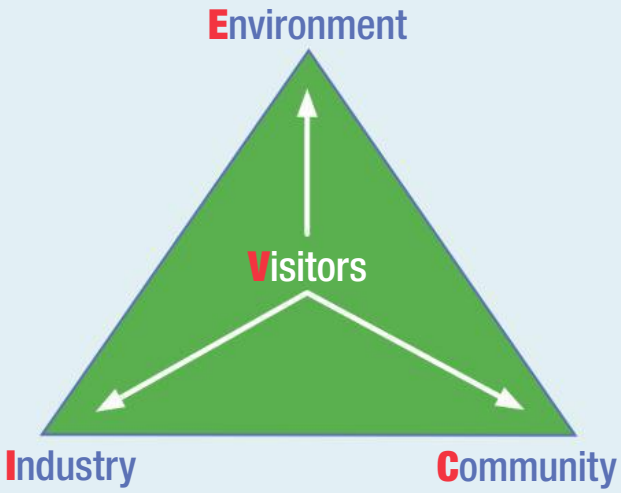
The following priority interventions have been developed for rural innovation and entrepreneurship in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Champion:** Develop a culture of rural innovation.
- Intervention 2 - **Empower:** Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Intervention 3 - **Enable:** Invest in and develop our rural economy.

Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism
To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.

Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
- **Outcome 10:** We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest.



Adapted from New Zealand Ministry of Tourism *et al.* (2006).

The following priority interventions have been developed for sustainable rural tourism in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Visitor:** Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for NI.
- Intervention 2 - **Industry:** Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- Intervention 3 - **Community:** Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- Intervention 4 - **Environment:** Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing
To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.

Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society.
- **Outcome 4:** We enjoy long, healthy, active lives.
- **Outcome 5:** We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.
- **Outcome 8:** We care for others and we help those in need.
- **Outcome 9:** We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity.
- **Outcome 11:** We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.
- **Outcome 12:** We give our children and young people the best start in life.

The following priority interventions have been developed for rural health and social wellbeing in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Champion:** Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- Intervention 2 - **Build Capacity:** Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- Intervention 3 - **Reduce:** Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Intervention 4 - **Sustain:** Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- Intervention 5 - **Community Assets:** Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

Thematic Pillar 4: Employment
To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.

Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society.
- **Outcome 6:** We have more people working in better jobs.
- **Outcome 12:** We give our children and young people the best start in life.

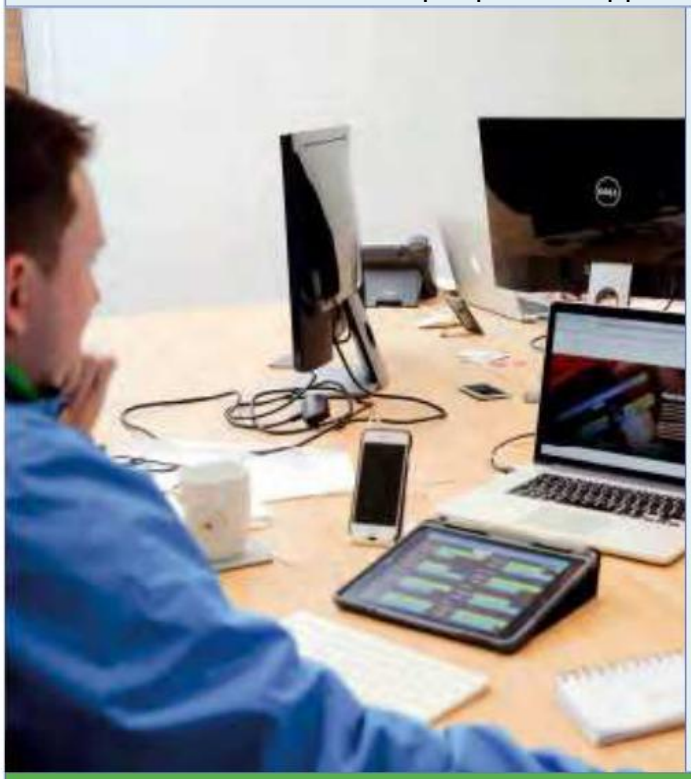
The following priority interventions have been developed for rural employment in NI:

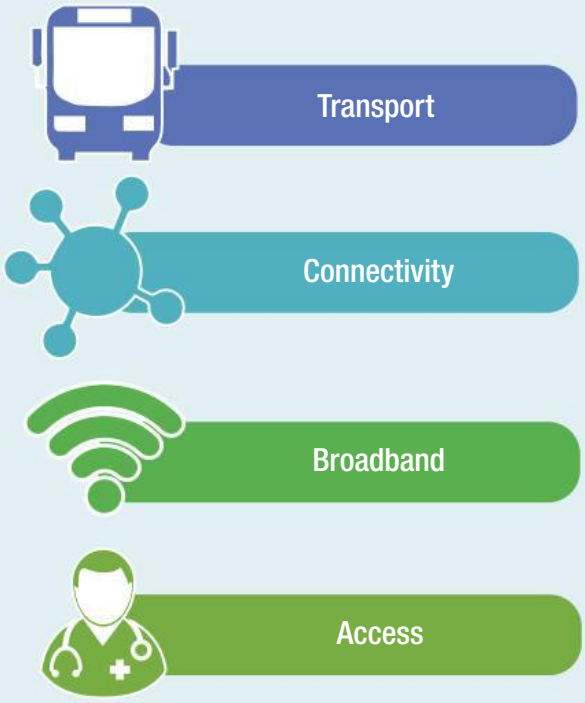
- Intervention 1 - **Support:** To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth.
- Intervention 2 - **Champion:** To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers.
- Intervention 3 - **Invest:** To invest in and develop our rural society.

Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity
To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.

Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society.
- **Outcome 11:** We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.





The following priority interventions have been developed for connectivity between urban and rural areas in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Transport:** To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.
- Intervention 2 - **Connectivity:** To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.
- Intervention 3 - **Broadband:** To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live.
- Intervention 4 - **Access:** To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas.

Links to Draft Programme for Government Outcomes

We note that the Executive has recently launched a public consultation on its Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework 2021. The development work for the Rural Policy Framework was based on the existing draft PfG 2016-2021 outcomes. The outcomes listed below are from the existing draft PfG, however, should the proposed outcomes be accepted, they will be incorporated into the Framework (for ease of reference we have also listed the new corresponding proposed outcomes alongside the existing ones). The Rural Policy Framework for NI is intended to feed into the following eleven (or eight under the proposed outcomes) draft Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes:

Current PfG Outcome	Corresponding Proposed PfG Outcomes
Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong competitive regionally balanced economy.	**Proposed Outcome:** Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral.
Outcome 2: We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.	**Proposed Outcome:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
Outcome 3: We have a more equal society.	**Proposed Outcome:** We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect.
Outcome 4: We enjoy long, healthy, active lifestyles.	**Proposed Outcome:** We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives.
Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.	**Proposed Outcome:** Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral.
Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs.	**Proposed Outcome:** Everyone can reach their potential.
Outcome 8: We care for others and we help those in need.	**Proposed Outcome:** We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives.
Outcome 9: We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity.	**Proposed Outcome:** We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect.
Outcome 10: We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest.	**Proposed Outcome:** People want to live, work and visit here.

Outcome 11: We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.	**Proposed Outcomes:** Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral; Our children and young people have the best start in life.
Outcome 12: We give our children and young people the best start in life.	**Proposed Outcome:** Our children and young people have the best start in life.

Key Principles

The following 14 key principles apply to the Rural Policy Framework for NI:

• The Framework will focus on addressing the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft PfG.
• The Framework will promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities.
• The Framework will encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector.
• The Framework will recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment.
• The Framework will encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies.
• The Framework will complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016.
• The Framework will be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas.
• The Framework will promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities.
• The Framework will seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75.
• The Framework will seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal.
• The Framework will promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation), learning and best practice between organisations.
• The Framework will seek to complement the community planning process.
• The Framework will recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis.
• The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

Implementation

The Rural Policy Framework for NI sets out five thematic pillars incorporating nineteen priority areas for intervention that we want to achieve to help create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active. We will work towards achieving these interventions in relation to the policies, programmes and services we provide.

Publication of this draft Framework is only the beginning of the process. Subject to consultation feedback and approval of the proposed Rural Policy Framework for NI, there are a number of steps to take forward as we begin to put it into operation. A key task will involve developing individual schemes into a new Programme entitled 'Rural Business and Community Investment Programme'. This new Programme will take into account any lessons learned from the Priority 6 element of the EU RDP and it is anticipated to last for a minimum of 7 years to facilitate meaningful outcomes and to tie into the multi-year budget approach outlined in the New Decade, New Approach Deal. Any Programme and associated interventions require sufficient budgets and delivery mechanisms to realise the Framework's overarching vision and aim. The interventions should also complement each other and be strategic in both development and delivery.

We will work with other organisations in designing and implementing a programme of priority areas for intervention to be delivered under the Framework. These organisations will include other Departments, local councils, other public and/or private bodies and the rural community sector.

The Rural Policy Framework for NI will operate from 2021 onwards and the initial programme will be implemented over a period of 7 years. The programme will be published setting out details of any schemes to be funded. We expect that an interim evaluation of the programme will be completed in year four and recommendations implemented. The programme will be a living document that will be updated regularly during the lifetime of the Framework. This enables opportunities to make amendments to the schemes to be funded under the programme, according to the need at the time. The need for such flexibility and adaptability was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An Equality Screening and Human Rights screening exercise has been carried out in relation to the draft Rural Policy Framework. A screening exercise will also be carried out in respect of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme to be delivered under the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

Monitoring

DAERA is responsible for the Rural Policy Framework for NI and will have a co-ordinating role but each Department has responsibility for their respective departmental and policy areas.

To ensure that any future Programme can proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward we will establish a new cross-cutting Rural Society Oversight Committee comprising senior managers from Departments and a range of stakeholders representing organisations with an interest in issues affecting rural communities. This Committee will be responsible for monitoring any future Programme, with regular updates provided on progress and expenditure. Whilst this committee will not have approval powers it will be able to highlight new need or reconfiguration of existing scheme(s) ensuring robust scrutiny of the Programme. Such an approach will provide opportunities to proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward. We expect that an update will be provided to the oversight committee twice per year or ad hoc as required.

Monitoring and Reporting

Indicators emanating from the nineteen priority intervention will be developed to assist with the monitoring of the effectiveness of the Framework. These indicators will be developed during Year One of the Framework. Whilst some indicators will be clearly associated with one particular priority intervention, other indicators will be cross-cutting and relevant across a number of priority areas for intervention.

There will be ongoing monitoring of the indicators to determine whether the actions we are taking are having an impact, how the indicators are being achieved and whether or not we are creating a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active.

Reporting and any updates to the Rural Society Oversight Committee will be proportionate and meaningful, so it can clearly be seen whether or not the Framework is making an impact. It is our intention that, as far as possible, reporting arrangements will be aligned with the reporting arrangements for the PfG. Data will be made available to our stakeholders and the public so they can see what progress is being made.

Equality Monitoring will be undertaken at a programme level regarding funding.

Regular Review

Regular reviews of the Rural Policy Framework will be considered to ensure that the Framework takes account of new issues affecting rural communities that might emerge over its lifetime.

Evaluation

Each intervention funded under the Rural Policy Framework for NI will be subject to an evaluation following its completion. An evaluation of the Framework will be undertaken prior to the development of any future Framework.

Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has a vision for sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone. Around 670,000 people (36%) of the population live in rural areas in Northern Ireland (NI). The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 provides a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs which should deliver better outcomes for people in rural areas and help make rural communities more sustainable. The impact of a policy or the delivery of a public service can be different for people in rural areas to those in urban areas and a one size fits all approach will not always be appropriate. For example:

- Accessing key public services is more difficult for rural communities than their urban counterparts. In some rural areas access to public services is impossible without private transport;
- The cost of living is higher in rural areas;
- Broadband speed and availability, though improving, are still much lower in rural than in urban areas;
- The rural and urban economies differ in terms of industry sector, with rural businesses predominantly engaged in agriculture, forestry, engineering, and construction, whereas urban businesses are more widely spread across a variety of sectors.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism had been a key growth sector within the NI economy in terms of employment and economic growth. Development work on the Rural Policy Framework for NI including extensive stakeholder engagement commenced prior to COVID-19. We have since taken into account feedback received throughout the pandemic including outcomes from a number of pilot schemes we launched. Whilst we are still in the midst of the worst global health pandemic in 100 years, there have been a number of emerging positives. It is clear that there is a renewed appreciation for access to nature, Green Growth, and sustainability in a post COVID-19 world. It has been reaffirmed to us that partnership working, not just across central government but also including local government, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector is fundamental to fostering sustainability within rural communities and ensuring the best possible outcomes for people in rural areas. The pandemic required quick and decisive responses to emerging need in rural areas, which would not have been possible without partnership working across all sectors. We have experienced a true willingness to work in new and innovative ways and will continue to nurture this going forward.

The cessation of funding via Priority 6 (LEADER and Rural Tourism) of the European Union (EU) approved Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 has provided us with a unique opportunity to take stock. The EU Priority 6 provides for promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

The LEADER and Tourism measures provided around £80 million over the course of the current RDP, attributed to non-agricultural activities supporting wider rural development. This includes ongoing work that currently supports rural businesses, rural tourism, basic services in rural areas, rural broadband and village renewal.

A Rural Policy Framework for NI provides an opportunity for us to review our approach to rural policy based on clearly identified need and what is required to support rural communities within the context of the following main strategic drivers: the impact of COVID-19 on our rural communities; Green Growth; opportunities for new ways of working and funding post RDP; the priorities set out in the draft Programme for Government; and the New Decade, New Approach Deal. The overarching Rural Policy Framework has been comprehensive in addressing a range of policy agendas that impact on rural prosperity, wellbeing and quality of life. It also provides an opportunity to ensure that the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework continues to operate parallel under the umbrella of the third Thematic Pillar. It became clear throughout the response to the COVID-19 pandemic that the flexibility of the TRPSI programme was crucial to delivering timely interventions where they were most needed. Feedback throughout early stakeholder engagement also highlighted the positive outcomes of the TRPSI programme which has benefitted many rural dwellers each year.

The Rural Policy Framework for NI has been underpinned by engagement, partnership working and flexibility throughout its development with extensive engagement incorporating a wide range of rural stakeholders. Many of the issues identified through the stakeholder engagement process will require inter-departmental co-operation collaboration to ensure strategic delivery in addressing those issues. The Framework also adheres to the cross-cutting horizontal principles of sustainability, equality and equal opportunities.

The Rural Policy Framework for NI is ambitious in regards to both its scope and remit, recognising rural areas as places of opportunity. The Framework sets a challenging vision and aim for rural NI complementing any future Green Growth Strategy, focusing on sustainability. The Framework has also taken into account City and Regional Growth Deals. Whilst a living document, in so far as possible, consideration has been given to current emerging needs impacting on rural areas, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic which has ultimately changed the landscape of the economy and the baseline employment rate.

Subject to approval of the proposed Rural Policy Framework for NI, individual schemes will then be developed into a new Programme entitled ‘Rural Business and Community Investment

Programme'. This new Programme will take lessons learned from Priority 6 of the EU Rural Development measures and other rural initiatives and is anticipated to last for a minimum of 7 years to facilitate meaningful outcomes and to tie into the multi-year budget approach outlined in the New Decade, New Approach Deal. Any Programme and associated interventions require sufficient budgets and delivery mechanisms to realise the Framework's overarching vision and aim. The interventions should also complement each other and be strategic in both development and delivery.

Our rural areas and rural communities make an important contribution to the social and economic life of the region and it is important that governments, rural communities and the voluntary and community sector continue to work together to help sustain rural communities; support balanced regional growth; and to help tackle rural disadvantage.

Purpose of this document

This consultation exercise gives you the opportunity to articulate your views on whether you consider the proposed Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland to be relevant and appropriate from your organisation's; your sector's; your community's; or your own perspective, as a means of creating a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active. This exercise will inform the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland and the subsequent interventions and Programme of support stemming from it. The Department encourages you to share your views with us. A full list of consultation questions are available on pages 122 - 128.

Annexes 1-2 contains a summary of key definitions, terminology and abbreviations used throughout this document. Annex 3 also provides a list of sources used to establish our evidence base and inform the need identified in this Framework.

The next section outlines our overarching vision for rural communities.

A Vision for Rural

In developing a vision and aim for the Rural Policy Framework for NI, a wide range of Executive and other governmental policies have been taken into account such as:

- Draft Programme for Government;
- New Decade, New Approach Deal; and
- Green Growth Strategy.

The impact of COVID-19 on rural communities, in particular the need for flexibility to respond quickly to emerging needs including the opportunity for new ways of working was also taken on board.

Rural Policy Framework Vision

We believe that the Rural Policy Framework for NI should be driven by the overarching DAERA vision which is:

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.

Whilst DAERA, through the work of Rural Affairs feeds into numerous outcomes in the Draft PfG, the Department has lead responsibility for PfG Outcome 2 “We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment”.

In pursuit of DAERA’s overarching vision, a key strategic priority for the Department is Strategic Priority 3: To champion thriving rural communities that contribute to prosperity and wellbeing. The Rural Affairs Division currently feeds into this Strategic Priority and associated vision through a number of key vehicles such as:

- Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016;
- Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI); and
- Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 - Priority 6.

The Rural Policy Framework has provided an opportunity to take stock to ensure that the needs of rural communities continue to be appropriately addressed, particularly in light of new opportunities post Priority 6 of the RDP.

We have outlined in the table below, how we believe each Thematic Pillar identified within this Framework adheres to the vision outlined above:

Thematic Pillar	Linkages to Vision: Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.
Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship - To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.	• Supporting innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas will help rural businesses develop and grow thereby maintaining a working rural landscape. Support for innovation in the delivery of public services will help provide better access to key services for people in rural areas thereby encouraging them to continue to live there and maintaining a living rural landscape.
Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism - To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.	• Supporting the development of sustainable rural tourism will help make the rural landscape more active and help ensure more people across Northern Ireland visit our rural areas and value our rural landscape.
Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing - To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.	• Tackling the effects of rural isolation will help overcome some of the biggest challenges of living in a rural area thereby ensuring that people can continue to live and thrive in rural areas and maintain a living rural landscape.
Thematic Pillar 4: Employment - To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.	• Increasing the number and quality of job opportunities available to people in rural areas will help to ensure that people can continue to live there thereby maintaining a living working rural landscape.
Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity - To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.	• Improving connectivity between urban and rural areas will help to ensure that rural businesses are more competitive and help improve the economic and social wellbeing of people in rural areas thereby maintaining a living working rural landscape.

Rural Policy Framework Aim

The overarching aim for the Rural Policy Framework for NI is:

To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active.

Championing thriving rural communities that contribute to prosperity and wellbeing has synergies with the draft PfG and Industrial Strategy where we prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy and have more people working in better jobs. Given the impact that the removal of EU funds has on the ability to deliver on this strategic priority, it is essential all government departments and statutory bodies work collaboratively to successfully deliver better outcomes for our communities. Furthermore, the New Decade, New Approach Deal document makes it clear that from 2021/22 there will be multi-year budgets so it is imperative that long-term outcomes are considered.

We believe that rural dwellers should be helped to ensure that they:

- Can avail of new opportunities arising following the loss of EU funds;
- Maximise their contribution to the overall NI economy in the future; and
- Ensure the future sustainability of our rural communities.

Q1) Do you agree that the proposed overarching aim 'To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active' for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland is appropriate?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

The next section outlines some key strategic drivers for change that were taken into account during the development of the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

Background - Informing the Framework

Strategic Context - Key Drivers for Change

A Rural Policy Framework for NI provides rural communities an opportunity to review the approach to rural policy and what is needed to support rural communities within the context of the following main strategic drivers: the impact of COVID-19 on our rural communities; Green Growth; opportunities for new ways of working and funding post RDP; the priorities set out in the draft Programme for Government; and the New Decade, New Approach Deal. The overarching Rural Policy Framework has been comprehensive in addressing a range of policy agendas that impact on rural prosperity, wellbeing and quality of life. Some of the key strategic drivers are outlined in more detail below.

Impact of COVID-19 on Rural Communities

Development work on the Rural Policy Framework for NI including extensive stakeholder engagement commenced prior to COVID-19, however, we have since taken into account feedback received throughout the pandemic including outcomes from a number of pilot schemes we launched.

Whilst we are still in the midst of the worst global health pandemic in 100 years, there have been a number of emerging positives. It is clear that there is a renewed appreciation for access to nature, Green Growth, and sustainability in a post COVID-19 world.

It has been reaffirmed to us that partnership working, not just across central government but also including local government, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector is fundamental to fostering sustainability within rural communities and ensuring the best possible outcomes for people in rural areas. The pandemic required quick and decisive responses to emerging need in rural areas, which would not have been possible without partnership working across all sectors. We have experienced a true willingness to work in new and innovative ways and will continue to nurture this going forward.

Draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework

At the time of writing, the Executive had launched a public consultation on its Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework 2021[2] which proposes to build upon the current outcomes-based approach whilst aligning to a long term multi-year budget. Our development work for the Rural Policy Framework has been based on the existing draft PfG 2016-2021 outcomes. Should the proposed outcomes be endorsed, they will be incorporated. We would still

2 Available at: https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/programme-government-pfg

expect to contribute to the majority of the new proposed outcomes through the implementation of interventions suggested within the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

The current draft PfG framework 2016-2021 sets out Government's ambition for improving the lives of everyone in NI with 12 strategic outcomes supported by indicators, which, taken together, the Executive believes best describes the society we wish to have. A key feature is collaborative working between organisations and groups, whether in the public, voluntary, or private sectors which reflects the cross-cutting nature of the challenges facing rural communities. Our cross-cutting Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland contributes to 11 of the 12 strategic outcomes.

New Decade, New Approach Deal (January 2020)[3]

The New Decade, New Approach Deal published in January 2020 outlined commitments from both the UK and the Irish Governments to restore devolved government in NI.

The priority for the NI Executive is to develop a regionally-balanced economy with opportunities for all, ensuring that through investment for the future that NI can harness opportunities and drive sustainable productivity, including opportunities for future trade as the UK leaves the EU. There are a number of commitments referred to in the agreement for the NI Executive to take forward which would complement some of the Thematic Pillars and associated Priority Areas for Intervention outlined within the Rural Policy Framework such as:

- Delivery of essential infrastructure projects in order to build a NI that is equipped for a prosperous shared future;
- Realise the economic potential offered by City Deals including through match capital funding for infrastructure, regeneration and tourism projects;
- Developing and delivering Growth Deals for Mid, South, West Northern Ireland and Causeway Coast and Glens;
- Tackle climate change head on;
- Develop an enhanced approach to careers advice, curriculum, training and apprenticeships to enhance employability and support economic growth;
- Identify resources to deliver extended, affordable and high quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4; and
- Development of key strategies, many of which are likely to have linkages to the thematic pillars outlined in this Rural Policy Framework.

3 Available at: www.gov.uk/government/news/deal-to-see-restored-government-in-northern-ireland-tomorrow

Furthermore, the Irish Government committed to working with the NI Executive and the UK Government to achieve greater connectivity on the island - by road, rail and air. In addition, the potential was highlighted for other projects including Greenways in border areas which contribute to sustainable tourism and other enterprise benefits for the region. The Irish Government also noted that they will continue to work with EU partners, the UK Government and NI Executive to ensure that the PEACE PLUS programme will be delivered. Again, these commitments are all complementary to this Rural Policy Framework for NI.

Other Strategic Considerations

Draft DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025[4]

The Draft DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025 was subject to public consultation in 2020. The mission of this strategy is to develop an innovation ecosystem which delivers for the environment, society and rural economy. The draft Innovation Strategy recognised that society faces many challenges including global ones impacting negatively on the environment such as climate change; land and ecosystem degradation; and waste management. Innovations are needed to help transform how we live and work.

The innovation strategy used the following definition in regards to innovation: *'the successful generation and exploitation of new ideas. It is about transforming creative thinking into new products, new and improved processes and technologies to support new ways of doing business'.*[5] In many cases, it relates to the novel use or application of knowledge or information already held, to yield products or outcomes of enhanced economic, social or natural capital value.

Green Growth/Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland[6]

DAERA initiated Northern Ireland's first Environment Strategy with a discussion paper to inform the direction of the new strategy. DAERA recognises the strategic importance of innovation in addressing the wider climate change, environmental and social challenges associated with growing and rebalancing the NI economy.

NI's environment is its most important asset and it is crucial to each and every one of us. Clean air, good quality water and the green and blue spaces, to which we have access, are part of our 'natural capital' (i.e. our stock of natural resources, including geology, soils, air, water and all living organisms). Effective care of the environment provides very real benefits in terms of improving health and wellbeing, promoting economic development and addressing the social problems which result from a poor quality environment.

4 Available at: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/daera-innovation-strategy-2020-2025
5 Innovate NI Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014 - 2025
6 Available at: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/esni-public-discussion-document

DAERA is now developing a Green Growth Strategy, which has been taken into account when developing this Rural Policy Framework for NI. Green Growth aims to transform our society towards net zero by 2050, protect and enhance our environment and deliver sustainable economic growth and will involve the development and co-design of a multi-decade Strategy and Delivery Framework.

Following on from the COVID-19 pandemic, people's expectations and values have changed in relation to environmental improvement and reinforced the need for Green Recovery and to "build back better".

Draft DfE Economy 2030: Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland (2017)[7]

The Draft Economy 2030 Strategy proposed that the following vision for NI: *'To be a globally competitive economy that works for everyone'.* This vision embraces the twin themes of competitiveness and wellbeing. Following on from the economic transformation in 2017, DfE identified five pillars on which the Economy 2030 Strategy is based as follows:

- Accelerating innovation and research;
- Enhancing education, skills and employability;
- Driving inclusive, sustainable growth;
- Succeeding in global markets; and
- Building the best infrastructure.

NI needs a culture which supports, prioritises and celebrates innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. It should become a place where they are embedded across the entire education system, supporting skills development to meet the needs of industry. By tackling its disadvantages the measures will deliver a more enterprising region that is able to compete globally in various sectors.

Turning NI into a leading, internationally competitive economy is essential if we are to deliver the economic outcomes that we want for our people such as increased employment and rising incomes. Competitiveness will drive export-led growth and for a small economy like NI we need to sell beyond our shores to generate wealth.

Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (The Act) provides a statutory duty on the public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services.

7 Available at: www.economy-ni.gov.uk/consultations/industrial-strategy

The Act was introduced to ensure that consideration of the needs of people in rural areas becomes more firmly embedded within public authorities. The Act seeks to help deliver fairer and more equitable treatment for people in rural areas by requiring public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing and revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services. This will help to deliver better outcomes for people in rural areas and help make rural communities more sustainable. In having due regard to rural needs, a public authority should consider all relevant information and ensure that the policy, strategy, plan or public service is influenced appropriately. This could involve:

- Acting as a Rural Champion and lobbying for rural needs to be reflected in policy development and delivery;
- Working with other Departments and other public agencies on an integrated approach to ensure that the particular characteristics of rural life and associated deprivation characteristics are recognised and addressed; and
- Supporting rural groups and networks to articulate rural needs to policy makers and influencers.

DAERA is not solely responsible for rural issues. All Departments have responsibilities in relation to rural areas. Each Department should comply fully with their statutory duties under the Rural Needs Act and work collaboratively in seeking to address the needs of people in rural areas. The Act provides a key policy tool for DAERA in seeking to ensure that the needs of people in rural areas are fully considered by government in policy making and in the delivery of public services. It is imperative that Departments, councils and other public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act work more closely with rural stakeholders in seeking to identify the particular needs of people in rural areas and to be open to adopting new approaches and to developing more innovative solutions to help address rural needs and deliver more equitable outcomes for rural dwellers.

Other Rural Initiatives

Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 - Priority 6

The current RDP is supported through the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. The EU has three objectives for the development of rural areas as follows:

- Improving competitiveness in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors;
- Safeguarding and enhancing the rural environment; and
- Fostering competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities.

The 2014-2020 RDP provides up to £545 million of EU funding over the course of its lifetime with around £80 million attributed to non-agricultural activities supporting wider rural development under Priority 6. Some additional information on how this aspect of the programme has been delivered to date is provided below.

Priority 6 is a European Community Initiative for assisting rural communities in improving the quality of life and economic prosperity in their local area. Priority 6 aims to increase the capacity of local rural community and business networks to build knowledge and skills, innovate and co-operate in order to tackle local development objectives. It provides support to promote social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas. Ten voluntary Local Action Groups (LAGs) made up of local government representatives and social partners deliver the Priority 6 Schemes on behalf of DAERA. Each LAG was allocated a rural development budget to enable them to pursue the strategic objective set out in the Local Rural Development Strategy they compiled for the area they represent. LAGs were permitted to spend up to 22% of the value of their projects on animation activities and administration.

The Priority 6 programme has included work that supports rural businesses, rural tourism, basic services in rural areas, rural broadband and village renewal. The Programme has provided some very notable successes such as the creation of 926 Full Time and 192 Part Time jobs (i.e. 1022 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs) at May 2021 under the Rural Business Investment Scheme. There has also been a total investment in rural areas of over £70m.

The Rural Tourism Scheme provides funding to invest 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 built and natural assets of the rural community and also stimulating economic activity.

Projects funded to date and currently under development are typically:

- Capital infrastructure;
- Increasing numbers of out of state visitors;
- Job creating;
- Promoting/encouraging a partnership approach with other statutory organisations; and
- Flagship, unique, high impact rural tourism-focused actions.

By May 2021, 19 Rural Tourism Scheme projects have been funded to the value of £9m.

Lessons learned will be taken from the current RDP to ensure that any new programme stemming from the Rural Policy Framework for NI builds upon the legacy of successful interventions under Priority 6 of the RDP.

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework

While poverty and social isolation exist in both urban areas and rural areas it is recognised that those living in rural areas often experience poverty and social isolation differently due to issues relating to geographical isolation, lower population density and the dispersed nature of many rural settlements. Living in a rural area can also exacerbate the effects of poverty and social isolation for certain groups. For example, additional costs of living in a rural area such as higher fuel or transport costs can have a greater impact on people on low incomes while some groups such as young people or people with disabilities may experience greater difficulties accessing transport services in rural areas than in urban settings. The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework is a rural initiative led by DAERA, which aims to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas through organisations working in partnership to design and implement measures, which target the needs of vulnerable people.

As no one single Department has the responsibility for rural issues, and all Departments have functions which can contribute to alleviating the impact of poverty and social isolation, the TRPSI Framework provides a mechanism through which Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural sector were able to work in partnership to develop new and innovative ways to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups.

Our TRPSI Framework promotes the sharing of learning and expertise and ensures benefits are gained through a collaborative approach that can lever additional resources for the benefit of rural communities. It also facilitates the piloting of new or innovative projects. TRPSI has been in place since March 2016 and in 2020/21 had a budget of over £11 million (an increase of £7m to help rural communities and businesses to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; to bolster the rural economy and to sustain and increase capacity within rural communities). TRPSI benefits many rural dwellers per year. TRPSI supports a wide range of schemes and examples of the most recent initiatives supported include:

- **Rural Business Development Grant Pilot Scheme** - provides development grants of between £500 and £4,999 to micro-enterprises based in rural areas to help them to sustain or grow.
- **Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme** - provides grants of between £200 and £1,500 to rural community-led voluntary organisations for tackling issues of local poverty and/or social isolation.

- **Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS)** - this scheme is delivered in conjunction with Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and allows rural dwellers with a valid SmartPass to access concessionary travel on Rural Community Transport Partnership vehicles in all areas of NI.
- **Farm Families Health Checks Programme** - in conjunction with the Public Health Authority (PHA) this is delivered by qualified Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) nurses who provide a holistic screening service, including health screening, advice and signposting services for rural dwellers at farmer's markets and community venues.
- **Community Development** - six Rural Community Networks (RCNs) provide a local community development support and advice service across all of rural NI provide this support.
- **Rural Support** - this organisation operates a helpline that provides a listening ear and signposting service for farmers and rural dwellers.
- **Social Farming Support Service** - this support service provided by Rural Support operates as a hub for Social Farming that provides disadvantaged groups of people in NI with an opportunity for inclusion, to increase their self-esteem and to improve their health and wellbeing.
- **Step Up to Sustainable Employment (SUSE+)** - aims to engage with unemployed, economically inactive and socio-economically deprived individuals.
- **Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP)** - administered by DfC and supported by DAERA at a regional level to ensure the voluntary and community sector has access to the support it needs to function effectively and efficiently. The Rural Community Network (RCN) and Northern Ireland Regional Women's Network (NIRWN) receive funding for providing the rural element of RISP.
- **Rural Community Recreational Facilities Scheme** - an Outdoor Spaces Programme that involves joint collaboration between DAERA, DfC, Sport NI and PHA to invest in sporting and recreational facilities in rural areas, namely multi-use community trails.
- **Forest Parks Enhancement Scheme** - in conjunction with Councils and Forest Service this scheme funds the development of safe, way marked, off-road cycling/walking trails and visitor facilities within forests.
- **SPRING Social Prescribing** - this enables medical professionals to refer their patients to Social Prescribers who in turn link clients to a range of local activities and community services that seek to address people's needs in a holistic way.

- **Village Catalyst Project** - this is a partnership between Historic Environment Division (HED), the Architectural Heritage Fund, DAERA and local community social enterprise groups. It aims to restore disused historic villages in rural villages, increase opportunities for a range of local social engagement activities by improving access to key services in rural areas through the provision of enhanced facilities and ultimately act as a catalyst for further regeneration in rural villages.
- **Your School, Your Club** - this partnership initiative in conjunction with the DE, Education Authority, Department for Communities (DfC), local Councils and Sport NI contributes to addressing the unmet demand for sporting and recreational facilities across NI by opening up educational sites for local community usage outside of normal school hours.
- **Libraries NI Out of Hours** - in partnership with the DfC the Libraries 'Out of Hours Service' has provided extended access to library facilities in a number of rural areas. Using a unique identifier PIN code, users can avail of a range of services including access to the public computer network and Wi-Fi, borrow books, access study facilities and, where available, make use of meeting room facilities.
- **Prosper Employability Project** - this project provides mentoring support to young people and specific vocational training leading to qualifications identified by local employers. Training is available across a range of occupational areas e.g. CAT C lorry driving, forklift driving, Emergency First Aid at Work, Customer Services and SIA door security & CCTV training.

It is important that DAERA's role is one that adds value and provides value for money. The TRPSI Framework is a model under which DAERA adds value through working in partnership with other public authorities to deliver positive tangible benefits for people in rural areas by promoting innovative solutions to challenges relating to poverty and social isolation in rural areas and supporting pilot projects.

We would suggest that the current Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) delivery approach will continue under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3 of the Rural Policy Framework for NI. It became very clear to us throughout the pandemic that the flexible approach of TRPSI was invaluable in responding quickly to local emerging and rapidly changing needs. We believe that lessons learned should be taken from the current TRPSI programme and that a revised and stronger programme is built upon going forward.

Q2) Do you agree that the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) approach should continue under the wider umbrella of the Rural Policy Framework?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Rural White Paper Action Plan (RWPAP)[8]

The NI Executive acknowledges that no single Department has exclusive responsibility for rural areas. The Executive's Rural White Paper Action Plan provides a Framework for Ministers to work effectively together in seeking to address the main issues and challenges facing rural areas. The Action Plan was launched in 2012 and was the first cross-departmental initiative in NI to focus solely on rural areas. The Action Plan set out the Executive's vision and policy priorities for rural areas and included over 90 actions from across all Departments covering a wide range of rural issues including rural broadband, healthcare, rural tourism, poverty and social inclusion, housing, rural transport and planning.

The next section provides a detailed overview of the stakeholder engagement we have carried out to date prior to formal public consultation.

8 Available at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/rural-white-paper-action-plan-and-progress-reports

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

Figure 4 below provides a brief summary of our stakeholder engagement on the Rural Policy Framework for NI up until now.

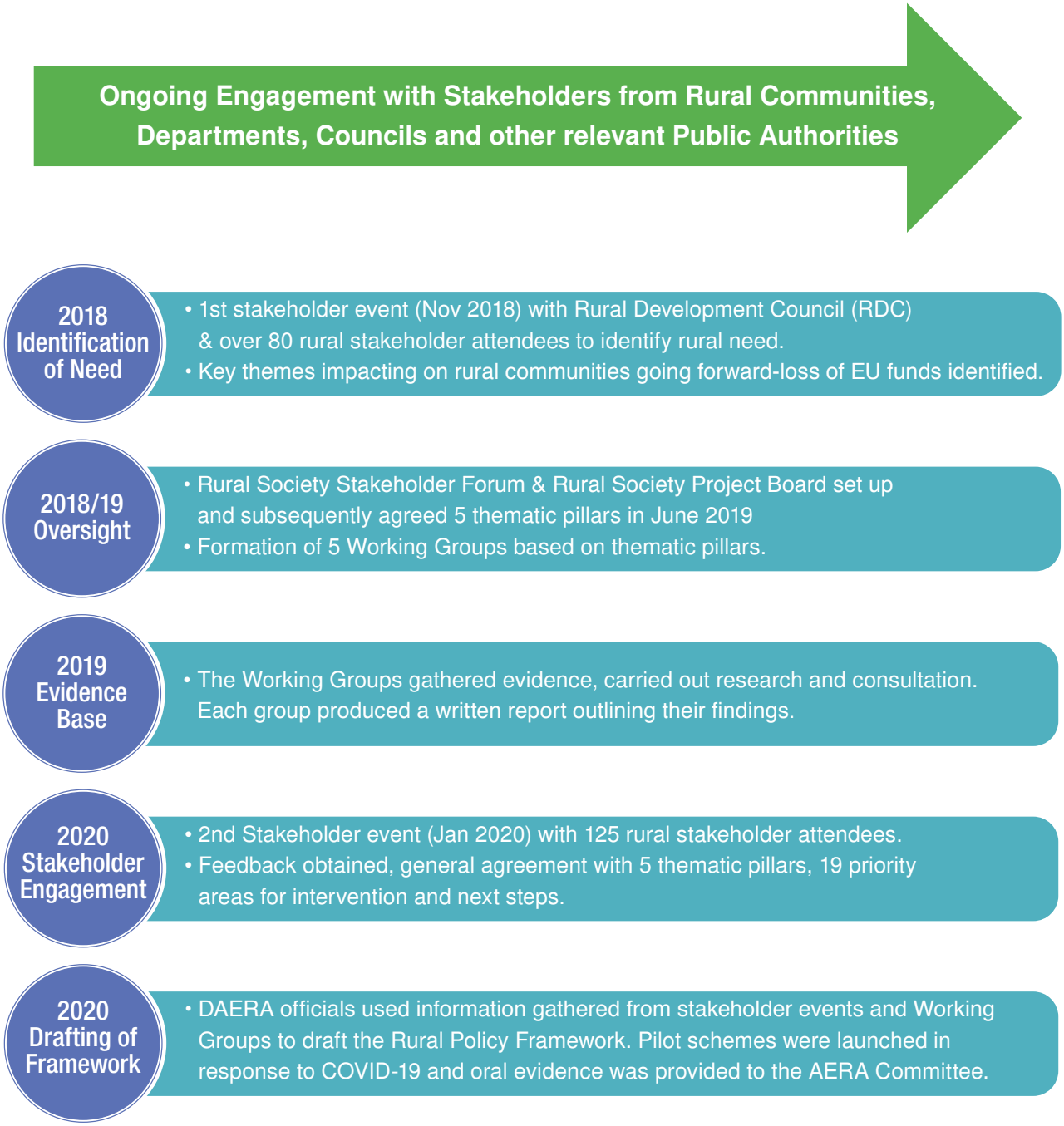


Figure 4: Summary of Stakeholder Engagement.

The section below provides a more detailed explanation of our stakeholder engagement carried out to date prior to formal public consultation stage.

We recognised that the cessation of the EU funding has the potential to significantly impact on people in rural areas in Northern Ireland, in particular funding previously provided under the Priority 6 element of the EU Rural Development Programme. Therefore, in November 2018 a stakeholder event with the Rural Development Council and over 80 rural stakeholders attending identified what the policy intervention (the need) was likely to be in rural communities following the loss of EU funds. The need identified at that event formed the basis for five key themes.

We established a Rural Society Stakeholder Forum in 2018 to assist it with exploring a possible future rural policy agenda. The Department also established a cross-departmental Rural Society Project Board tasked with considering the impacts of the loss of EU funding on rural society, identifying how cross-departmental working can benefit rural dwellers and supporting the development of a Rural Policy Framework for NI. In late 2018 and 2019 there followed a period of consultation, engagement and desk research with a range of rural stakeholders. The Stakeholder Forum and Project Board agreed five thematic pillars in June 2019 that a longer term rural policy framework would use to respond to that loss of EU funding and the challenges facing rural NI.

Subsequently, informal engagement was carried out with key rural stakeholders on the five thematic pillars, and five Rural Society Working Groups were established to take forward work on identifying potential priority interventions. These would be undertaken to help deliver the five thematic pillars. The Working Groups were established on the principle of collaborative working and included representatives of DAERA, other departments, councils, rural stakeholders and other relevant public authorities. Figure 5 below demonstrates how each of the thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention feed into the overarching Rural Policy Framework for NI. Subject to approval of the proposed Rural Policy Framework for NI, individual schemes will then be developed into a new Programme entitled ‘Rural Business and Community Investment Programme’. This new Programme will seek to take lessons learned from all previous interventions including the Priority 6 element of the EU RDP and other rural initiatives.

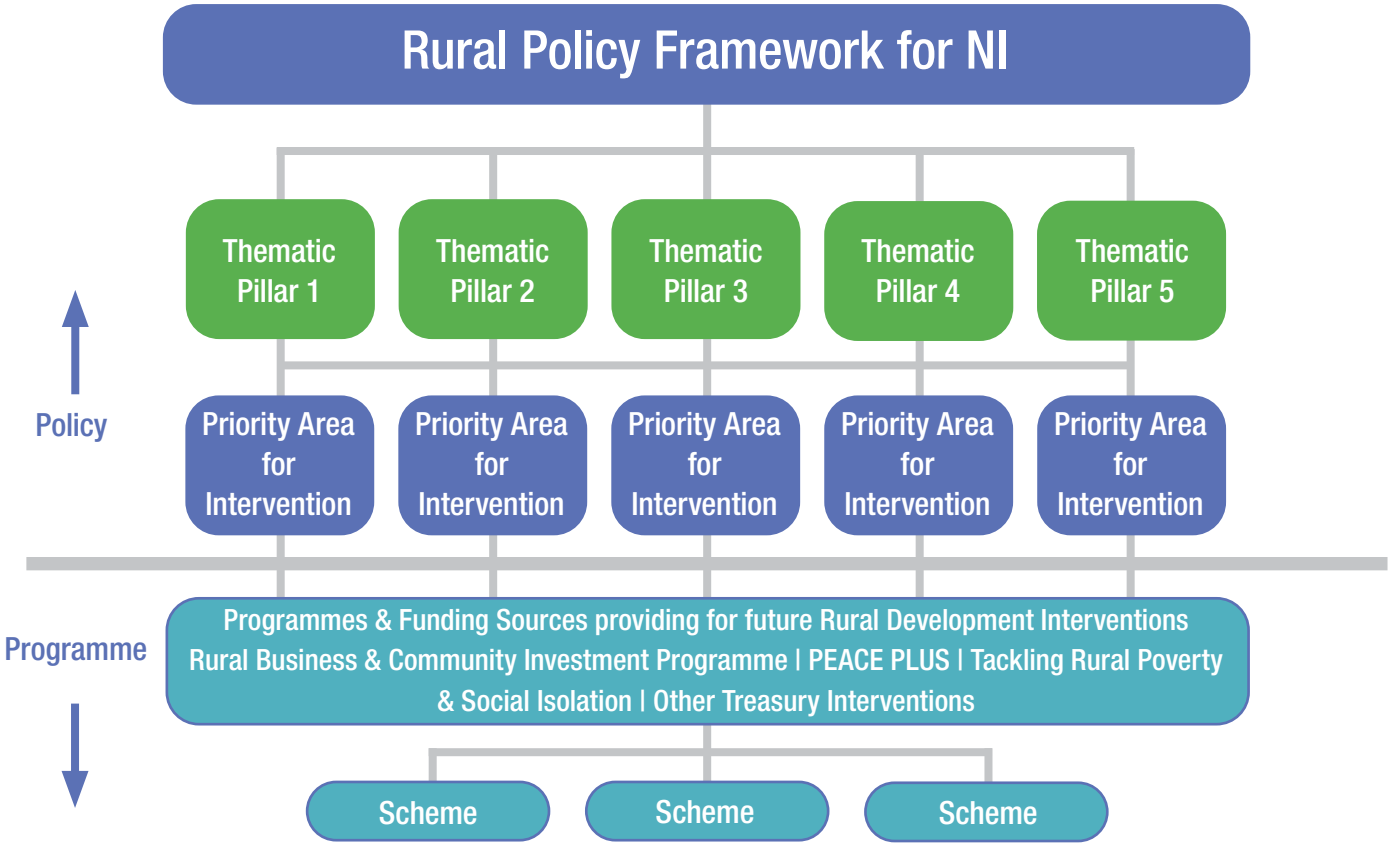


Figure 5: Overview of Rural Policy Framework for NI.

Each Working Group produced a written report that considered the evidence for policy intervention including the identification of potential priority interventions. These reports have been used to feed into the drafting of the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

A formal public rural stakeholder engagement event entitled '*Working Towards A New Rural Framework'* was held on 16 January 2020 in Loughry College, Cookstown. The chairs of each of the five Working Groups delivered a presentation outlining issues identified, evidence base and potential priority interventions identified. Each presentation was followed by round-table discussions with attendees.

This event provided an opportunity for the Department to obtain feedback from 125 key stakeholders (a list of organisations represented is included in Annex 4) on the proposals for the development of the Rural Policy Framework for NI. On the day there was strong endorsement from the attendees in relation to the Thematic Pillars and associated priority interventions within the Framework. Issues raised by stakeholders included: transport and infrastructure; rural regeneration of villages; rural isolation and poverty; future funding, health and wellbeing; and the wider impacts of loss of EU Funding on the rural economy. The common issue identified across all Thematic Pillars was the need for improved Broadband connectivity in rural areas. The information gathered at the stakeholder engagement event has been used to inform the Rural Policy Framework for NI. Annex 5 outlines the key messages highlighted by stakeholders on the day.

Our evidence gathering and drafting of the Rural Policy Framework for NI was at a fairly advanced stage prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout 2020, we had the unique opportunity to launch a number of pilot schemes. The purpose of these pilots were to test the assumptions emerging from the draft Framework; to assist us further in the policy development process taking into account emerging needs; and to provide practical and much needed intervention support to rural businesses and communities. Central to the pilots was the ability to address rural need in a sustainable way through minimising any gap between existing support programmes and new programmes. We will be completing full evaluations of each of the pilots in the near future, although, it was clear that there is a renewed appreciation for access to nature, Green Growth, and sustainability in a post COVID-19 world. The pilots launched to date include: a Website Development Initiative with Tourism NI; a Rural Micro-Business Growth Scheme; a Tourism Collaboration Experiences Scheme; a Rural Social Economy Investment Scheme; a Micro Food Business Investment Scheme; and a Rural Halls Refurbishment Scheme.

We also had the opportunity to present oral evidence on the draft Rural Policy Framework for NI and pilot schemes to the AERA Committee on 26 November 2020.

Q3) In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five challenges from the options outlined below. Rank these five challenges by priority from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most significant challenge, 2 being less significant etc.)

- Access to public services (e.g. health, education and social services).
- Availability of appropriate and adequate community facilities/supports for different age groups.
- Broadband/mobile phone connectivity.
- Changing demographics (e.g. ageing population, new communities, and retention of young people in rural areas).
- Climate change and environmental sustainability.
- Future of farming/agri-food sector.
- Jobs and business.
- Managing tourism in a sustainable way.
- Transport and infrastructure.

If there are any other challenges you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box below.

Q4) In your opinion, what are the main opportunities facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five opportunities from the options outlined below. Rank these five opportunities by priority from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most significant opportunity, 2 being less significant etc.)

- Diversification within farming/agri-food sector.
- Economic development of markets (local, national and international) and sectors (both non-traditional and emerging).
- Enabling communities (e.g. supporting local leadership, groups and volunteers, enhancing community amenities).
- Enterprise and employment: expanding opportunities (e.g. Social Enterprise, apprenticeships, supporting entrepreneurs).
- Joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland.
- Optimisation of digital connectivity (e.g. Broadband and emerging technologies) (e.g. remote working, research, development and innovation, and future jobs).
- Revitalisation of towns and villages.
- Sustainable development and climate adaptation (e.g. renewable energy).
- Tourism: expansion of options including heritage, recreation and activity tourism.
- Transport infrastructure and services.

If there are any other opportunities you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box below.

The next section provides an overview of some key rural statistics and information available at a high level.

Rural Statistics and Information

Introduction

Around 670,000 people (36%) of the NI population live in a rural area, and although their circumstances are in many ways very similar to those of urban dwellers, there are distinct urban/rural differences which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas outside of Belfast. Rural industry and employment differ in nature from that of towns and cities, and difficulties with accessibility and connectivity, social and digital, are almost uniquely rural. The cost of living tends to be higher in rural than urban areas and rural households are more likely to experience fuel poverty. Nevertheless, the rural population on average enjoy a better quality of life than their urban counterparts, in terms of health, happiness and life satisfaction.

The statistical and other information set out below is intended to provide a broad overview of many of the key issues affecting rural communities. More detailed information can be found in the 'Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2020' report.[9]

In the first instance it is important to understand what is meant by the term 'rural' which is outlined in more detail in the next section.

Definition of Rural

Whilst there is no single definition of what the term 'rural' means, in 2015 the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) recommended a default, that settlements with a population of less than 5,000, and areas of open countryside should be defined as rural. The classification also took into account service provision and incorporated measures of distance to each settlement as within or outside 20 and 30 minute drive times of a medium or larger town with a population of 10,000 or more. These measures were intended as proxies for accessibility, as previous research has indicated that towns of this size are large enough to provide access to all key services and those rural areas in their vicinity are likely to thrive. Market towns are likely to have connections with city regions and linkages between urban and rural areas are beneficial to both.

The next section includes some of the key findings affecting rural communities at a NI regional level as identified by the Policy, Economics and Statistics Division within DAERA in the 'Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2020' Report.

9 Available at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Key%20Rural%20Issues%202020%20-%20Final.pdf

Key Statistical Rural Issues Findings - NI Region

The infographic in Figure 6 below provides a brief overview of the key issues affecting both urban and rural areas and the differences between the two.

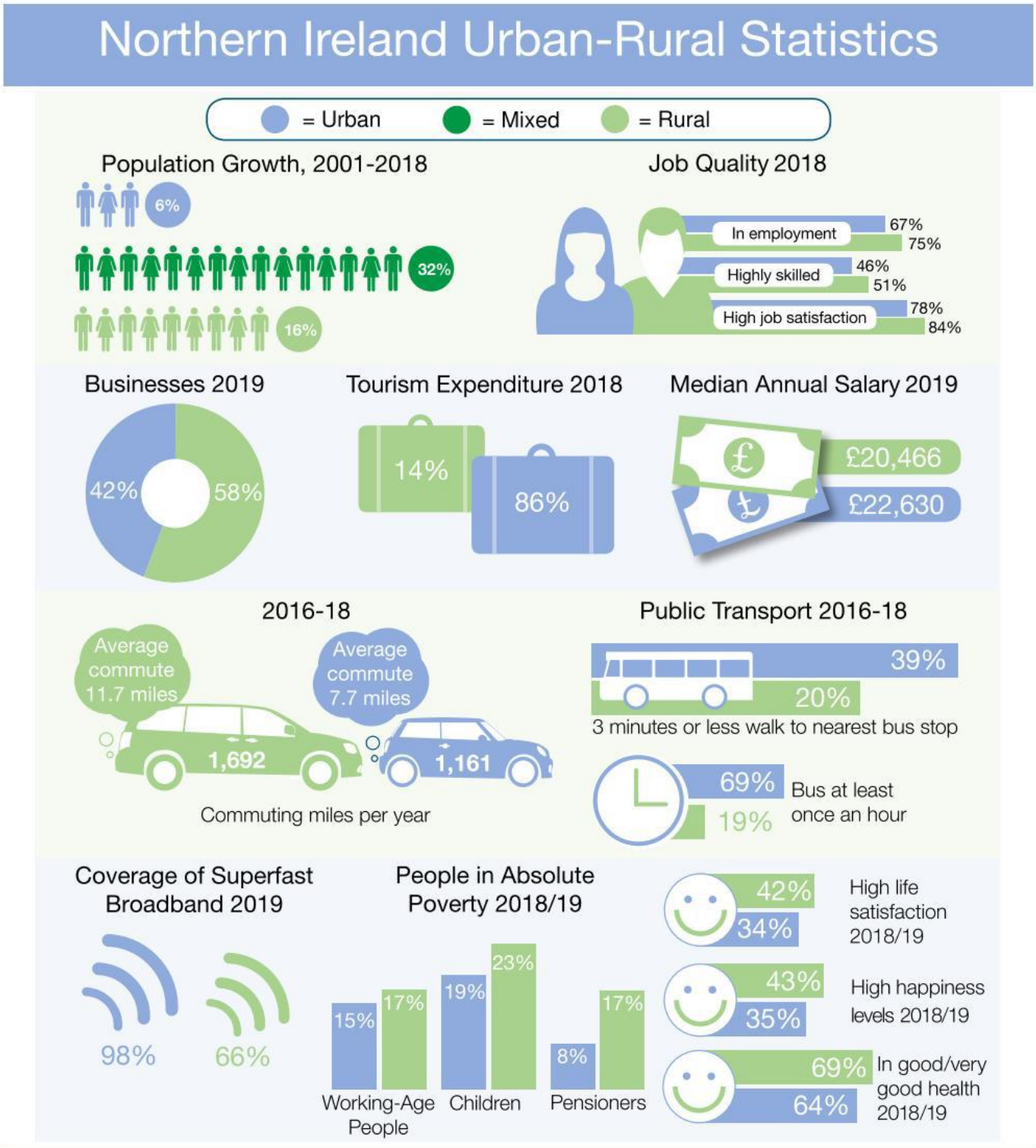


Figure 6: Taken from Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2020 report available at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Key%20Rural%20Issues%202020%20Infographic_0.pdf

The table below provides evidence of key issues affecting rural communities at a NI regional level. This evidence is being used to support equitable treatment of rural communities in policies and programmes across government.

Key Findings - Issues Affecting Rural Communities in NI

- Over 80% of the NI land mass is rural and more than one in three of the population live in rural areas. Population growth in rural areas outstrips that in urban areas. Between 2001 and 2018 rural populations grew by 16% in comparison to 6% for urban areas.
- The adult populations of rural and urban areas are very similar in terms of educational achievement, but on average, young people from rural areas leave school with higher qualifications and are more likely to enter higher education than their urban peers. There are, however, intra-rural differences in qualifications and destinations of school leavers with those rural dwellers living more than an hour's drive from Belfast less likely to have achieved degree level or higher qualifications (23%) than their urban counterparts (30%), and were more likely to have no formal qualification (25% compared to 18%).
- Rural people of working age are more likely to be in full-time employment, and less likely to be economically inactive than those living in towns and cities.
- In 2018, people living in rural areas were more likely to be in employment, with 74% employed either full or part-time. Similarly, this group was less likely to be economically inactive compared to those living in urban areas. Earnings levels for public sector workers are on average higher in urban than in rural areas, while for those in the private sector, salaries in rural and urban workplaces are very similar. However, people working in rural areas more than an hour's drive from Belfast have lowest average earnings of all, whether in the public or the private sector. In 2019, the median salary overall in rural areas was £20,466 compared to £22,630 in urban areas. Figure 7 shows the median salary according to urban and rural areas:

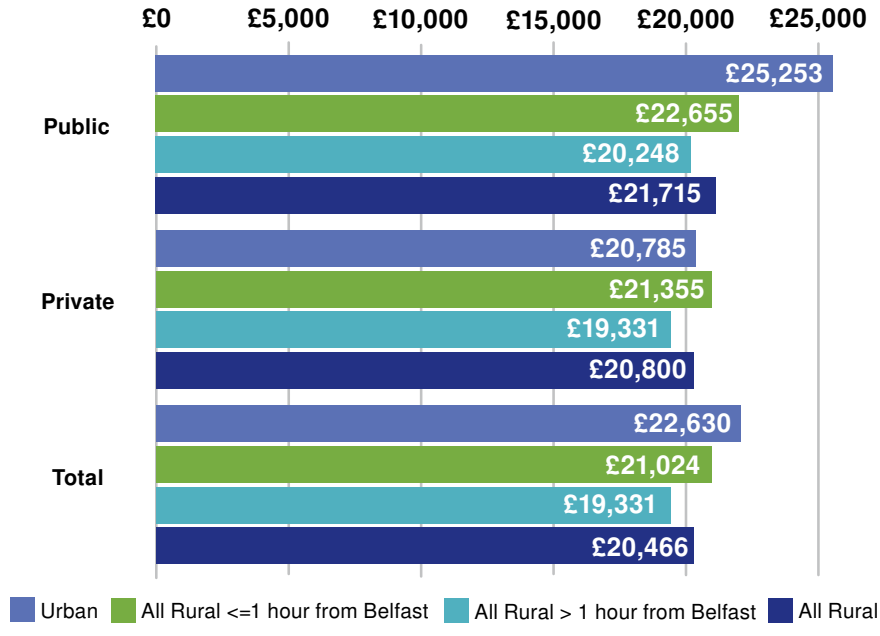


Figure 7: Median Annual Salary by Workplace Address/Sector, Urban/Rural/NI Comparison, 2019 (Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) 2019, NISRA).

Key Findings - Issues Affecting Rural Communities in NI

- Workers who live (but not necessarily work) in rural areas are on average more highly skilled and enjoy higher job satisfaction than those who live in towns and cities.
- Workers from rural areas have an average commute for almost one and a half times more than urban workers, and travel on average over 400 miles more annually to get to work. Rural workers (91%) are also far more likely to use private transport to commute than those from urban areas (74%).
- In 2020, more than half (58%) of all businesses in NI are located in rural areas, yet rural businesses account for only around a fifth of employees and roughly a quarter of total business turnover.
- The rural and urban economies also differ in terms of industry sector, with rural businesses predominantly engaged in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and construction, whereas urban businesses are more widely spread across a variety of sectors.
- Tourism is important in terms of employment and economic growth, but less than a fifth (18%) of all overnight tourism visits to NI and only 14% of associated expenditure take place in rural locations.
- Broadband speed and availability, though improving, are still much lower in rural than in urban areas. Access to public transport in rural areas is also much lower than that in towns and cities.
- Accessing key services is more difficult for the rural than the urban population. In some rural areas, services are simply inaccessible without private transport, and journey times to key services by car are on average twice as long for rural dwellers as for those living in towns and cities. The disparity in access is greater for those living in rural areas more than an hour from Belfast than those living closer to the city.
- People living in rural areas are consistently more likely than those in urban areas to rate their happiness and life satisfaction as high and their health as good.
- Life expectancy is much higher in rural areas and a number of indicators point to better overall mental and emotional wellbeing in the rural than the urban population. However, people living in rural areas on average wait much longer for emergency services than those living in towns and cities.
- People from rural locations are less likely to directly experience several crime types than those living in towns and cities. However, the number of recorded crimes with a racist, sectarian or homophobic motivation has increased in rural areas from 2018-19, despite a decline in urban areas.
- Similar proportions of urban and rural households are in relative or absolute poverty. Levels of poverty in households in rural areas distant from Belfast are higher than those of households in urban areas.

Key Findings - Issues Affecting Rural Communities in NI

- Poverty levels in both children and adults of working age are very similar in urban and rural areas as a whole. However, the reverse is true for pensioners. Rural pensioners are nearly twice as likely to experience relative or absolute poverty as their urban counterparts. Figure 8 shows the proportion of individuals in poverty after housing costs for 2018/19:

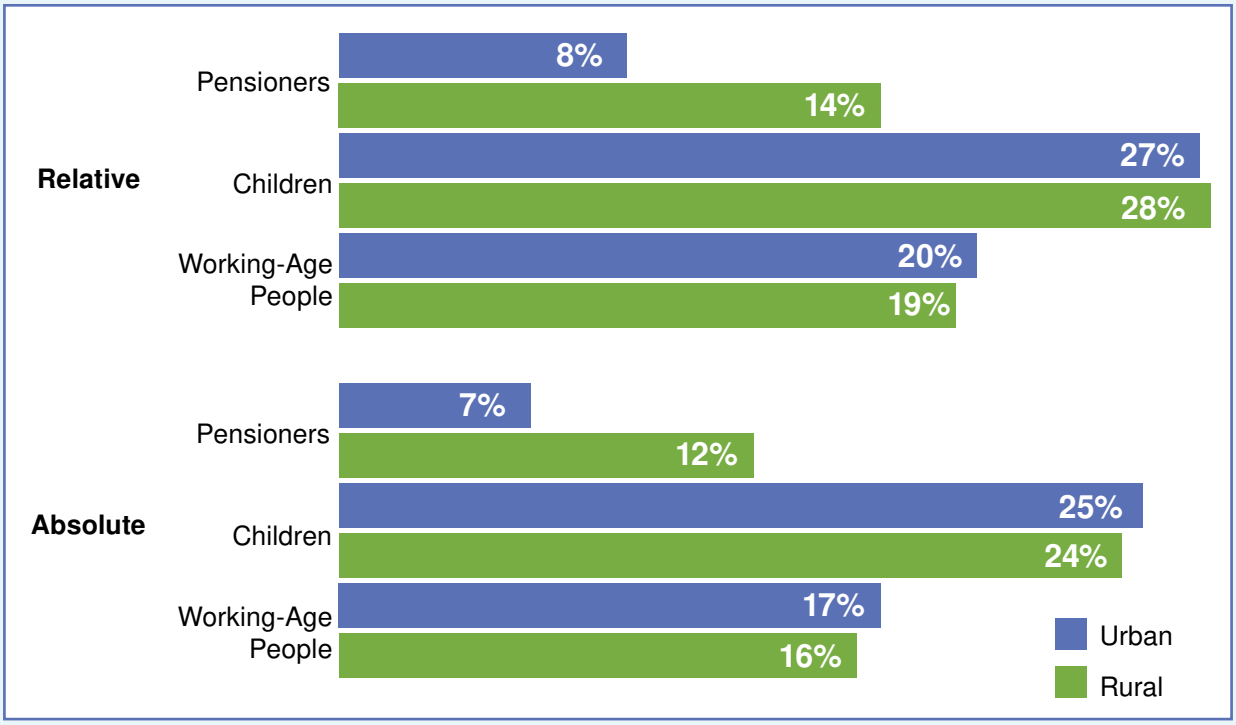


Figure 8: Proportion of Individuals in Poverty (after Housing Costs), Urban/Rural Comparison, 2018/19 (Source: Households Below Average Income (HBAI), Department for Communities (DfC), 2018/19)

- The cost of living is higher in rural areas. Private transport is often a necessity and car ownership and running costs may consume a greater share of available household income. Rural households are also twice as likely as urban households to be in fuel poverty (e.g. 32% of rural households compared to 16% of those in urban areas).

- Access to social housing is much more limited and levels of home ownership are much higher in rural (80%) than urban areas (63%). House prices in rural areas are on average higher than in towns and cities.

Conclusion

Around 670,000 people live in rural areas in NI, and although their circumstances are in many ways very similar to those of urban dwellers, there are distinct urban/rural differences which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas distant from Belfast. Nevertheless, the rural population on average enjoy a better quality of life than town and city dwellers, in terms of health, happiness and life satisfaction.

In the next section we outline in some detail, the specific evidence gathered and stakeholder feedback received from each of the Working Groups across the five themes. Co-design principles were used throughout the development of each key theme with evidence of the emerging need in rural areas resulting in the development of Priority Interventions. Subject to the outcome of the public consultation, we would seek to take forward those Priority Interventions via a number of different mechanisms including a new Programme.

Output from Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship Working Group

Introduction

The Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship Working Group was tasked with considering the issues that could contribute to the thematic pillar: '***To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish'.*** The research and evidence (see Annex 6 for more detailed information on the evidence base) along with the consultation and engagement played a key role in formulating three priority areas for intervention which feed into the thematic pillar.

Innovation is high on the UK policy agenda with a compelling rationale for investment in establishing and encouraging an environment conducive to innovation. Consideration needs to be given to how innovation is driven from within, in processes and thinking, as well as in the delivery of projects and programmes and in the type of enterprises and entrepreneurial activity supported. Rural entrepreneurship and innovation are also important vehicles for the delivery of the Draft Programme for Government, particularly in delivering a regionally balanced economy.

We would highlight that there is some degree of similarity between thematic pillars 1 and 4. Therefore, in order to avoid any potential overlap, pillar 4 focuses on the 'people' aspect (i.e. employees and addressing the barriers to employment). The next section sets the strategic context within NI for entrepreneurship and innovation.

Strategic Context - Entrepreneurship and Innovation

The importance of entrepreneurship is widely recognised in NI economic policy as is the need for innovation in terms of driving competitiveness and growth, with the potential to contribute to social cohesion, act as a vehicle for personal development, and help resolve social issues.

The Draft DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025 states that:

> *'There is a compelling rationale for government to invest in establishing and encouraging an environment conducive to innovation. Evidence shows that businesses that innovate grow nearly twice as quickly in both employment and turnover [10] as non-innovators. Innovation drives research and development which in turn leads to economic growth'.*[11]

10 NESTA (The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, now known as the Innovation Foundation), 'The Vital 6%' (2009).
11 Economy 2030 - Draft Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfE) (2017).

The draft strategy also recognises that there are a number of barriers to innovation including availability and cost of finance, leadership, technology, research and development and creative thinking skills, risk aversion, and lack of understanding of innovation.

NESTA in their study into 'Rural Innovation'[12] highlighted similarities between urban and rural businesses, however, concluded that it was important for business support providers to recognise the different context in which rural based businesses operate and the different challenges and opportunities they face. The study states that

> *'Innovation in rural areas may be much wider than product innovation, and may incorporate new ways of living, travelling, working and collaborating. Rural innovation may be about different ways of working - perhaps using technology.'*

Entrepreneurship and innovation operate within a complex landscape with various sources of support available for entrepreneurs. Recognising the complexity of the landscape, it is important that DAERA consider opportunities to signpost to existing programmes/services where available and act as a key source of navigation for rural entrepreneurs.

Invest NI, as the economic development agency in NI, supports enterprise creation and development at a number of levels with a focus predominately on scaling up and export (those businesses demonstrating capacity to exceed £250k turnover and 25% exports).

The 'Go for It' programme delivered by local government provides individuals with business start-up advice and mentoring. It should be noted that there is no grant assistance included with this programme.

Opportunities should exist to design bespoke or tailored programmes, particularly at the lower end towards micro and small enterprises/businesses (new and existing), to address rural specific needs relating to groups, sectors or gaps. For example, targeted programmes on farm diversification; women in rural enterprise; rural youth entrepreneurship; rural social economy or in support of emerging/growth sectors where evidence supports this need and where there is currently little to no provision. The next section highlights some key statistics and findings in relation to innovation and entrepreneurship within NI.

12 NESTA (The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, now known as the Innovation Foundation), Rural Innovation (2007).

Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland - Key Findings

The table below highlights some key findings identified by the Working Group in relation to innovation and entrepreneurship in NI.

Category	Findings
Entrepreneurship and Innovation	• Levels of entrepreneurial activity are a vital sign of any economy. Research indicates that NI has historically lagged behind the rest of the UK in terms of enterprise start-up; level of innovative activity; and collaboration. • Entrepreneurship and innovation operate within a complex landscape, with a range of players offering predominately standardised products with a focus on scaling up and export (those businesses demonstrating capacity to exceed £250k turnover and 25% exports). • According to the GEM UK: Northern Ireland Report 2017 the Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) in NI in 2017 was 6.5% compared to the UK average of 8.7%. Those aged between 25-34 years old in NI were most entrepreneurial and females in NI were half as likely to be entrepreneurs as males. Opportunity also exists to tap into the entrepreneurial potential of 18-24-year olds. There is a need to make enterprise and entrepreneurship visible to the existing and potential talent pool in rural areas including graduates. • Within NI, the highest TEA rates are typically found in Mid Ulster District Council area while Derry & Strabane have the lowest. Just under 30% of the non-entrepreneurial working age population perceive good start-up opportunities locally. The UK rate, which is almost 40%, continues to be significantly higher than that for NI. • Innovations and entrepreneurial accomplishments of rural women are imperative to the future progress and viability of rural areas. The Treasury commissioned *'Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship (2019)'* identified 3 areas of opportunities to help female entrepreneurs including: increasing the funding directed towards them; greater family care support; and making entrepreneurship more accessible to women and increasing support locally, through relatable and accessible mentors and networks. The government is aiming to increase the number of female entrepreneurs by half by 2030, equivalent to nearly 600,000 additional female entrepreneurs.

Category	Findings
	• The DfE in its context paper 'Entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland (2018)' highlights: ~ NI historically has a comparatively low business birth rate compared to the rest of the UK, with a 10.2% rate in 2016 compared to a 14.6% UK average[13], but the rate is increasing steadily in recent years, with NI showing the greatest rate of growth over the last five years within the UK; ~ The rate of business closure in NI was significantly lower than in England and the UK as a whole in 2017, with 1.0% of businesses closing in the last 12 months compared to 2.1% in the UK as a whole;[14] ~ The proportion of non-entrepreneurs who thought they had skills to start a business was significantly lower in NI with 31.9% compared to 40.6% in the UK. Those expressing their intention to start a business was much lower at 5.1% compared to a 9.3% UK average;[15] and ~ NI has a lower proportion of innovation-active businesses with 40.3% of firms from NI actively engaged in innovation.
Social Economy	• The Social Enterprise Northern Ireland 'Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy Report (2019)' provided a comprehensive survey of the social enterprise sector in NI showing: ~ Social economy is worth £625 million to the economy. The employment base has grown from 12,200 in 2013 to 24,860 in 2018 and equivalent growth in turnover has increased from £592.7 million to £980 million in 2018; and ~ 53% of social enterprises employ half their workforce from their immediate locality. Social enterprise activity is predominately concentrated in urban centres, the North East and North West, with the number of organisations significantly lower in the West (Fermanagh & Tyrone) and East (Down). 53% of social enterprises are in Belfast in comparison to Antrim 16%, Armagh 11%, Derry/ Londonderry 13%, Down 3%, Fermanagh 1% and Tyrone 3%.

13 Business Demography UK, ONS, 2016.
14 GEM UK 2017 Monitoring Report, July 2018.
15 GEM UK 2017 Monitoring Report, July 2018.

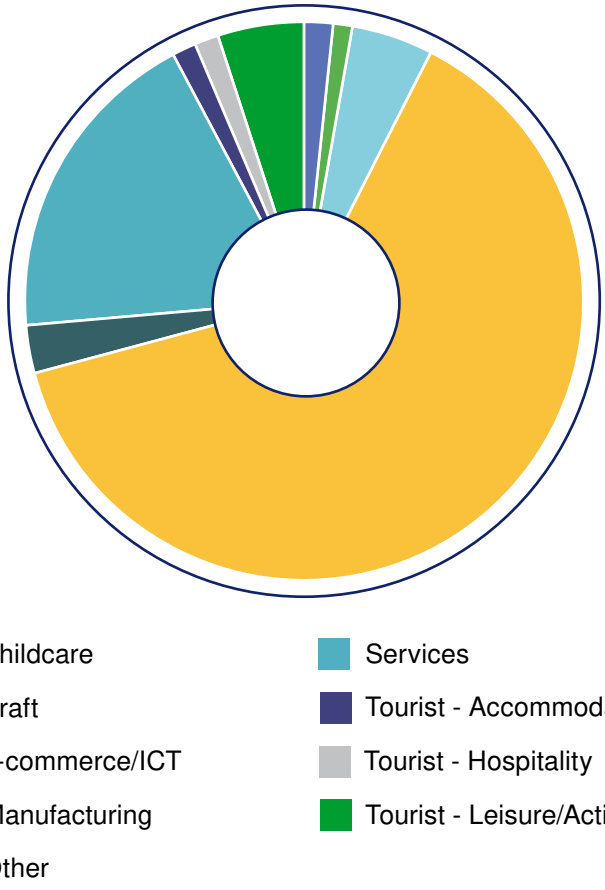
Category	Findings
	• A report commissioned by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (now DAERA) in 2016[16] in relation to the scope and potential of social enterprises in rural areas highlighted: ~ The main identified constraints on the sector were lack of available finance, lack of awareness and support, staffing (skilled and voluntary) and business planning strategies and skills. Organisations also suggested that the role and potential contribution of social enterprises was not well understood at both a government and wider community level. This was especially true in relation to the challenges that rurality, characterised by low population densities and isolated rural communities, can bring in terms of the cost of delivering services in rural areas; and ~ Four areas where rural social enterprises could be supported include: recruiting and retaining volunteers; awareness, promotion and marketing of the sector; willingness to collaborate; and funding mechanisms.
Businesses	• There are more businesses located in rural areas of NI than in urban areas. The Inter-Departmental Business Register (April 2019) shows the total number of businesses in NI to be 74,060[17] of which 43,000 are located in rural areas (58%). However, turnover in rural areas is considerably less and accounts for only 25% of the NI turnover. • Micro and small businesses are particularly dominant in rural areas with 94% of rural businesses are considered micro (i.e. businesses with less than 10 employees). Queens University and the Enterprise Research Centre in their study of 'Understanding Micro Businesses in Northern Ireland (2018)' identified 28,500 micro businesses in NI employing 111,000 people (19.7% of workforce). The research also showed: ~ In 2017, micro enterprises surveyed generated sales of £10.4bn (17.2% of all NI firms); ~ Family ownership is more important in NI than elsewhere in the UK with 78% of micro businesses family owned. 54% of micro business owners placed a high priority on building a business to hand on to family;

16 DARD Commissioned E&I Programme 'The impact of low-income and poverty on the wellbeing of rural households and the role and scope of social enterprises in delivering solutions' Project Number 13/02/01 AFBI Claire Jack; Duncan Anderson.
17 Total of all businesses including micro (0-9), small (10-49), medium/large 50+, Inter-Department Business Register, April 2019.

Category	Findings
	~ On average 10% of micro business sales are from export markets. 20% have ambitions to build nationally/internationally; and ~ The level of innovative activity in NI was the lowest of any UK region with 13% of innovating firms in NI compared to 23% in the UK as a whole. • Sustainability and stability of businesses is very important in a rural context. Support needs to cater for existing businesses (with a focus on efficiency, improving productivity, profitability, modernisation, succession & next generation growth & development). It also needs to accelerate the growth potential of ambitious rural businesses & encourage new business start-ups (particularly within groups or sectors lagging behind or where opportunity for innovation exists). • More rural businesses are owned by people for whom export is not the main driver. However, critical mass is important, given the small populations and higher transportation costs etc. There should be opportunities to create a critical mass of 'buyers' and 'suppliers' in rural areas. • **Rural Business Investment Scheme 2014-2020** - an analysis of this scheme which falls within Priority 6 was carried out in January 2020. The Scheme aims to assist new and existing rural businesses to become sustainable and to grow and is open to micro and small businesses offering grant aid from a minimum of £5,000 up to a maximum of £90,000 at 50% of eligible expenditure. The scheme provided the only opportunity for rural businesses to access grant aid. The findings are consistent with wider research particularly in highlighting a disparity between male and female entrepreneurs; a high demand for support from existing businesses and lower levels of youth, social enterprise and farm diversification engagement. The review showed: ~ A total of 480 business supported with the most frequent award in and around £30,000; ~ Of the businesses successful in securing grant aid assistance, 84% were located off-farm with 16% considered on-farm; ~ 64% of businesses were classified as micro with 36% considered small;

Category	Findings
	~ The chart below shows the Breakdown of Business Themes supported under the Rural Business Investment Scheme. Manufacturing represented the highest percentage in terms of business theme at 55% of all businesses supported:

Chart: Breakdown of Business Themes - RDP 2014-2020



~ 83% of businesses supported were existing, 15% new and 2% social enterprise;

~ A total of 764 Full Time jobs and 159 Part Time jobs have been created to date through the scheme.

~ In relation to gender and age, males benefitted most from the scheme with 76% of beneficiaries identified as male and 24% female. Of those, male and female beneficiaries, the highest percentage were over 40 years old with 230 male beneficiaries over 40 and 79 female beneficiaries. This is in stark contrast to beneficiaries under 25 years old with only 3 recorded.

Category	Findings
Farm Diversification	• Government figures for 2018/2019 showed a fall in farm incomes. On average they fell by 23% with only cereal business showing a slight increase. The average income in 2018/2019 was just over £26,000, a drop of £7,800 on the previous year. Although agriculture remains the anchor of many rural communities, falling farm incomes require new thinking around farm assets and resources. • The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) in 2015 found that the incidence of farm diversification in 2010 was considerably lower in NI (5%) than was the case in England (18%). • A 2019 study carried out by AFBI[18] has shown that there is a range of farm diversification strategies being pursued in NI. The primary motivating factor in pursuing farm-level diversification is the need to generate a new income source. However, factors such as resource availability, succession and funding also are important influences. Farm level diversification contributes to both sustainability of family farms and to the wider rural economy. Activities seen as having potential opportunity for growth include: agri and food tourism, care services (including social farming) and professional services. • The main factors identified as constraints to diversification were broadband, planning, business rates, a lack of support networks and a fear of failure. • The AFBI study identified 7 key policy recommendations: ~ Farm diversification businesses tend to fall into the category of 'micro-businesses', involving mainly the farm owner and/or some family members. There is a need to explore how support can be provided to these prospective businesses in a less bureaucratic way. This could include softer support mechanisms other than financial grants such as developing 'softer' business skills through training; ~ Government targets around job creation and turnover were perceived as too narrow and not appropriate metrics to evaluate successful farm diversification programmes. A project's contribution may be better measured through the additional income it provides for the farm business and its contribution it makes to farm and household sustainability. This requires consideration from a policy

18 Encouraging entrepreneurship, business innovation and diversification at farm level in Northern Ireland, Conall Mullan, Claire Jack, Austen Ashfield, Adewale Henry Adenuga, AFBI 2019, project 16/2/02 under Policy Lead, Mr Niall Heaney.

Category	Findings
	perspective in terms of how support is allocated and what metrics are used to assess the success of funded projects; ~ A more joined-up approach to developing rural programmes around farm diversification and developing entrepreneurship is required with greater collaboration between government departments, policy development and delivery. DAERA should provide a 'championing' and coordinating role but there needs to be a wider involvement of other government departments and agencies; ~ Policymakers should consider whether dedicated support should be provided to farm families in devising strategies for diversification. The availability of guidance around diversification, specifically for farm families should help to ensure the development of sustainable diversification businesses which will contribute to the local rural economy; ~ Rural broadband connectivity needs to be improved to help with the promotion, visibility and running of on farm diversification projects; ~ There is a need to provide short courses in a range of business-related areas through the correct learning mechanisms. Training and mentoring support should extend beyond the initial project start-up period; and ~ There should be greater promotion of exemplar diversification businesses to encourage peer to peer knowledge exchange and increase the visibility of successful diversification projects.
Tourism	• Rural areas are lagging behind in terms of tourism expenditure. An opportunity exists to focus on place-based product development and innovations that add to visitor experiences e.g. emergence of food tourism experiences and how the rural sector can deliver, innovate and capitalise on this.

Category	Findings
Connectivity, Infrastructure & Planning	• The following all impact negatively on rural business development and competitiveness: ~ Poor transport infrastructure; ~ Broadband speeds and connectivity; ~ Costs of transportation and communications; ~ Lack of skilled labour; ~ Planning policies; ~ Lack of similar firms to network with and localised business network opportunities; and ~ Limited access to local skills and training.
Training, capacity and capability	• Capability, capacity and skills development are as important as capital grant and should be seen as key enablers in support of enterprise and entrepreneurship development and growth.

The next section outlines in detail, how the Working Group developed the priority interventions under the rural innovation and entrepreneurship thematic pillar.

Development of the Priority Interventions

The Working Group interventions are framed within the context of three key elements: Champion; Empower and Enable to ensure successful delivery of the thematic pillar. Each element is interrelated and interdependent and may be packaged collectively as a 'wrap around programme' with the champion and empower elements identified as essential precursors to any enabling investment particularly for new businesses. Each element is outlined in more detail below:

- **Champion** - built on leadership principles, norms, work habits and vision, mission and values, this element is designed to improve the motivation to prioritise rural innovation and entrepreneurship. There is a need to work together with others both inside and outside government, to pool resources, ideas and innovations to maximise the opportunities for rural and to deliver better, more connected outcomes for rural dwellers.
- **Empower** - focused on building the capacity and capability of people to engage in rural innovation and entrepreneurship. This could involve maximising opportunities whether in industry, business, local development or volunteering in communities.

- **Enable** - focused on providing financial support (Grant Aid) to improve the opportunities for rural innovation and entrepreneurship. This is a commitment to action and provide support to take forward practical projects and programmes that will make a difference to the everyday lives of rural people.

The following priority interventions have therefore been developed for rural innovation and entrepreneurship in NI:

- **Intervention 1 - Champion**
  Develop a culture of rural innovation.

- **Intervention 2 - Empower**
  Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.

- **Intervention 3 - Enable**
  Invest in and develop our rural economy.

The diagram below demonstrates how the three interventions are interrelated and interdependent.

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

A stakeholder event was held in January 2020 to review engagement findings across all five policy working groups. Overall the feedback was positive, with the proposed thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention endorsed on the day. In regards to each thematic pillar, the stakeholders were asked their views on what they agreed with; and what needed changed or was missing. The feedback received in relation to the rural innovation and entrepreneurship thematic pillar from the public rural stakeholder engagement event held in January 2020 is summarised below (detailed feedback received on the day is available in Annex 7):

- The need for wraparound support (animation, training and development, mentoring) and grant aid featured prominently;
- Whilst it was noted there was a need to support social enterprises in rural areas, respondents highlighted more was required in terms of promotion and awareness raising in relation to the social enterprise model in rural areas with many organisations not realising that they were in fact a social enterprise;
- The potential for farm diversification featured particularly in a post EU RDP environment;
- There was general acceptance of a need to support new business start-ups and existing businesses and an acknowledgement of a need to support sustainability and stability and to reduce the emphasis on job creation as a measurement of success;
- There was a need identified to encourage better connections and linkages both internally across government and externally with colleges, universities and to encourage businesses to network and cluster;
- Focus on innovation was welcomed and a need for it to be applied to the whole approach. Linked to this was the opportunity to share practice and learn from other regions;
- Improved connectivity, infrastructure and planning policies were considered key requirements to the successful attainment of the thematic pillar;
- Stakeholders indicated there was a high degree of similarity between thematic pillars 1 and 4 and that greater distinction may be needed to avoid any potential overlap. It was suggested that thematic pillar 4 should focus more on the ‘people’ aspect (employee side) addressing, for example, the barriers to employment; and
- There were a number of comments for DAERA in relation to the simplification of regulations. These will require further consideration when developing operating procedures for any new schemes or programmes that may arise.

The next section outlines some potential implications that have since been identified due to COVID-19.

Potential Implications of COVID-19

The Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship Working Group presented their evidence and findings prior to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. To ensure that the Rural Policy Framework accurately reflects need, Working Group Members were asked in May 2020 to advise if there were any impacts on priorities previously identified or emerging issues that may need to be taken into account.

The impacts of COVID-19 on Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship were highlighted as follows:

- The Priority Interventions are more valid than ever in helping and supporting the rural economy to get back on its feet. In the short to medium term, a focus may need to be on recovery rather than growth. There is also a need to focus on the micro-enterprise sector.
- Remote working and digitalisation will likely become more prominent. There is a strong sense of opportunity now for rural communities with a realisation that people can work from anywhere, that local shops and services are essential and that community facilities/ assets are hugely significant for rural areas.
- Social interaction and innovation remains important, particularly for young people. There is an opportunity to combine remote working, employment, enterprise opportunities in rural areas with community facilities and to create more accessible community hubs in rural areas with access to broadband.

Feedback outlined above indicated that no changes are required to the high-level priority interventions given that the interventions are broad enough to incorporate the issues identified above.

Linkages to Programme for Government Outcomes

Entrepreneurship and innovation contribute to at least two of the twelve Programme for Government outcomes as follows:

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy; and
- **Outcome 5:** We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.

We believe that entrepreneurship and innovation links into the Programme for Government Outcomes outlined above as follows:

- These outcomes set out actions to increase the number of new businesses and encourage entrepreneurial activity, placing emphasis on increasing the number of new business start-ups and growing the size of existing businesses;

- These outcomes are about building a society and an economy which is renowned for its innovation and creativity and admired for the opportunities afforded to people of all backgrounds to fulfil their potential. Innovation drives productivity and economic growth as companies that innovate and collaborate are more productive, more inclined to export and employ more highly qualified people than those that do not;
- To prosper in a global economy, our social, economic and cultural assets need to work together to foster greater creativity, innovation and inclusiveness and to create an environment where arts and culture can flourish as part of an ever more innovative, creative society; and
- Digital technology has become a driving force across all aspects of our social, cultural and economic lives and research has identified a growing need to ensure that everyone has the digital skills needed to benefit from new technology and to remain safe online.

Conclusion

Levels of entrepreneurial activity are a vital sign of any economy. There are some very real differences in the characteristics of businesses located in urban and rural areas. Micro and small businesses are particularly dominant in rural economies. This thematic pillar recognises the future success of the rural economy is inextricably linked to the capacity of rural businesses to innovate, to identify new opportunities that develop, strengthen and grow our rural economy. It should be noted that there is a distinction between innovative business and supporting businesses to innovate (with the latter offering greater opportunity to engage businesses in the process of innovation maximising longer-term impact).

Q5) Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship: To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Develop a culture of rural innovation.
- Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Invest in and develop our rural economy.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Output from Rural Tourism Working Group

Introduction

The Rural Tourism Working Group was tasked with considering the issues that could contribute to the thematic pillar: ***'To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment'.*** The research and evidence (see Annex 8 for more detailed information on the evidence base) along with the consultation and engagement played a key role in formulating four priority areas for intervention which feed into the thematic pillar.

The benefits and positive impacts of tourism are not limited to revenue and job creation. Development of the sector and its component parts, hotels, restaurants, visitor attractions, and infrastructure, benefit not only tourists but also local communities, creating better environments in which to work, live and play. Furthermore, when developed and managed properly, tourism has the capacity to cultivate and showcase local history, culture and natural and built heritage, and engenders a sense of community, togetherness and pride. The focus of this Working Group was on sustainable rural tourism, which is defined in more detail in the next section.

What is "Sustainable Tourism"?

A fundamental relationship that exists between the environment and tourism. The environment, natural or built, is the most fundamental ingredient for tourism development yet it is highly dependent on the availability and the type of attractive natural and/or built resources in an area, which tourists demand and pay for. However, the increasing amount of tourism development often erodes the environmental resources on which it depends.

On the other hand, tourism has the potential to create beneficial effects on the environment by contributing to environmental protection and conservation. It is a way to raise awareness of environmental values and it can serve as a tool to finance protection of natural areas and increase their economic importance. In order to prevent these haphazard development and negative impacts, tourism needs to be ecologically acceptable in the long term, and financially viable and fair from a social and ethical point of view for local communities. In other words, it must be sustainable.

This Framework's thematic pillar on sustainable rural tourism, uses the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) definition on sustainable tourism as follows: *'Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities'.*

The vision for tourism in NI is:

- Renowned as a world-class short break destination;
- With a skilled, competitive and committed industry;
- Working with government for the long-term success of tourism; and
- Focused on fostering high growth, high quality indigenous businesses.

Northern Ireland - Embrace a Giant Spirit

In November 2019 a new tourism destination brand for Northern Ireland was launched at World Travel Market London, that is now used to promote Northern Ireland on the island of Ireland and internationally, with the aim of increasing visitor numbers and ensuring economic impact across all regions. Northern Ireland - Embrace a Giant Spirit will communicate a high-quality experience to visitors that is recognisable as distinctively Northern Irish.

The next section provides some key findings relevant to tourism within Northern Ireland.

Tourism in Northern Ireland - Key Findings

Whilst NI is still a relatively new, emerging destination and lags behind the other nations in the UK in terms of tourism's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and overseas visitor spend per night, the opportunity for growth is significant with the NI tourism sector developing with pace in recent years. In particular, since 2012 overnight trips to NI increased by over one fifth, and associated spend grew to over £1 billion in 2019. The table below highlights some key findings identified by the Working Group in relation to the Tourism Industry in NI. These findings were identified in early 2020, pre-COVID-19, therefore where feasible we have updated statistics using the most recent information available to us.

Category	Findings[19]
NI Tourism Market	• The Northern Ireland Urban Rural Statistics produced by DAERA[20] shows total tourism expenditure in 2018 in rural areas was 14% in comparison to 86% in urban areas. • Tourism NI data confirmed that 59% of all visitor tourism expenditure in 2018 in NI was concentrated in Belfast and Causeway, Coast and Glens.

19 Information sourced from Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2018 (Published 6 June 2019, NISRA) and NI tourism performance data (January-March 2019) released by NISRA
20 Available at: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-rural-urban-statistics

Category	Findings
	• In 2019 the Giant's Causeway remained NI's number one visitor attraction, welcoming 1 million visitors. • Tourism NI's visitor survey (2018) highlights: ~ Strong endorsement of the overall NI experience with attractions and activities on offer across NI, however, there is still a lack of a 'sense of place' and a wider tourism offer; ~ 60% of respondents indicated that NI provides enough to do for a weekend or less, however, there was still a lack of night-time and Sunday experiences; and ~ There was room for a wider food and drink offer. • Feedback from the Tourism Ireland's market reviews suggested a need for: ~ New, compelling projects unique to NI; ~ Experiences that are authentic, connect people with place, drawing on the heritage and landscape; ~ Regional and seasonal experiences; ~ Better integration and connectivity between experiences including food experiences; ~ Better orientation and navigation to attractions; and ~ Authentic NI including living historical experiences; hidden gems; and nature experiences/adventure activities. These experiences should be open to all. • The Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index (SM): 2019 report for Northern Ireland indicated that: ~ NI's international reputation remains stable, achieving a mid-level ranking of 22 out of 50 nations with a score of 59.38 on the Nation Brands IndexSM; ~ The attribute with the highest score was "Natural beauty" with "Sports" receiving the lowest score; and ~ Visiting or digital exposure to NI (through buying NI products/ visiting websites) was associated with significantly higher scores. • There is a lack of public transport from NI airports; on Sundays; with regular connections to/between rural areas. Many of the main tourist attractions also do not have public transport near them.

Category	Findings
Overnight Trips	• One third of all overnight trips taken in NI in 2019 were enjoyed during the peak season (July - September). • During 2019 there were an estimated 5.3 million overnight trips in NI of which: ~ 2.3 million were internal visitors; ~ 1.5 million visitors were from GB; ~ 0.8 million visitors were from people outside the UK and Ireland; and ~ 0.8 million visitors were from Republic of Ireland (RoI). The total expenditure associated with these trips was £1bn. This was a record breaking spend and was 8% more when compared to 2018. On average there was spend of £2.9m each day. • Research in the GB market, the Tourism NI Visitor Survey 2019 and NISRA statistics all suggest that out of state visitors typically spend 4-5 days in NI. The average length of stay of domestic and RoI visitors is somewhat shorter at between two and three days. • In 2019 when compared to 2018, nights increased by 2%, driven by significant increases in RoI nights (+23%), as well as growth from NI (+5%). • The two main reasons to take an overnight trip in Northern Ireland are 'holiday/pleasure/leisure' and 'visiting friends or relatives'. Research undertaken by Tourism NI demonstrates the principle reasons for people visiting NI are to explore our culture, heritage and landscape. There was a 14% increase in holiday visitors when compared to 2018.
Out of State Visitors	• The 'out of state' markets of RoI, GB, France, Germany, USA and Australia and the emerging Chinese market have been identified as critical to the continued success and growth of NI tourism. • In order to attract more of the right type of visitors and grow NI's tourism economy, Fáilte Ireland has developed an overseas segmentation model focused on understanding visitor motivations and needs. The three segments with the strongest potential for RoI and NI are: ~ Culturally Curious - want to soak up authentic insights into new cultures, art, history and landscapes which are different;

Category	Findings
	~ Social Energisers - want fun-packed social adventures and new experiences; and ~ Great Escapers - want time out from busy lives to reconnect with each other, sharing quality down time, off the beaten track. • In addition to leisure tourism there are a number of further niche market opportunities for NI including Business, Golf and Screen and Cruise tourism. For example, a total of 167 cruise ships docked at NI ports in 2019. This was an increase compared to 128 cruise ships in 2018 and a marked increase from 62 cruise ships in 2013.
Hotel Room Occupancy	• In 2019, an estimated 2.3 million hotel room nights were sold in NI with hotel room occupancy estimated to be 67%. • Guest house/guest accommodation/B&Bs delivered a strong performance throughout 2019 with an additional 41,200 bed-spaces sold compared to the same period in 2018. However, average room and bed-space occupancy recorded decreased, probably affected by the increase in additional rooms to fill compared with 2018.
Employment in tourism related industries	• There were 70,803 employee jobs in tourism related industries in 2019. By the nature of the sector these jobs have been generated both in urban and rural areas of NI.
Visitor Attractions	• NISRA runs an annual survey to collect information on visits to all visitor attractions in Northern Ireland. The key findings in December 2018 were: ~ The top three attractions (excluding parks & gardens) were Giant's Causeway, Titanic Belfast and Ulster Museum. There was an increase of 5% of visits from the previous year to Giant's Causeway and Titanic Belfast; ~ There were a reported 21.1 million visits to visitor attractions; ~ A reported 40% of visits were made by visitors who lived outside of NI; and ~ Country Parks/Parks/Forests accounted for 42% of all visitors reported.

Category	Findings
Managing impact of tourism on built, natural and cultural heritage	• Tourism needs to be developed in the right place and in the right way. This can be done by ensuring that development sites carrying capacity will not be exceeded in terms of both physical and perceptual carrying capacity. • Development should not be to the detriment of any individual or community but should bring positive benefits and become an asset to the community. • Development should not de-value landscapes - development should fit within the landscape and not be imposed on it.

The next section outlines in detail, how the Working Group developed the priority interventions under the sustainable tourism thematic pillar.

Development of the Priority Interventions

The Working Group interventions are framed within the internationally recognised visitors, industry, community, and environment (VICE) model (as set out in Figure 8 below) which identifies sustainable tourism as the interaction between visitors, the industry that provides services to them, the community and culture that hosts them and their collective impact on and response to the environment where it all takes place.

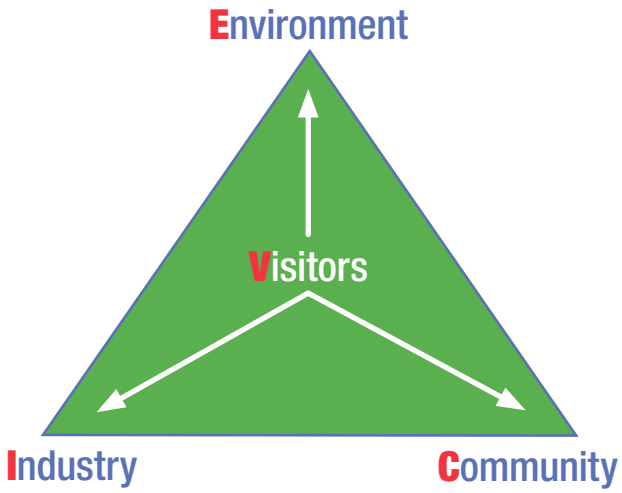


Figure 8: New Zealand Ministry of Tourism et al. (2006)

A successful, sustainable tourism industry needs to identify how to:

- Welcome, involve and satisfy **Visitors**
- Achieve a profitable and prosperous **Industry**
- Engage and benefit host **Communities**
- Protect and enhance the local **Environment**

The following priority interventions have therefore been developed for sustainable rural tourism in NI:

- **Intervention 1 - Visitor**
  Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for NI.
- **Intervention 2 - Industry**
  Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- **Intervention 3 - Community**
  Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- **Intervention 4 - Environment**
  Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

A stakeholder event was held in January 2020 to review engagement findings across all five policy working groups. Overall the feedback was positive, with the proposed thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention endorsed on the day. In regards to each thematic pillar, the stakeholders were asked their views on what they agreed with; and what needed changed or was missing. The feedback received in relation to the rural tourism thematic pillar from the public rural stakeholder engagement event held in January 2020 is summarised below (detailed feedback received on the day is available in Annex 9):

- Tourism should be sustainable, ensuring protection of the environment and possible minimisation of carbon footprint issues whilst enabling appropriate infrastructure linkages

between urban and rural areas to facilitate tourists. There is potential to explore the activity and environmental tourism market, which allows the use of natural assets whilst promoting local health and wellbeing initiatives. This would allow rural communities to also benefit from the tourism product;

- Tourism opportunities such as co-ordination around food/crafts etc. should be considered. Whilst a limited number of "signature projects" are important, there is also an opportunity to maintain and develop local attractions (for locals in the off-season) but with enough to attract out of state visitors in holiday season;
- Partnership working with local communities is needed to ensure a bottom up approach whereby any tourist attraction will benefit the local rural community. There also needs to be a joined up inter-departmental and local government approach to tourism with a link to Community Plans;
- There is a shortage in skills sets (e.g. skilled waiters). Capacity needs to be built up and significant support provided to those in rural areas;
- Planning policies can make rural tourism difficult; and
- A cultural shift is needed by working with local rural communities to embrace tourists and tourism and understand the target audience. In order to make NI more prominent for global visitors, there needs to be a joined up approach between Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI. Market research and branding is important to understand the visitor profile and year round local marketing should be maximised.

The next section outlines some potential implications that have since been identified due to COVID-19.

Potential Implications of COVID-19

The Rural Tourism Working Group presented their evidence and findings prior to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. To ensure that the Rural Policy Framework accurately reflects need, Working Group Members were asked in May 2020 to advise if there were any impacts on priorities previously identified or emerging issues that may need to be taken into account.

The impacts of COVID-19 will have a major impact on Rural Tourism going forward:

- Businesses are in uncertain times both financially and operationally. Assistance will be required for local businesses to re-establish post COVID-19. For example, businesses need to be able to meet any health and safety regulations and may also be negatively impacted by travel and quarantine restrictions.

- Out of state visitors will likely be significantly reduced in numbers for a number of years. The focus in the immediate short-term needs to be on the domestic, RoI and UK market and community based tourism to generate rural areas through tourism.

- The outdoors and adventure and activities sectors will be popular in the early months and years as visitors may be reluctant to spend large amounts of time indoors due to perceived safety and restrictions. The rural economy will be well placed to offer this visitor experience.

- Tourism NI highlighted that the tourism sector in NI closed down almost overnight and that it will be challenging for tourism businesses to develop or recover post COVID-19. Tourism NI set up a Contact Centre to support tourism businesses as well as a dedicated microsite. The contact centre had received calls and contact from over 700 businesses by the end of May 2020. Additionally, Tourism NI undertook an industry survey with 1,300 businesses responding with the following findings:

  ~ 79% of businesses stated that COVID-19 would have a severe impact on their business in the short term (0-3 months) and 63% stated it would be severe in the longer term (4 months +);

  ~ Tourism NI have been developing a Market Review of the NI Domestic Market. This will become increasingly important due to international travel restrictions, impact on international flights, lack of confidence of consumers etc.;

  ~ The NI, RoI and GB markets, in turn, will be key in the short to medium term. Families will feature highly as a high spending segment among others. In 2019, UK and Ireland represented 76% of visitor spend in NI.

  ~ Whilst a moving target, it is estimated that it will take at least 5 years for NI tourism performance to return to 2019 levels;

  ~ Tourism NI is working on a 'Tourism Model' to help set goals and objectives and forecast visitor and spend levels and which will review historic attraction and accommodation numbers, tourism trends, other economic data etc.;

  ~ Tourism NI will lead a rallying call for NI residents to support the local tourism and hospitality businesses and key success factors will includes the attractiveness of our town and villages, the evening economy, appealing visitor experiences;

  ~ Investment interventions will be required to help businesses 'reset' when returning to a 'new normal'. In some cases COVID-19 proof measures will need to be implemented such as visitor management, interpretation and signage, strict hygiene

regimes, advance booking online booking systems, business and staff development, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality and so on;

~ It is anticipated that many tourism businesses will not survive the impact of Covid-19 adding to the levels of unemployment and reduced levels of spend in the local economy;

~ The Embrace a Giant Spirit experience brand will be ever more important to gel the tourism industry together and give NI stand out. Tourism NI is working on a new domestic marketing campaign;

~ The tourism industry must become an increasingly agile, resilient and dynamic industry to compete with ever more competitive world-wide tourist destinations; and

~ Tourism NI is working collaboratively with councils and other tourism bodies to help to co-create solutions and programmes to ensure that they utilise existing limited resources to the greatest effect. Councils, Northern Ireland Hotels Federation (NIHF), Hospitality Ulster, local tourism agencies etc. are offering business support services including webinars, 1-1 mentoring, digital marketing programmes, signposting to government support and finance among other services.

In addition, the Tourism Performance Report for 2019, Tourism NI indicated that industry feedback suggested a positive start to 2020, pre-COVID-19. Accommodation and airport statistics clearly show the devastating impact the pandemic had during the first lockdown, and the reopening period.

Feedback outlined above indicated that no changes are required to the high level priority interventions given interventions 2 and 3 facilitate the focus on tourism at local and regional levels in terms of the local domestic market; and also community based tourism to generate rural areas through tourism. The next section outlines some of the work taking place to assist in recovery post COVID-19.

Recovery Work - Post COVID-19

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, tourism accounted for approximately 65,000 jobs (almost 10% of all jobs) in NI's economy. The industry also generated around £1 billion in visitor spend in 2019. However, tourism businesses rely on visitors (domestic and out of state) for revenue. COVID-19 has resulted in the total removal of our industry's source of revenue for 2020. The crisis is exacerbated by the seasonal nature of the NI tourism offer and comes at the end of the low season when the cash reserves of tourism businesses are at their lowest, and the spring and summer seasons in which the industry does 70% of its business.

In regards to recovery work post COVID-19, DfE have established a Tourism Recovery Steering Group with membership drawn from the private and public sectors (central and local Government) to lead in the planning and preparations for the recovery of the NI Tourism Industry in response to COVID-19. A number of Tourism Recovery Task and Finish Groups have also been established.

Linkages to Programme for Government Outcomes

The PfG recognises that tourism will be increasingly central to NI's economic and social wellbeing - driving export earnings for the economy, contributing to balanced sub-regional growth and job creation. Sustainable Rural Tourism can make a meaningful contribution to the following PfG outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy;
- **Outcome 10:** We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest; and
- Indirectly to **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.

We believe that sustainable tourism links into the Programme for Government Outcomes outlined above as follows:

- A strong, regionally balanced economy is essential if we are to tackle the social and economic challenges facing us. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, from a previously low base a decade ago, tourism had become a key sector for economic growth in the local economy with direct tourism and tourism-related industry supporting many jobs. Tourism is one of the largest, locally owned, internationally traded sectors of our economy. It will be important to build on the momentum already achieved and unlock the potential to attract visitors from new and emerging markets.
- The key actions relating to tourism in the Draft PfG include but are not limited to:
  - ~ Supporting priority sectors to raise awareness of their capability, establish key partnerships and secure new business in key international markets;
  - ~ Investing in the development and communication of an inspiring tourism experience which will provide international standout for NI;
  - ~ Investing in experiences and products that will give external visitors new reasons to holiday and stay longer;
  - ~ Supporting the tourism industry to invest in capability building measures to deliver long term growth;

~ Creating a policy environment which enables faster growth of the tourism industry; and

~ Supporting the public and private sectors to attract international investment in infrastructure and regeneration projects.

- The PfG Outcomes Delivery Plan 2019 also notes under Outcome 10 the following key actions:

~ Run tactical marketing programmes to promote NI as an attractive destination;

~ Host events of scale to promote investment and tourism potential;

~ Deliver the Taste the Island Programme to promote NI as an attractive destination; and

~ Provide a programme of activities to attract visitors to NI heritage sites.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, Northern Ireland's tourism industry has experienced healthy growth and a significant potential for further expansion. This thematic pillar recognises that to be successful and sustainable however, there has to be a synergy between welcoming, involving and satisfying visitors; achieving a profitable and prosperous industry; engaging and benefiting host communities; and protecting and enhancing the local environment.

Q6) Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism: To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for Northern Ireland.
- Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Output from Rural Health and Social Wellbeing Working Group

Introduction

The Rural Health and Social Wellbeing Working Group was tasked with considering the issues that could contribute to the thematic pillar: ***'To Reduce Loneliness and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas, to Minimise the Impacts of Rural Isolation and to Promote the Health and Wellbeing of Rural Dwellers'.*** The research and evidence (see Annex 10 for more detailed information on the evidence base) along with the consultation and engagement played a key role in formulating five priority areas for intervention which feed into the thematic pillar.

The Working Group recommended that any policy response should be people centred, putting rural dwellers at the centre of service delivery. Many of the factors affecting the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers are cross-cutting and therefore an integrated strategic approach is required.

The next section provides some detail in relation to findings pertaining to health and social wellbeing in rural areas in NI.

Rural Health and Social Wellbeing in Northern Ireland - Key Findings

The table below outlines some of the key findings identified by the Working Group in relation to rural health and social wellbeing in NI.

Category	Findings
Challenges and opportunities for rural social wellbeing in NI	• There are a number of challenges for those trying to access health services in rural areas such as: ~ Poor health; ~ Lack of mobility; ~ Poor/affordable transport; and ~ Remoteness of and inability to access health services and the closure of GP practices in rural areas. • Whilst community based health models can be highly effective, they are struggling for resources in an increasingly regulated environment.

Category	Findings
	• There are issues with early years development in rural areas which can include poor language skills and low levels of physical activity resulting in obesity among children.
Reducing Loneliness and Social Exclusion	• Loneliness is not exclusive to one particular group and impacts across the community. Loneliness can impact lone householders (of any age), new mothers, carers, young people and can frequently be linked to a change in life circumstances (e.g. grief, relationship breakdown which may include domestic abuse, changing jobs, family dynamics, retirement and peer groups moving on/away). • In terms of impacts, loneliness can result in a loss of identity, vulnerability and detachment from the community resulting in further isolation and reduced community cohesion. There is a perceived stigma around loneliness and mental and emotional wellbeing, often making people reluctant to seek advice or support, highlighting the need for and importance of locally accessible support and contact. • Groups at particular risk of loneliness and exclusion include: ~ Carers (of all ages), especially in the context of an ageing rural population with increased caring responsibilities; the growing number of ageing carers is also an issue which often entails one generation of older people caring for the generation above them; and ~ Young people including those who are hard to reach. Isolation can be exacerbated by issues around mental and emotional wellbeing, paramilitaries, drugs and alcohol misuse; and social media usage. There is a need for early intervention around mental and emotional wellbeing, including work with schools, youth groups and organisations in order to build connections and capacity around engagement and inclusion.

Category	Findings
Minimising the Impact of Rural Isolation	• **Rural Access** - the geographic remoteness and associated challenge in accessing services (including lack of access to childcare, broadband, digital skills and transport) is experienced by many rural communities. Figure 9 below shows the proportion of small areas with no public transport access to selected services:

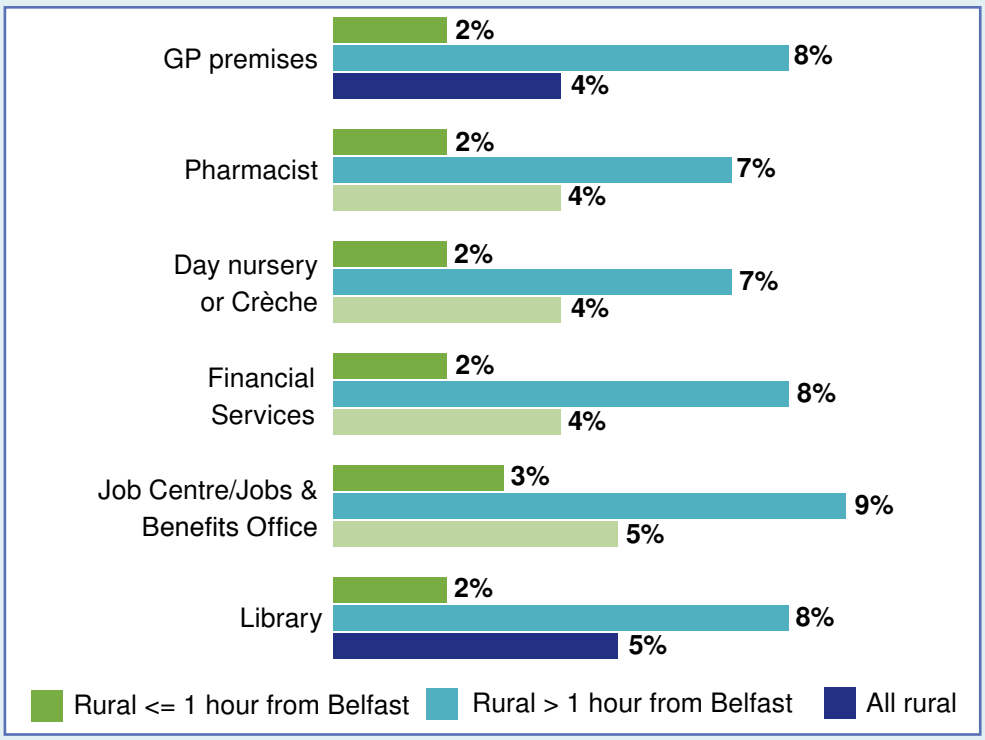


Figure 9: :Source: NISRA 2017 cited in Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2019 Report Updated April 2020 (DAERA)

Difficulty in accessing services may be a source of disadvantage for people in rural communities, particularly for those living in more remote areas and for those without private transport. In rural areas more than an hour from Belfast, access to key services by public transport is particularly poor, with some unable to access key services at all by this means while for many others journeys by public transport may be so long and/or difficult as to be impractical. It is recognised that investment will be forthcoming in the form of City and Growth Deals with the potential to act as a catalyst for economic regeneration in rural communities, including those in the west of the province and more than an hour from Belfast.

Category	Findings
	Figure 10 below depicts average journey time (mins) by car to selected services:

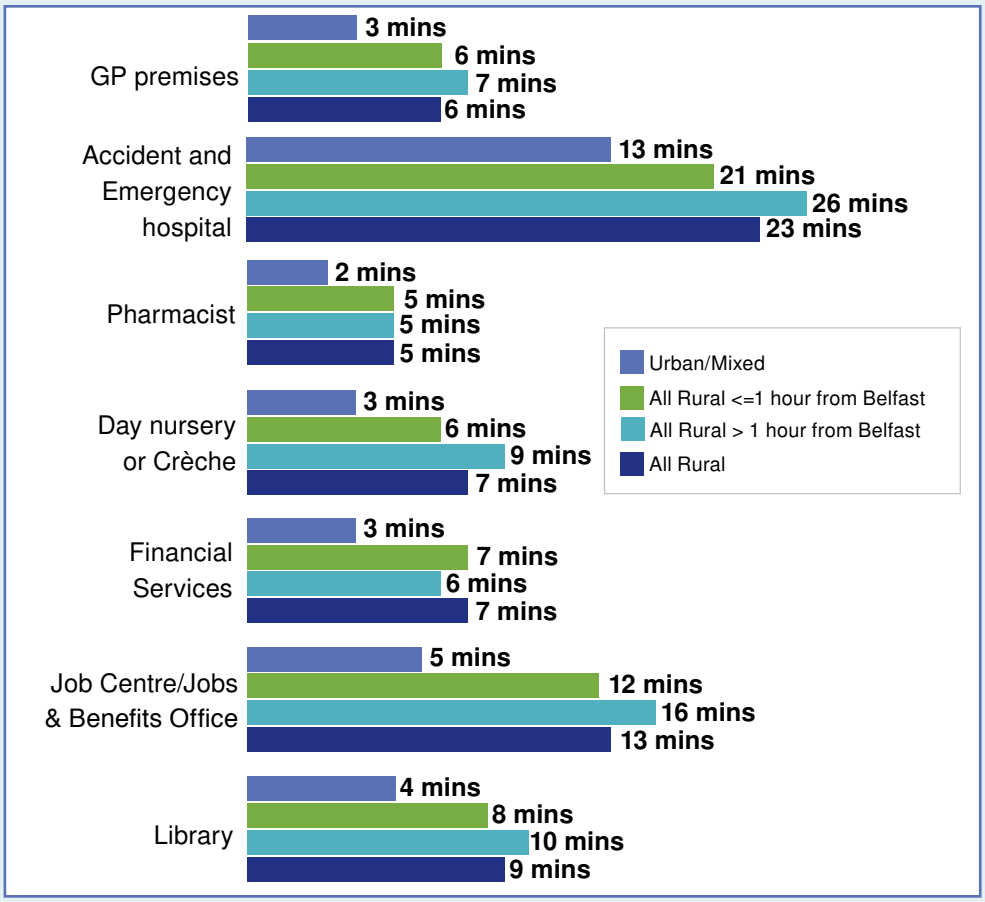


Figure 10: Source: NISRA 2017 cited in Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2019 Report Updated April 2020 (DAERA)

For rural dwellers who can travel by private transport, journey times to key services are on average twice as long as for those living in towns and cities, and this disparity is again more pronounced in rural areas distant from Belfast. The greatest differences in travel times are to accident and emergency hospitals and to job centres/jobs and benefits offices. Those living in rural areas more than an hour from Belfast are on average 26 minutes away from an Accident and Emergency department, compared to an average 13 minute drive time for those living in urban areas. These factors can have a detrimental impact on both inclusion and participation which can negatively impact on the social wellbeing and mental health of rural dwellers.

- **Isolation -** (including due to a reducing rural population) is an increasing issue for the farming community. There is a need for tailored intervention and one to one support at farm business level.

Category	Findings
	• **Outreach -** (e.g. engagement and activity programmes, advice clinics, health checks, and befriending schemes) into isolated communities has been identified as a potential solution to reducing loneliness and isolation in rural areas. This could be delivered via: ~ **Provision of community development support** at the grass roots level (e.g. Rural Support Networks) to reach into rural communities and build the capacity of the community and voluntary sector, including linking groups with service providers and sectoral specialists; and ~ **Area based strategy managers** to identify area priorities and support delivery of actions. Forms of intervention should be underpinned by local contacts and face to face connections, which are vital to addressing loneliness and isolation and engaging the truly hard to reach groups. Such contact may take a number of forms, including befriending/home visits, handyman/ maintenance programmes, sharing of advice and information. • **Erosion of services** - (such as Post Office, banking services) combined with challenges in accessing grassroots community services has contributed to a lack of resilience and capacity for self-care. There is also growing pressure on the community and voluntary sector to replace/deliver local services and groups themselves are struggling for resources (in terms of both funding and volunteers), raising concerns about the sustainability of both services and the rural communities themselves. • **Provision of animated indoor and outdoor rural community space** - was identified as a mechanism that could be used to promote health and wellbeing and to address loneliness. This could be via supporting participation programmes to better encourage people to use the rural estate such as local authority physical activity programmes, and environmental education programmes such as Forest School. Affordability and accessibility will be central to the success of such programmes, including uptake by key target group such as young people and to ensure family friendly participation.

Category	Findings
	• **Community buildings/hubs** - by locating a range of activities/ services in one facility this makes best use of limited rural assets and encourages cross-sectoral working. A key benefit of community hubs is that people can access it for any purpose allowing for strengthened collaboration for health and wellbeing at both regional and local levels. Given the challenges in relation to connectivity in rural areas, it would be preferable that these hubs act as broadband and community outreach hubs, potentially utilising libraries and schools. An integrated coffee shop within the community hub would also afford people an opportunity to utilise a hub facility whilst reducing any potential stigma associated with other activities on offer. To ensure facilities are fit for purpose, the need for support in terms of small capital repair or refurbishment was identified. • **Village Hub Model** - taking the community hub model a step further, and recognising the need for efficiency in service delivery and strategic development, there is scope to explore a "Village Hub" model where groups within a village community work together using different spaces/ buildings for different purposes (such as sports, arts, childcare, youth activities, etc.) - but are strategic in service delivery. • **Community Transport** - a need was identified to address the challenges of service delivery in rural areas, such as transport, cost and travel time. Community transport is a key enabler for social wellbeing. Initiatives which could increase the number of volunteer drivers were seen as beneficial. • **Infrastructure** - it was noted that inter-agency co-operation is necessary to promote rural health and wellbeing. For example, access to safe drinking water was raised in terms of ensuring sufficient quality of access to bore wells and water mains. • **Capacity building** - the need was identified to include governance support such as committee succession planning and encouraging a culture of volunteering. Given that there is an ageing rural population and that group committees often rely on older volunteers, there is a need to support existing rural volunteers in sustaining groups whilst also attracting new volunteers and providing them with appropriate skills and

Category	Findings
	confidence to engage. Groups are also often put off submitting funding applications due to the level of bureaucracy and governance requirements. Consistency across programmes and the ability to have flexibility in dealing with applications could ensure that interventions respond appropriately to local needs. • **Planning legislation** - difficulty in securing single dwelling applications approvals can contribute to younger generations moving away from rural areas, ultimately impacting on the health and wellbeing of those left in the rural areas.
Promoting Rural Health and Wellbeing	• **Rural deprivation** - issues such as unfit housing can impact negatively on health and in particular lead to an increase in chronic health conditions. • **Rural poverty** - a lack of access to transport and the impact of changes in benefits systems including a lack of knowledge of what benefits people are entitled to can result in some rural households slipping below the poverty line. This impacts on households in a number of ways such as food, pension or fuel poverty. Advice and support services/networks could help reduce fuel poverty. Working with other Departments and other public agencies will be required on an integrated approach to alleviate rural poverty (including addressing food poverty). • **Lack of family support services** - a lack of services such as rural childcare facilities can both increase isolation and negatively impact on child development, which can in turn lead to poor academic performance. Scope exists for a rural Early Years model. Rural communities have frequently identified the lack of a comparable Sure Start programme in rural areas as a key challenge to health and wellbeing, recognising the value of such a programme for both children and parents and its potential to address isolation and deprivation in some of the most disadvantaged communities. Such a model would require extensive inter-departmental collaboration and resourcing. • **Mental and Emotional Wellbeing** - access to support services in relation to mental and emotional wellbeing within rural communities was identified as a priority with a need for timely access to services when in crisis (i.e. waiting lists are not an appropriate response). Whilst these issues affect wider society, matters are exacerbated further for rural dwellers due to poor transport and access to services.

Category	Findings
	• **Social supermarket model** - can help those who are finding the costs of food difficult to meet due to low income and scarce resources. The social supermarket can provide access to surplus food from mainstream retail outlets at major discounts and can be considered to be particularly beneficial for facilitation of personal connections and the ability to link beneficiaries with wraparound services. • **Enhancing current initiatives** - there are a number of existing out of hours initiatives available to rural communities which could be built upon (e.g. Libraries NI and Your School Your Club which allows access to facilities outside of normal hours). • **Community development led health and wellbeing interventions -** these should accommodate primary health care providers working collaboratively with the community and voluntary sector to reach those most at risk. A bottom-up community development approach is most effective empowering people to better tackle their educational, employment, training, health, socioeconomic issues. Learning could be taken from the existing Healthy Living Centre partnership model. For example, existing sub-regional models/partnerships could be pulled on to act as local conduits between grass roots and service providers/ statutory bodies. Any service delivery model should seek to use sectoral specialists (such as older people's partnerships, youth forums, mental health agencies, advice services, Rural Support, BME groups, farmers, those affected by alcohol/substance misuse, those engaging in Anti-Social Behaviour and those affected by domestic abuse) where possible. This approach will also avoid duplication/displacement of existing providers who have specialist knowledge and support enablers to deliver/direct services to the most vulnerable. • **Social Prescribing** - this involves medical professionals referring their patients to a range of activities and community service that seek to address people's needs in a holistic way. Activities can include: stress and anxiety reducing programmes; volunteering projects; walking groups; befriending services and a range of other local activities that promotes positive physical and mental and emotional wellbeing and tackles social isolation. Any such initiative must focus on ensuring a quality and sustainable model of prescribing. Referrals should be tailored and matched to the capacity of the hosting group/project in order to be sustainable and deliver meaningful outcomes for both

Category	Findings
	parties. Host groups may also require small financial support to deliver such services. • **Social Farming** - this involves an innovative use of agriculture to promote therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education and social services in rural areas. Social farming can generate social inclusion outcomes for farmers while offering the participant a person centred model. It has the ability to positively contribute to both mental and emotional wellbeing and physical activity. • **Inter-generational Working** - Strengthening of linkages between service providers and rural dwellers, including work with sectoral specialists such as Youth agencies and Age Friendly partnerships. This could include supporting life-long learning and participation and healthy active ageing, as well as supporting inter-generational working.

In light of some of the barriers identified above, there is a clear need to promote rural focused interventions which target those most at risk of isolation and loneliness, recognising the challenges associated with service delivery in rural areas and mindful of the need for interventions tailored to the specifics of rural living - isolated and often insular communities and individuals, lack of connectivity and gradual service erosion which has impacted negatively on health and wellbeing.

The next section outlines in detail, how the Working Group developed the priority interventions under the rural health and social wellbeing thematic pillar. The scope of these interventions illustrates the importance of inter-departmental working, with potential to lever in funds from other government departments.

Development of the Priority Interventions

The Working Group interventions are framed within the context of five key elements: Champion; Build Capacity, Reduce, Sustain and Community Assets to ensure successful delivery of the thematic pillar. The Working Group considered the information and evidence base available to it and sought to develop a range of interventions which placed social wellbeing for rural communities at the heart of the policy making agenda. It recognised the need for DAERA to act as a Rural Champion, raising awareness, promoting and supporting action on the issues identified around rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness. There was a clear recognition that DAERA cannot act in isolation, rather that joint working across a range of policy areas will be required to bring about positive outcomes for rural dwellers and communities.

Partnership working is at the core of the interventions identified, reflective of the need for collaboration within and between sectors to support and sustain communities and villages. This will ensure that the needs of those most at risk are heard and responded to, working through established networks and supporting capacity in those areas where such infrastructure is lacking to develop a person centred approach and better position rural communities both socially and economically.

Each element is outlined in more detail below:

- **Champion** - there is a need for awareness raising of rural issues, with DAERA positioned as a Rural Champion. Aligned to this is a need to further integrate agri-food and rural affairs, promoting the mutual relationship and benefits.

- **Build Capacity** - capacity and governance support is required to sustain and succession plan for committees and groups taking the form of resourced partnerships, networks and local authority models. Investment in community capacity will better enable a community to engage and articulate its needs and potentially contribute to addressing them. Co-ordinated and strategic delivery will be required to avoid any duplication.

  It is essential that funding processes are more user friendly as they are currently too complex and off-putting, placing too much burden on volunteers. For example, the Rural Support Network (RSN) support provided via the micro grants has been an effective model in supporting groups access funding. Groups would also require capital and revenue support to ensure any service delivery is fit-for-purpose.

- **Reduce** - In accessing those most at risk of isolation, the Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas (MARA) project was a very effective model. This and any initiative, must be seen in the context of existing services/provision including Affordable Warmth/Warmer Homes, Home Safety, Wraparound, Make the Call, Handyperson, Health and Wellbeing Plans, Council Environmental Health teams.

- **Sustain** - There is a need for rural communities to become more sustainable and viable economic centres.
- **Community Assets** - These need to be used across the whole community and where possible become hubs to deliver multiple activities and services to rural communities.

The following priority interventions have therefore been developed for rural health and social wellbeing in NI:

- **Intervention 1** - **Champion**
  Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- **Intervention 2** - **Build Capacity**
  Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- **Intervention 3** - **Reduce**
  Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- **Intervention 4 - Sustain**
  Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- **Intervention 5** - **Community Assets**
  Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

The diagram below summarises the five interventions for the rural health and social wellbeing thematic pillar.

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

A stakeholder event was held in January 2020 to review engagement findings across all five policy Working Groups. Overall the feedback was positive, with the proposed thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention endorsed on the day. In regards to each thematic pillar, the stakeholders were asked their views on what they agreed with; and what needed changed or was missing. The feedback received in relation to the rural health and social wellbeing thematic pillar from the public rural stakeholder engagement event held in January 2020 is summarised below (detailed feedback received on the day is available in Annex 11):

- Succession planning is essential;
- Volunteerism should be encouraged;
- Existing rural estate and assets should be utilised;
- The potential for faith based groups in service delivery should be considered; and
- There is a need for inter-departmental co-operation (including DoH and DfC) given the cross-cutting nature of issues identified.

The next section outlines some potential implications that have since been identified due to COVID-19.

Potential Implications of COVID-19

The Rural Health and Social Wellbeing Working Group presented their evidence and findings prior to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. To ensure that the Rural Policy Framework accurately reflects need, Working Group Members were asked in May 2020 to advise if there were any impacts on priorities previously identified or emerging issues that may need to be taken into account.

The impacts of COVID-19 on Rural Health and Social Wellbeing were highlighted as follows:

- Issues already identified by the Working Group remain and are even more valid now as the needs in rural communities will increase. The priority of this work is increased by a rise in needs.
- Whilst there is no evidence available yet on the long-term impacts of shielding/isolation /social distancing there is likely to be an increase in rural isolation, rural social exclusion, rural poverty and mental and emotional wellbeing difficulties impacting on rural communities. There is also likely to be increased financial hardship and poverty across communities compounded by both the loss of EU funding and COVID-19.

- Innovation needs to be encouraged with best practice shared on a cross-cutting level. Any lessons learned should also be recorded.

- Rural communities will need practical support and funding to allow them to adapt and change to find new ways of delivering services (especially in light of those people who may be asked to continue to shield). It was suggested that funding may be needed on a rolling programme basis to allow groups to apply as and when a need arises as opposed to an open/close call.

- Opportunities need to be grasped in a timely manner such as the significant increase in volunteering and ensuring its sustainability which could be via training etc.; the opportunity to bring forward a 'community of practice hub approach'; maximising on initiatives such as social farming that allow for social distancing. Consideration could also be given to older people having access to digital technology; localised befriending services etc. The importance of enabling personal connections and signposting between rural dwellers and service providers should not be underestimated.

- There is a need to invest in support for community space/infrastructure as well as people to ensure that they remain fit for purpose in serving the needs of the community. There will also be an increased need for outdoor space to help communities to maintain social distancing.

- A publication by the Centre for Mental Health - 'BRIEFING Covid-19 and the nation's mental health: May 2020'[21] highlighted the following:

  ~ The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to lead to an increase in mental ill health in the UK, as a result of both the illness itself and the measures being taken to protect people from the virus;

  ~ It has already been widely acknowledged that social distancing and lockdown measures may increase exposure to domestic violence and abuse;

  ~ If the economic impact is similar to that of the post 2008 recession, then we could expect 500,000 additional people experiencing mental health problems, with depression being the most common;

  ~ The economic impact is likely to affect different parts of the country differently and therefore the likely increased prevalence of mental illness will be unevenly distributed;

  ~ If the economic impact results in significant unemployment, there is a major risk of an increase in suicides unless action is taken to prevent this loss of life; and

21 Available at: www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-05/CentreforMentalHealth_COVID_MH_Forecasting_May20.pdf

~ The various 'safety net' initiatives introduced by the Government are likely to be offering some significant protection to people's wellbeing. How and when these are dismantled are also likely to be critical to the fallout in terms of mental wellbeing following this crisis.

Feedback outlined above indicated that no changes are required to the high level priority interventions given that the interventions are broad enough to incorporate the issues identified above. However, it is apparent that the interventions are more relevant now with potential increased identified need and a call to fast track the implementation of a number of those interventions if possible.

Linkages to Programme for Government Outcomes

Rural Health and Social Wellbeing contribute to seven of the twelve Programme for Government outcomes as follows:

- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society;
- **Outcome 4:** We enjoy long, healthy, active lives;
- **Outcome 5:** We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential;
- **Outcome 8:** We care for others and we help those in need;
- **Outcome 9:** We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity;
- **Outcome 11:** We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure; and
- **Outcome 12:** We give our children and young people the best start in life.

Whilst Rural Health and Social Wellbeing contributes to many PfG Outcomes, we believe there are linkages to the Outcomes outlined above as follows:

- Good physical and mental health brings social and economic benefits both at an individual and societal level, whereas poor health restricts quality of life and reduces opportunities and productivity;
- For individuals, families and communities to take greater control over their lives and be enabled and supported to lead healthy lives, active collaboration is needed across government and with local government, the community and voluntary sector, private businesses and other organisations and delivery partners to address the factors which impact on health and wellbeing;

- It is important that we support all rural dwellers in our society to build self-confidence and capacity to live independent self-fulfilling lives and in particular, those who are vulnerable, and ensure they have the means to help themselves and can live their lives free from fear, discrimination, and exclusion; and
- Caring for others and helping those in need is fundamental to the overall achievement of conditions of societal wellbeing.

Conclusion

Our rural areas are diverse ranging from open countryside to small towns, villages and hamlets. The number of people living in rural areas is increasing with an ageing population. The tendency to idealise rural living and to make assumptions about what it is like can be a barrier to recognising rural circumstances. This thematic pillar recognises the wider social determinants to health and wellbeing and a need to respond to the specific needs of people living in many different types of rural settlements.

Q7) Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing: To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the five priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Output from Rural Employment Working Group

Introduction

Working Group 4 was tasked with considering the issues that could contribute to the thematic pillar: ***'To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas'.*** The research and evidence (see Annex 12 for more detailed information on the evidence base) along with the consultation and engagement played a key role in formulating three priority areas for intervention which feed into the thematic pillar.

As referenced before there is some degree of similarity between thematic pillars 4 and 1. Therefore, in order to avoid any potential overlap, pillar 1 focuses more on the 'business' aspect (i.e. encouraging innovation within existing businesses and the creation of new businesses).

The next section provides some detail on employment in rural areas in NI as identified by the Working Group.

NI Context - Rural Employment

Data provided within the Labour Force Survey October-December 2019 shows that there are a number of council areas, which are largely rural with levels of economic inactivity higher than the norm for NI. Councils with higher levels of inactivity than the norm include Causeway Coast and Glens, Derry City and Strabane, Fermanagh and Omagh and Newry Mourne and Down Council. There is a rationale for investment in interventions, which have the potential to help address barriers or create opportunities relating to economic activity and employability.

Job creation has been one of, if not the highest prioritised outcomes sought from business support agencies over the past decade in NI. Many grants and subsidies offered from organisations such as Invest NI have had binding requirements to meet job creation targets. Administrators and applicants to the current Priority 6 programme (Rural Development Programme 2014-2020) will be familiar with this emphasis on job creation. The programme's Rural Business Investment Scheme offered capital grants of up to £90,000 for businesses, however these applications required an outline plan for job growth within the applicant's business in order to be eligible for funding. The scheme has led to significant job creation within rural businesses over the past five years.

In addition to the Priority 6 programme, TRPSI funded projects such as Prosper and Step Up to Sustainable Employment (SUSE) provide examples of initiatives which have successfully assisted young unemployed and those in lower paid employment, into better jobs.

The next section outlines some key findings in relation to employment in rural areas in NI.

Rural Employment in Northern Ireland - Key Findings

The table below outlines some of the key findings identified by the Working Group in relation to rural employment in NI. These findings were identified in early 2020, therefore where feasible we have updated statistics using the most recent information available to us.

Category	Findings
Regional Dynamics	• Eurostat, the data agency of the European Union identifies NI as one of the poorest regions in the UK in terms of Gross Domestic Product per capita. • NI is the 2nd youngest UK region (median age 38.7) after London (35.3). • There is an overdependence on low productivity, low pay industries such as farming and food production. An example of this is the agri-food sector which makes up 4.6% of total employment in NI compared to 2.3% in the UK and accounts for 3.7% of NI Gross Value Added (GVA) compared to 2% for the UK. • There are areas of high deprivation, particularly in border areas with 7 out of the 10 most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the Border areas (and therefore rural). • Despite difficulties, rural population growth is out pacing urban population growth (16% between 2000 and 2018 in rural areas vs 6% in urban areas).
Barriers for Companies to Undertake Employment	• The primary issue for many employers is access to sufficiently skilled labour, which is restricting the growth potential of rural companies in terms of both market size and global reach. Examples outlined by the Working Group include the Mid Ulster engineering cluster, and the food and drink sector where skills shortages have been identified in production and production management. • There is an uncertain and unpredictable 'skills pipeline' highlighting the need to promote the establishment of linkages between local employers and education/training providers. Such linkages are required to develop a pipeline of people with the skills and qualifications needed to support growth sectors and which also connect young people to key sectors (e.g. farming, engineering, IT, environmental industries). This could provide a mechanism to reflect rural business needs at stakeholder level while also providing the rural economy with tailored skills to meet evidenced demand. There is potential for further developing the links

Category	Findings
	between Further Education Colleges and the Universities and rural businesses to provide tailored apprenticeships and skills development initiatives aligned to the needs of growth sectors in the rural economy. • The adult population of more remote rural areas have on average a lower level of formal educational attainment than those living in urban areas. Consultation also acknowledged that some of the barriers to employability relate to the personal circumstances of rural dwellers, highlighting a need for interventions in the form of Employability Programmes.
Barriers for People Seeking to Obtain Employment	• The most commonly associated difficulty concerning employment is the availability of employment opportunities in areas across NI, which contributes to issues such as unemployment and emigration from the countryside. • According to a number of Advice Networks, poverty is increasing and presents a real barrier to entering training or employment. Any increase in base rate (i.e. increased mortgage/loan repayments and reduction in finance/affordability) could present a multitude of scenarios impacting on rural poverty and the sustainability of farms and rural enterprises. • There is a continuing link between poverty and unemployment with 19% of the NI population living in relative poverty. Poverty is the prime determinant of ill health, which is in turn the single most significant barrier to entering the labour market. This is a significant barrier to employability in the most deprived rural Super Output Areas (SOA) while low wages are associated with sectors prevalent in rural areas such as construction, agriculture and agri-food. • The levels of reported (and anecdotal) poor mental and emotional wellbeing are increasing in rural communities. This has a clear impact on the ability of people to consider undertaking training or entering the labour market and sustaining their involvement with it. • Traditional practical barriers to employability (training and employment) still remain for rural dwellers and need to be addressed to facilitate those living in rural areas in becoming economically active. Central barriers include access to affordable childcare and more effective/ affordable rural transport solutions.

<table>
<tr><th>Category</th><th>Findings</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>

Support for enabling young people into employment was highlighted due to concerns that young people are moving away/abroad due to lack of employment opportunities or they have little/no appetite for work/employment. Current Tackling Rural Poverty Social Isolation (TRPSI) funded projects such as Prosper and Step Up to Sustainable Employment (SUSE) were seen as examples of initiatives that have successfully assisted young unemployed and those in lower paid employment, into better jobs.
The NI economic inactivity rate (16-64 years old) was 26.2%. This was equivalent to 306,000 economically inactive people. The table below shows economic inactivity in NI by local government district:

<table>
<tr><th>Local Government District</th><th>Rate (%)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Antrim and Newtownabbey</td><td>20.6%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ards and North Down</td><td>25.3%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon</td><td>25.7%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Belfast</td><td>30.5%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Causeway Coast and Glens</td><td>29.9%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Derry City and Strabane</td><td>30.4%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Fermanagh and Omagh</td><td>33.1%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lisburn and Castlereagh</td><td>17.4%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mid and East Antrim</td><td>23.9%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mid Ulster</td><td>26.2%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Newry, Mourne and Down</td><td>26.2%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Northern Ireland Total</td><td>26.2%</td></tr>
</table>
Source - Labour Force Survey, 2019, published on 1st October 2020
</td></tr>
</table>

Category	Findings
Economic Viability of Working in Rural Areas	• Low wages associated with sectors, which are prevalent in rural areas; construction, agriculture and agri-food mean that the most employable are drawn to work and often move to urban areas. People living in rural areas have a lower median salary of £20,466 compared to those in urban areas £22,630 (2019 figures). • The Travel Survey NI for 2016-18 revealed that workers from rural areas had an average commute of around 50% further than workers in towns and cities, and travelled on average more than 500 additional miles per year to their workplace. This poses not only financial issues (cost of fuel or using public transport), but also quality of life issues, particularly drivers who have long car journeys and/or congestion. • Previously, the Rural Business Investment Scheme was found to be overly bureaucratic and time consuming which can be off-putting for many Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) whose owners do not have the skills, time or technical support required to complete effective applications. There is a requirement to promote sectoral competitiveness, innovation and research and development investment initiatives through rural enterprises. This would help to support growth and an increase in median wages/salaries in rural enterprises. • Rural transport continues to be a limiting factor (financial accessibility combined with timetabling) to accessing employability initiatives, training and employment support for rural dwellers. • Suitable childcare creates a challenge to rural industry in meeting their demand for the skilled labour to achieve sustainable growth. • According to the NI Labour Force Survey 2018, people living in rural areas are more likely to be in employment than those in urban areas (75% rural/ 67% urban), be highly skilled (51% rural/46% urban) and enjoy higher job satisfaction (84% rural/78% urban).
Impact of Poor Broadband Connectivity	• The limited quality of connectivity/broadband is still a significant barrier to increasing rural businesses start up rate and growth. In 2019, only 66% of the rural population has access to superfast broadband, compared to 98% in urban areas. • Poor connectivity also impedes distance learning, and inhibits the growth of a lifelong learning culture in rural communities.

Category	Findings
Sustainability of Social Enterprises	• Facilitating a transition to more sustainable rural social enterprises is important if barriers to employability are to be addressed and rural based opportunities for transitioning to part/full-time employment are to be created. From a community economic development perspective, rural community groups/organisations are an important part of rural society. Social enterprises based in rural communities have the potential to create training and employment opportunities for a range of target groups including adults post-18 years exiting the special needs education environment, people on the autism spectrum and people dealing with/ coping with life challenges (e.g. addictions, anxiety, and depression). • Social enterprises could potentially provide accommodation to facilitate 'working from home' or other flexible working arrangements. • In terms of support for social enterprises, DAERA has piloted models of refurbishing heritage/listed buildings (Village Catalyst). Underutilised rural assets could provide a base for rural enterprises and social enterprises. • A focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) has taken away from community outreach education in local community facilities. There is potential for development of social enterprise schemes (such as Action for Community Employment (ACE) schemes; handyman scheme). There is also a need for a more proactive and creative approach (e.g. community shops in rural areas).
Productivity, Innovation and Competitiveness	• **Farm Diversification** - a need was identified for the replacement of the former Rural Diversification Programme. Any new programme should be set in the context that self-employment is not the ideal or appropriate solution to employability as only a small percentage of people have the skills, desire and personal characteristics to progress into self-employment. Any agriculture based skills and development pathway should also consider initiatives to address a current lack of succession planning amongst the farming community. In addition, the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) identifies the tourism as a significant opportunity for rural NI with its stunning landscapes and scenery. There is an opportunity to encourage diversification from farming towards provision of tourism infrastructure that will in turn increase the sustainability of the rural economy. • Improvement in business performance could lead to employment opportunities with rural businesses.

Category	Findings
	• Research activity is low across all sectors with uptake of new technology and participation in knowledge transfer activity relatively low in NI. A greater adoption of innovation and knowledge transfer in agriculture and food production could impact significantly on the productivity of the industry. • Rising costs, market volatility and profitability are an ongoing challenge for farmers and food producers. According to DAERA, the 'Total Income from Farming' (TIFF) in Northern Ireland fell by 25% from £386 million in 2018 to £290 million in 2019. There is a need to improve efficiency and reduce overall costs within the industry in order to remain competitive.

The next section outlines in detail, how the Working Group developed the priority interventions under the rural employment thematic pillar.

Development of the Priority Interventions

The Working Group interventions are framed within the context of three key elements: Support; Champion; and Invest to ensure successful delivery of the thematic pillar. Each element is outlined in more detail below:

- **Support** - this addresses economic growth and sustainability by providing employment opportunities.
- **Champion** - this relates to practical support for dwellers and covers areas such as accessibility, available childcare etc.
- **Invest** - this relates to specific support for dwellers and covers areas such as training, engagement with schools.

The following priority interventions have therefore been developed for rural employment in NI:

- **Intervention 1 - Support**
  To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth.
- **Intervention 2 - Champion**
  To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers.
- **Intervention 3 - Invest**
  To invest in and develop our rural society.

The diagram below summarises the three interventions for the rural employment thematic pillar.

Many of the issues pertaining to rural employment are cross-cutting and therefore an integrated strategic approach is required. DAERA must take the lead role in championing the specific requirements of the rural economy and rural employability. Partnership working will be required with DfE, DE and organisations such Invest NI. A range of colleges, providers and sectors such as age sector platforms, industries, social economy and childcare etc. need to be involved in developing quality interventions ensuring that duplication does not occur and that learning/ resources can be shared.

Some interventions will require significant capital funding and may be led by rural community organisations. It will therefore be important to identify match funding solutions.

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

A stakeholder event was held in January 2020 to review engagement findings across all five policy Working Groups. Overall the feedback was positive, with the proposed thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention endorsed on the day. In regards to each thematic pillar, the stakeholders were asked their views on what they agreed with; and what needed changed or was missing. The feedback received in relation to the rural employment thematic pillar from the public rural stakeholder engagement event held in January 2020 is summarised below (detailed feedback received on the day is available in Annex 13):

- A strong consensus was reached around encouraging college outreach into rural communities and a recognition that libraries can also play a role in awareness raising and sharing information on opportunities;

- Connections should be built between education/colleges and the private sector, in particular the area of apprenticeships. This model would strengthen links between businesses and the education sector, providing practical opportunities for joint working with the potential to act as a catalyst for future policy interventions and ensure that the needs of local businesses and the rural economy can be addressed through educational stakeholders (e.g. the Further Education Colleges providing apprenticeship support in partnership with growth employers based in rural areas or aligned to growth sectors in the rural economy);
- Recognition of the importance and potential of the agri-food industry (a main private sector employer) in rural job creation including a need to focus on agri-food skills;
- Potential of environmental and renewable energy employment opportunities in the context of sustainable development in rural areas;
- With regards to rural businesses, a common issue cited was the need to work with Planners around planning legislation;
- On agricultural matters, the need to consider the impact of loss of EU funding on farmers was noted while stakeholders also highlighted that there is a need for succession planning in both farm and non-farm businesses as part of any initiative to sustain the rural economy;
- There is crossover between some Thematic Pillars and Priority Areas for intervention;
- Rural Hubs can support employability, including through hot desk facilities;
- Childcare issues were raised, with attendees stating that provision needs to consider both quality and affordability; and
- Recognition of the challenges faced by carers and the obstacles they face in entering or sustaining employment.

The next section outlines some potential implications that have since been identified due to COVID-19.

Potential Implications of COVID-19

The Rural Employment Working Group presented their evidence and findings prior to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. To ensure that the Rural Policy Framework accurately reflects need, Working Group Members were asked in May 2020 to advise if there were any impacts on priorities previously identified or emerging issues that may need to be taken into account.

No feedback was received from the Working Group Members in relation to this, other than a reference to the poor quality of Broadband in some parts of Northern Ireland and the impact of this both on those working from home and also children being home schooled.

Linkages to Programme for Government Outcomes

Rural Employment contributes to five of the twelve Programme for Government outcomes as follows:

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy;
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment;
- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society;
- **Outcome 6:** We have more people working in better jobs; and
- **Outcome 12:** We give our children and young people the best start in life.

We believe that Rural Employment links into the Programme for Government Outcomes outlined above as follows:

- Work with schools, colleges and employers be undertaken to improve the links between education and employment, identify the gaps and opportunities that currently exist and take measures to address these;
- Work with sectoral partners, including colleges and enterprise agencies will be undertaken to strengthen the rural skills base and rural economy;
- Access to employment is central to developing the rural economy and is a vital component in building successful communities. The interventions will encourage local rural economic development through employment and training opportunities;
- Interventions will consider sustainable development and how renewable energy can contribute to rural economies, recognising both environmental and economic benefits; and
- Rural job creation is central to sustaining rural communities, providing well paid employment in local communities to increase the attractiveness of communities and address rural depopulation which has an adverse impact on wider rural wellbeing.

Conclusion

Access to well-paid employment is a key factor in creating thriving rural communities. Equally access to a skilled labour force is a vital element in supporting rural business growth. This thematic pillar recognises that the future sustainability of our rural communities will be dependent upon the development of new ways to link and address both these challenges. For example, the priority interventions outlined above identify actions that could increase business starts, generate new/additional jobs, increase innovation and encourage export potential.

Q8) Thematic Pillar 4: Employment: To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 4: Employment is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 4: Employment are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth.
- To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers.
- To invest in and develop our rural society.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Output from Connectivity Working Group

Introduction

Working Group 5 was tasked with considering the issues that could contribute to the thematic pillar: ***'To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas'***. The research and evidence (see Annex 14 for more detailed information on the evidence base) along with the consultation and engagement played a key role in formulating four priority areas for intervention which feed into the thematic pillar.

The main focus of the Connectivity Working Group was on infrastructure, broadband, accessibility, and commuting. Given that most of the issues relating to connectivity between rural and urban areas are outside the responsibility of DAERA, cross Departmental buy-in to the proposals is essential. Work must continue with other Government Departments to implement the Rural Needs Act with a particular focus on ensuring investments in rural broadband, communications and roads infrastructure as vital components of a competitive and regionally balanced economy.

The next section provides some detail on connectivity between urban and rural areas in NI as identified by the Working Group.

NI Context - Connectivity between Rural and Urban Areas

Rural areas have become increasingly integrated with their urban neighbours. Rather than a rural versus urban binary, there is now a rural-urban interface where rural dwellers in NI travel into urban spaces for work, to access services, to shop, and to access cultural events/festivals. Urban dwellers come to rural areas for recreation, tourism and weekend breaks. Rural and urban areas are increasingly linked together. Connectivity is the means by which rural and urban enhance and complement each other.

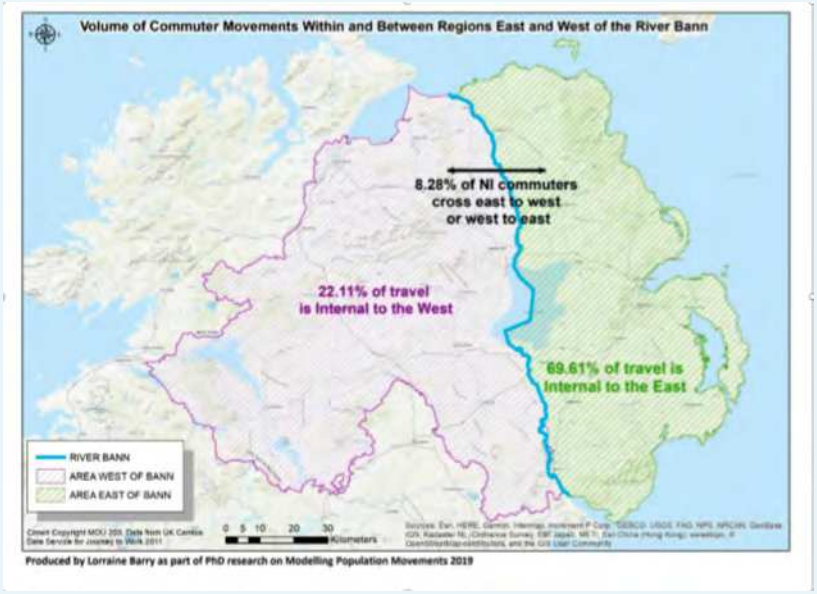
Growing a regional economy will benefit from strong cities and rural areas. Rural areas, including towns and villages, have a key role in supporting economic growth. They offer opportunities in terms of their potential for growth in new sectors, the provision of rural recreation and tourism, and their attractiveness as places to invest, live and work. Balanced growth and tackling regional imbalance are critical issues. This means places having a co-ordinated approach to the provision of services, employment and infrastructure and a focus on cooperation between service providers. For example, given that employment is often concentrated in urban centres it is important for rural wellbeing that there are adequate transport provisions.

The next section outlines some of the key findings identified by the connectivity Working Group.

Connectivity in Northern Ireland - Key Findings

The table below outlines some of the key findings in relation to connectivity in NI. These findings were identified in early 2020, therefore where feasible we have updated statistics using the most recent information available to us.

Category	Findings
Climate Change	• Re-evaluating and reducing commuting will lead to a reduction in carbon emissions. This could be done via the development of broadband hubs in small towns and villages. • Remote working could also lead to improvements in quality of life and health. If remote working is promoted in the region, it can lead to the development of remote working spaces that will re-use retail space in smaller settlements and support local businesses. Remote working will need to be actively promoted by the public sector as a positive way of working contributing to a sustainable living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.
Infrastructure/ Transport	• Appropriate infrastructure can enhance employment and education opportunities, access to rural leisure activities, and increasing population growth in rural areas helping to support their sustainability. • Population projections indicate that the population of rural areas is to increase which will place further pressure on the limited infrastructure leading to longer travel times to access educational, training and employment opportunities. • The key factor for government departments is not to eliminate differences in access times between urban and rural areas, but to ensure that quality services are available within a reasonable travel time and invest in infrastructure to support this. • DfI currently subsidise financially loss-making Translink rural bus routes and the rail network. • Whilst there is a perception that most rural travel is to Belfast, 8% of commuters cross East to West or West to East of the Bann. 22% of journey to work movements are internal to the west, and 70% are internal to the east. This highlights the need to ensure that towns and rural areas in the West are adequately connected. Figure 11 below shows the volume of commuter movements within and between regions East and West of the River Bann.

Category	Findings
	 *Figure 11 Evidence by Lorraine Barry (DfI) - as part of a PhD (2019) in modelling journey to work movements based on 2011 census journey to work data at super output area level.* • The DfI Rural Transport Fund (RTF) established in 1998 aims to reduce social isolation of rural dwellers with a Dial-a-Lift transport option for those who live in rural areas and have difficulty accessing everyday services due to a lack of transport. • In 2018/2019 funding to the Rural Community Transport Partnerships was £2.4 million with 232,470 trips delivered. • Easilink Community Transport (ECT) highlight the importance of place-based solutions to rural needs and the success of the RTF and the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS). For example, while most rural people begin their journey in their car, the emphasis for connectivity and environmental sustainability, needs to be on policy measures that get commuters out of their cars and onto public transport as quickly as possible. • Transport provision also needs to be considered for urban dwellers travelling to rural areas for recreation, tourism and weekend breaks.

Category	Findings
Broadband	• Access to broadband is an essential part of most people's daily lives. Digital connection is necessary for successful business development and operation. Service provision is always changing, and many people now rely on digital access to bank, grocery shop and pay bills. Interpersonal connectivity also relies heavily on digital inclusion. Friends and family stay in touch through Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp and other digital platforms. • In the past, there has been a digital divide between urban and rural areas, and between some rural areas and other rural areas. • Many parts of rural NI do not have sufficient access to broadband and lags behind urban provision. In 2019, NI had the highest proportion of non-internet users in the UK (14.2%) followed by the North East of England (12.1%). • According to Ofcom data at September 2020 there is a high uptake of broadband in both urban and rural areas, however, there are still 43,184 (6%) of those using the broadband who do not have access to good quality broadband. The vast majority (40,244) are in rural areas. The availability of faster services, not just in NI but right across the UK, is lower in rural areas. • Telecommunications is a reserved matter, which has not been devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive but is controlled centrally by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in London. Under the Communications Act 2003, the DfE has limited powers to intervene where there is evidence of market failure but this has to be undertaken with caution in order to avoid distortion of the market and comply with European regulations. • Project Stratum, which is being led by DfE, provides for a £165 million (including £15 million funding from DAERA) broadband rollout scheme in NI. This scheme seeks to improve connectivity for those unable to access broadband services of at least 30 megabits per second (Mbps). It is anticipated that around 76,000 premises, primarily in rural areas, are eligible for potential intervention as Project Stratum rolls out. The deployment phase is to run to 2023/24.

Category	Findings
	• Consideration could be given to utilising UK wide supporting solutions, which provide a minimum of 30 Mbps to all rural premises that, may fall outside of Project Stratum intervention areas. Such solutions could include: ~ The UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Rural Gigabit Connectivity scheme; ~ The City and Regional Growth Deals for NI covering all Council areas which include plans for digital projects; ~ Shared Rural Network, which will see improvements to mobile communications services across the UK, including rural areas of NI. ~ The UK Government Budget announced on 11 March 2020 committed £5billion to support the rollout of gigabit-capable broadband in the most difficult to reach 20% of the country. ~ The broadband universal service obligation (USO) implemented across the UK from March 2020 provides people in the UK the right to request a decent and affordable broadband connection. Under the USO, eligible homes and businesses will be able to request a connection. The connection is only provided free of charge where the cost of doing so is no more than £3,400.
Access	• **Digital Inclusion** - digital inclusion means not only having access to internet connectivity but also the skills, motivation and trust to go online with confidence. Digital inclusion initiatives that address these key elements can help those that are excluded to reap the benefits of the internet that many take for granted, e.g. reducing social isolation, improving independence, financial inclusion and better quality of life. This is already a priority for FFNI and the Rural Councils. • Investment in education is necessary to ensure people are trained to use digital services. This is true for businesses and residents, and particularly older people should be targeted to learn how to use online services, and how to use it as a tool to stay connected with family and friends. Training should be delivered locally, preferably in libraries where the infrastructure exists.

The next section outlines in detail, how the Working Group developed the priority interventions under the connectivity thematic pillar.

Development of the Priority Interventions

The Working Group interventions are framed within the context of four key elements: Transport; Connectivity; Broadband and Access to ensure successful delivery of the thematic pillar. Each element is outlined in more detail below:

- **Transport** - Ensure transport provisions adequately connect areas across NI. This supports sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers. A number of areas will need to be considered such as reviewing the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act to determine if any additional organisations such as Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHCO) need added to this. It could also entail signposting to transport solutions available to support rural/urban linkages as well as supporting the development of community based transport models in rural areas where Translink services are underutilised and/or have limited coverage.
- **Connectivity** - Ensure rural people are adequately trained to use and understand the benefits of high-speed broadband. This should support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live. This could involve identifying and tackling barriers to accessing online services such as digital cost, availability of technology, skills deficit and promotion of awareness of socioeconomic benefits of digitisation. Any gaps in provision could be identified with a focus on working with stakeholders to develop an education and training package around online security and digitisation.
- **Broadband** - Ensure high quality broadband is available in rural areas. This would support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres. This could involve pilots and promotion of voucher schemes.
- **Access** - Promote remote working across NI. This could involve identifying and tackling barriers to accessing services and support innovative solutions to service provision in rural areas through collaboration with the voluntary/community sector and social economy. This could include regeneration of rural towns and villages and the piloting of socioeconomic hubs to provide enhanced access to service provision.

The following priority interventions have therefore been developed for connectivity between urban and rural areas in NI:

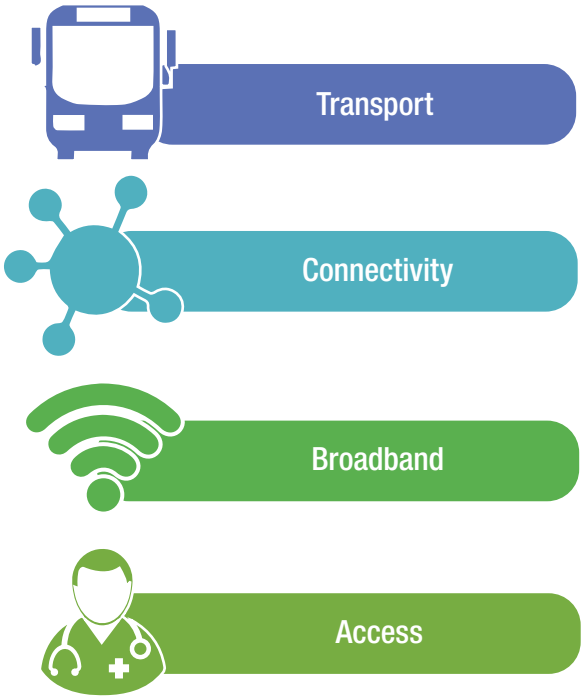
- **Intervention 1 - Transport**
  To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.

- **Intervention 2 - Connectivity**
  To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.

- **Intervention 3 - Broadband**
  To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live.

- **Intervention 4 - Access**
  To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas.

The diagram below summarises the four interventions for the connectivity thematic pillar.



As the priority interventions related to connectivity fall within the policy remit of other Government Departments, they will require collaborative working.

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

A stakeholder event was held in January 2020 to review engagement findings across all five policy Working Groups. Overall the feedback was positive, with the proposed thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention endorsed on the day. In regards to each thematic pillar, the stakeholders were asked their views on what they agreed with; and what needed changed or was missing. The feedback received in relation to the connectivity thematic pillar from the public rural stakeholder engagement event held in January 2020 is summarised below (detailed feedback received on the day is available in Annex 15):

- The narrative should be changed about rural to enhance connectivity. Rural policy has tended to be driven by the desire to address disadvantage and to ensure rural need is addressed. A narrative change will allow a focus on the development potential of rural areas and signal that business or leisure facilities are not necessarily best placed in urban centres; and
- Connectivity was identified as central to the rural policy framework.

The next section outlines some potential implications that have since been identified due to COVID-19.

Potential Implications of COVID-19

The Connectivity Working Group presented their evidence and findings prior to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. To ensure that the Rural Policy Framework accurately reflects need, Working Group Members were asked in May 2020 to advise if there were any impacts on priorities previously identified or emerging issues that may need to be taken into account.

The impacts of COVID-19 on Connectivity were highlighted as follows:

- Some jobs can be done effectively remotely, whilst others cannot. Many more organisations invested in capacity and hardware and now have staff with the capability to continue remote working post-lockdown. Employees who were already IT literate were able to develop new skills quickly and utilise new platforms/technology effectively to enhance their remote working.
- Broadband connectivity is an essential public utility and the remote working/home schooling during Covid-19 has demonstrated gaps in broadband connectivity in rural NI. Areas which are missed out by Project Stratum need to be targeted with alternatives such as DCMS Gigabit voucher schemes.
- Huge potential impact on primary health services if telemedicine can be rolled out further - big issue for older people who need remote access to GP services but are delaying contact with GPs due to having to shield.
- Effect on public transport usage is likely to be suppressed if the private car and active transport (there are risks associated with cycling on rural roads) provide alternatives. People are likely to be wary of public transport for a period of time and social distancing may prove difficult both practically and economically.
- Potential in broadband hub idea in small towns/villages to foster remote working and this can also complement active transport.

Feedback outlined above indicated that no changes are required to the high level priority interventions given that the interventions are broad enough to incorporate the issues identified above.

Linkages to Programme for Government Outcomes

Connectivity contributes to four of the twelve Programme for Government outcomes as follows:

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy;
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment;
- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society; and
- **Outcome 11:** We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.

We believe that Connectivity links into the Programme for Government Outcomes outlined above as follows:

- Economic well-being, social cohesion and environmental improvements all rely in varying ways on advances in our connected infrastructure as key enablers to achieving the thematic pillar;
- Enhancing the flow of traffic on key routes between population centres will not only benefit the individual road user but also enhance economic growth and reduce environmental hotspots as a result of traffic congestion. It is a key enabler for economic growth;
- In isolation, road improvements will also drive an increase in road traffic, generating further congestion and poorer air quality. Incentivising more sustainable and efficient ways of travelling such as walking, cycling and public transport as choices will reduce traffic congestion particularly in the peak am/pm commuter period and encourage healthier, more environmentally sustainable lifestyles which will be of wider benefit; and
- Broadband availability is a core element to support economic growth and social cohesion. Economic growth can be supported through provision of superfast broadband for those premises that require it and the spread of enhanced internet speed connectivity to particular areas which currently lag behind government's vision for increased coverage across the UK.

Conclusion

This thematic pillar considers the importance of infrastructure and connectivity between rural and urban areas and the importance of good connectivity to all aspects of rural life. From physical infrastructure and connectivity such as roads and transport links through to improvements in communications technology such as broadband and mobile coverage.

Q9) Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity: To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.
- To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.
- To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live.
- To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

The Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland

Overarching Aim

The overarching aim of the Rural Policy Framework for NI is as follows:

To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active.

Thematic Pillars

There are five key thematic pillars that make up the Rural Policy Framework for NI as follows:

Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship • To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.	
Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism • To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.	
Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing • To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.	
Thematic Pillar 4: Employment • To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.	
Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity • To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.	

Links to Draft Programme for Government Outcomes

We note that the Executive has recently launched a public consultation on its Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework 2021. The development work for the Rural Policy Framework was based on the existing draft PfG 2016-2021 outcomes. The outcomes listed below are from the existing draft PfG, however, should the proposed outcomes be accepted, they will be incorporated at the first opportunity (for ease of reference we have also listed the new corresponding proposed outcomes alongside the existing ones). The Rural Policy Framework for NI is intended to feed into the following eleven (or eight under the proposed outcomes) draft Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes:

Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong competitive regionally balanced economy.	**Proposed Outcome:** Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral.
Outcome 2: We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.	**Proposed Outcome:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
Outcome 3: We have a more equal society.	**Proposed Outcome:** We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect.
Outcome 4: We enjoy long, healthy, active lifestyles.	**Proposed Outcome:** We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives.
Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.	**Proposed Outcome:** Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral.
Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs.	**Proposed Outcome:** Everyone can reach their potential.
Outcome 8: We care for others and we help those in need.	**Proposed Outcome:** We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives.
Outcome 9: We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity.	**Proposed Outcome:** We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect.
Outcome 10: We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest.	**Proposed Outcome:** People want to live, work and visit here.

Outcome 11: We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.	**Proposed Outcomes:** Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral; Our children and young people have the best start in life.
Outcome 12: We give our children and young people the best start in life.	**Proposed Outcome:** Our children and young people have the best start in life.

Priority Areas for Intervention

The Rural Policy Framework for NI will focus on nineteen priority areas for intervention. Each of the five thematic pillars will incorporate a number of priority areas for intervention. It is recognised that there is potential for significant overlap between the five thematic pillars and that individual priority areas may address more than one thematic pillar.

Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship - this pillar will be supported by a number supporting interventions which:

- Develop a culture of rural innovation;
- Raise awareness, build capacity & capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation; and
- Invest in and develop our rural economy.

Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism - this pillar will be supported by a number supporting interventions which:

- Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for Northern Ireland;
- Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity;
- Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas; and
- Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing - this pillar will be supported by a number supporting interventions which:

- Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness;
- Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area;
- Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers;
- Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres; and
- Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

Thematic Pillar 4: Employment - this pillar will be supported by a number supporting interventions which:

- Promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth;
- Identify and address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers; and
- Invest in and develop our rural society.

Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity - this pillar will be supported by a number supporting interventions which:

- Support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres;
- Reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas;
- Support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live; and
- Support sustainable transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.

Q10) What are your views on how the five thematic pillars should be prioritised, ranked by priority from 1-5 (with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest priority)?

- Thematic pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
- Thematic pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism.
- Thematic pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing.
- Thematic pillar 4: Employment.
- Thematic pillar 5: Connectivity.

Key Principles

The following 14 key principles apply to the Rural Policy Framework for NI:

- The Framework will focus on addressing the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft PfG;
- The Framework will promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities;
- The Framework will encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector;
- The Framework will recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- The Framework will encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- The Framework will complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016;
- The Framework will be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas;
- The Framework will promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities;
- The Framework will seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75;

- The Framework will seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal;
- The Framework will promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation) learning and best practice between organisations;
- The Framework will seek to complement the community planning process;
- The Framework will recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis; and
- The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

Q11) Do you agree that the 14 Key Principles outlined below are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Address the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft Programme for Government 2016-21 (PfG).
- Promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities.
- Encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector.
- Recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment.
- Encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies.
- Complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016.
- Be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas.
- Promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities.
- Seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75.

- Seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal.
- Promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation), learning and best practice between organisations.
- Seek to complement the community planning process.
- Recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis.
- The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Implementation

The Rural Policy Framework for NI sets out five thematic pillars incorporating nineteen priority areas for intervention that we want to achieve to help create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active. We will work towards achieving these interventions in relation to the policies, programmes and services we provide.

Publication of this draft Framework is only the beginning of the process. Subject to consultation feedback and approval of the proposed Rural Policy Framework for NI, there are a number of steps to take forward as we begin to put it into operation. A key task will involve developing individual schemes into a new Programme entitled 'Rural Business and Community Investment Programme'. This new Programme will take into account any lessons learned from the Priority 6 element of the EU RDP and it is anticipated to last for a minimum of 7 years to facilitate meaningful outcomes and to tie into the multi-year budget approach outlined in the New Decade, New Approach Deal. Any Programme and associated interventions require sufficient budgets and delivery mechanisms to realise the Framework's overarching vision and aim. The interventions should also complement each other and be strategic in both development and delivery.

We will work with other organisations in designing and implementing a programme of priority areas for intervention to be delivered under the Framework. These organisations will include other Departments, local councils, other public and/or private bodies and the rural community sector.

The Rural Policy Framework for NI will operate from 2021 onwards and the initial programme will be implemented over a period of 7 years. The programme will be published setting out details of any schemes to be funded. We expect that an interim evaluation of the programme will be completed in year four and recommendations implemented. The programme will be a living document that will be updated regularly during the lifetime of the Framework. This enables opportunities to make amendments to the schemes to be funded under the programme, according to the need at the time. The need for such flexibility and adaptability was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An Equality Screening and Human Rights screening exercise has been carried out in relation to the draft Rural Policy Framework. A screening exercise will also be carried out in respect of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme to be delivered under the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

Monitoring

All Departments are collectively responsible for this Rural Policy Framework for NI. DAERA will have a co-ordinating role but each Department has responsibility for their respective departmental and policy areas.

To ensure that any future Programme can proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward we will establish a new cross-cutting Rural Society Oversight Committee comprising senior managers from Departments and a range of stakeholders representing organisations with an interest in issues affecting rural communities. This Committee will be responsible for monitoring any future Programme, with regular updates provided on progress and expenditure. Whilst this committee will not have approval powers it will be able to highlight new need or reconfiguration of existing scheme(s) ensuring robust scrutiny of the Programme. Such an approach will provide opportunities to proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward. We expect that an update will be provided to the oversight committee twice per year or on an ad hoc basis when there is a requirement to do so.

Monitoring and Reporting

Indicators emanating from the nineteen priority intervention will be developed to assist with the monitoring of the effectiveness of the Framework. These indicators will be developed during Year One of the Framework. Whilst some indicators will be clearly associated with one particular priority intervention, other indicators will be cross-cutting and relevant across a number of priority areas for intervention.

There will be ongoing monitoring of the indicators to determine whether the actions we are taking are having an impact, how the indicators are being achieved and whether or not we are creating a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active.

Reporting and any updates to the Rural Society Oversight Committee will be proportionate and meaningful, so it can clearly be seen whether or not the Framework is making an impact. It is our intention that, as far as possible, reporting arrangements will be aligned with the reporting arrangements for the PfG. Data will be made available to our stakeholders and the public so they can see what progress is being made.

Equality Monitoring will be undertaken at a programme level regarding funding.

Regular Review

Regular reviews of the Rural Policy Framework will be considered to ensure that the Framework takes account of new issues affecting rural communities that might emerge over its lifetime.

Evaluation

Each funded intervention under the Rural Policy Framework for NI will be subject to an evaluation following its completion. An evaluation of the Framework will be undertaken prior to the development of any future Framework.

Next Steps

The Department welcomes feedback in relation to these consultation proposals and the draft Equality and Human Rights Screening Template. All consultation responses will be analysed and used, as appropriate, to shape the final recommendations. Following the end of the consultation period the Department will:

- Collate and analyse consultation responses;
- Publish a response report (all responses may be published in full or in summary form);
- Finalise proposals and the Equality and Human Rights Screening Template; and
- Publish a future programme.

Q12) Are there any other aspects of the proposals that you wish to comment on?

If you have any additional comments, please outline below.

Rural Needs Considerations

DAERA has a statutory duty to implement the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act. A Rural Needs Impact Assessment has been completed and is available at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/Rural%20Policy%20Framework%20for%20Northern%20Ireland%20Rural%20Needs%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf

Equality Considerations

Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act. We commit to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring our effective compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our progress.

In the context of Section 75, 'policy' is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions. In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.

We use the tools of screening and Equality Impact Assessment to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process. Policies that we propose to adopt will be subject to screening prior to implementation. For more detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages, we will screen at various stages during implementation.

An Equality and Human Rights Screening Template has been completed for this Framework and is available at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Rural%20Framework%20for%20NI%20EQIA%20Screening%20Template.docx.DOCX

Q13) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DAERA in relation to Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland in respect of:

a. The Equality and Human Rights Template
If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. The Rural Needs Impact Assessment
If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

How to Respond

DAERA welcomes responses and comments from stakeholders on the questions outlined in this document to help develop the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland for publishing.

A full list of questions in this document can be found at pages 122 - 128.

When responding please provide the following information:

Your name;
Contact details (preferably e-mail); and

Organisation you represent (if applicable).

This consultation exercise uses the Citizen Space Hub, accessible at: https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/daera-central-services-and-rural-affairs/rural-policy-framework as the primary means of response, in order to make it as accessible as possible.

However, you may download a response template at: at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/20.21.042%20Rural%20Policy%20Framework%20NI%20-%20Response%20Template%20final.PDF and reply:

By e-mail to: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk

By post to:
Rural Policy and Delivery Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Limavady
Londonderry
BT49 9HP

Early responses are encouraged but the closing date for responses is **Monday 6 September 2021**. Before you submit your responses please read the “Publication of Responses” section below, which gives guidance on the legal position. If you require any further information on this consultation exercise, we would encourage you to contact us via e-mail. If you are unable to access e-mail, you can telephone us on 028 7744 5113. Please note this is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back.

Publication of Responses

At the end of the engagement, the Department intends to publish a summary of responses following the closing date for receipt of views. Your response, and all other responses to this publication, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses will not be treated as such a request.

Section 8(e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this stakeholder engagement exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation.

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this stakeholder engagement exercise, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response.

This means that information provided by you in response to the stakeholder engagement is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
- Acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (https://ico.org.uk/).

Summary of Consultation Questions

Consultation Questions

Q1) Do you agree that the proposed overarching aim 'To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active' for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland is appropriate?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q2) Do you agree that the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) approach should continue under the wider umbrella of the Rural Policy Framework?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q3) In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five challenges from the options outlined below.

Rank these five challenges by priority from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most significant challenge, 2 being less significant etc.).

- Access to public services (e.g. health, education and social services).
- Availability of appropriate and adequate community facilities/supports for different age groups.
- Broadband/mobile phone connectivity.
- Changing demographics (e.g. ageing population, new communities, and retention of young people in rural areas).
- Climate change and environmental sustainability.
- Future of farming/agri-food sector.
- Jobs and business.
- Managing tourism in a sustainable way.
- Transport and infrastructure.

If there are any other challenges you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box below.

Q4) In your opinion, what are the main opportunities facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five opportunities from the options outlined below.

Rank these five opportunities by priority from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most significant opportunity, 2 being less significant etc.).

- Diversification within farming/agri-food sector.
- Economic development of markets (local, national and international) and sectors (both non-traditional and emerging).
- Enabling communities (e.g. supporting local leadership, groups and volunteers, enhancing community amenities).
- Enterprise and employment: expanding opportunities (e.g. Social Enterprise, apprenticeships, supporting entrepreneurs).
- Joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland.
- Optimisation of digital connectivity (e.g. Broadband and emerging technologies) (e.g. remote working, research, development and innovation, and future jobs).
- Revitalisation of towns and villages.
- Sustainable development and climate adaptation (e.g. renewable energy).
- Tourism: expansion of options including heritage, recreation and activity tourism.
- Transport infrastructure and services.

If there are any other opportunities you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box below.

Q5) Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship: To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Develop a culture of rural innovation.
- Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Invest in and develop our rural economy.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q6) Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism: To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for Northern Ireland.
- Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q7) Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing: To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below**.**

b. Do you agree that the five priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q8) Thematic Pillar 4: Employment: To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 4: Employment is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 4: Employment are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth.
- To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers.
- To invest in and develop our rural society.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q9) Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity: To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.
- To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.
- To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live.
- To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q10) What are your views on how the five thematic pillars should be prioritised, ranked by priority from 1-5 (with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest priority)?

- Thematic pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
- Thematic pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism.
- Thematic pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing.
- Thematic pillar 4: Employment
- Thematic pillar 5: Connectivity.

Q11) Do you agree that the 14 Key Principles outlined below are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Address the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft Programme for Government 2016-21 (PfG).
- Promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities.
- Encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector.
- Recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- Encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- Complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016.
- Be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas.
- Promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities.
- Seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75.

- Seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal.
- Promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation), learning and best practice between organisations.
- Seek to complement the community planning process.
- Recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis.
- The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q12) Are there any other aspects of the proposals that you wish to comment on?

If you have any additional comments, please outline below.

Q13) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DAERA in relation to Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland in respect of:

a. The Equality and Human Rights Screening Template

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. The Rural Needs Impact Assessment

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Annex 1 - Definitions and Terminology

Rural

Those settlements with a population of 5,000 or less[22]. This equates to more than one third of the population living in rural areas. Some degree of flexibility would be recognised when considering economic activity to extend the settlement size above the recognised rural definition where this is clearly supported with a rationale.

Entrepreneurship

Any attempt at new business or venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organisation, or the expansion of an existing business organisation by an individual, teams of individuals or established businesses.[23]

Innovation

The successful generation and exploitation of new ideas. It is about transforming creative thinking into new products, new and improved processes and technologies to support new ways of doing business[24]. Rural innovation can take many different forms, including (adopted from NESTA[25]):

- **Collaborative Innovation** the establishment of learning networks, strategic partnerships, clustering and supply chain developments offering potential for long-term economic growth and regional competitiveness;
- **Production Innovation:** the adoption of new processes, systems, technology and equipment to improve efficiency and productivity and actions that make positive climate related contributions;
- **Adaptive Innovation:** modifications to existing business models or processes in response to changing circumstances or market conditions;
- **Marketing/Digital Innovations:** the quick adoption and use of digital and network marketing techniques and the use of electronic media to promote and sell products into distant markets; and

22 NISRA (2015) Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements
23 GEM - The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor definition
24 Innovate NI Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014-2025
25 Considering innovation in its widest sense, the Working Group has developed the findings of the NESTA Study on *'Rural Innovation'* (2007) to reflect their aspirations for innovation in Thematic Pillar 1.

- **Social Innovation:** solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources.

Micro & Small Enterprises

A micro enterprise is typically defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 10 persons; a small enterprise is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons.

Social Enterprises

As businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.[26]

26 DTI (2002)

Annex 2 - List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
ACE	Action for Community Employment
AERA	Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
AFBI	Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
AR	Augmented reality
ARTS	Assisted Rural Travel Scheme
BME	Black and minority ethnics
CCTV	Closed-Circuit television.
COVID-19	Coronavirus D
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DCMS	Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DE	Department of Education
Defra	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for the Economy
DfI	Department for Infrastructure
DoH	Department of Health
ECT	Easilink Community Transport
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FFNI	Full Fibre Northern Ireland
GB	Great Britain
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
GP	General Practitioner
GVA	Gross Value Added
HED	Historic Environment Division
INTERREG	INTERREG is a series of programmes to stimulate cooperation between regions in and out of the European Union (EU), funded by the European Regional Development Fund.
IT	Information Technology
LAG	Local Action Group
LEADER	A local development method which has been used to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas.
MARA	Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas
Mbps	Megabits per Second

Abbreviation	Explanation
NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
NHSCT	Northern Health and Social Care Trust
NI	Northern Ireland
NIHF	Northern Ireland Hotels Federation
NIRDP	Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme
NIRWN	Northern Ireland Regional Women's Network
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Association
NITHCO	Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
Ofcom	The Office of Communications
PEACE PLUS	A EU cross-border programme that contributes to a more prosperous and stable society in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. The programme achieves this by funding activities that promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to the cross-border economic and territorial development of the region. It builds upon previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes.
PfG	Programme for Government
PHA	Public Health Authority
RCN	Rural Community Network
RDP	Rural Development Programme
RISP	Regional Infrastructure Support Programme
RoI	Republic of Ireland
RSN	Rural Support Network
RTF	Rural Transport Fund
RWPAP	Rural White Paper Action Plan
SIA	Security Industry Authority
SIB	Strategic Investment Board
SM	Service Mark
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SOA	Super Output Area
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
SUSE+	Step Up to Sustainable Employment
TEA	Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity
TIFF	Total Income from Farming
TRPSI	Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation
UK	United Kingdom
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
USA	United States of America
USO	Universal Service Obligation
VICE (model)	Visitors, Industry, Community, and Environment
VR	Virtual Reality

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Annex 4 - Organisations Represented at Engagement Event Held on 16 January 2020

List of attendees	
• Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)	• Early Years
• Alliance Party	• Easilink Community Transport
• Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	• Enterprise NI
• Ards and North Down Borough Council	• Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
• Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas (SOAR) Local Action Group (LAG)	• Fermanagh Rural Community Network
	• Generating Rural Opportunities within (GROW) South Antrim
• Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	• Invest NI
• Causeway Coast and Glens Local Action Group (LAG)	• Lagan Rural Partnership
	• Libraries NI
• Centre for Cross Border Studies	• Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
• College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)	• Rural Area Partnership in Derry (RAPID)
	• Mid Ulster District Council
• Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)	• Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership
	• MURD
• Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas Ltd (COSTA)	• Newcastle University
	• Newry Mourne and Down District Council
• County Armagh Community Development	• Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)
• County Down Rural Community Network	• NI Community Relations Council
• Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)	• NI Environment Link
	• Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
• Mid and East Antrim Local Action Group (LAG)	• Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
• Department for Communities (DfC)	• Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
• Department for Infrastructure (DfI)	• Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
• Department for the Economy (DfE)	• Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance
• Department of Education (DE)	• Omagh Forum for Rural Associations
• Department of Finance (DoF)	• Outdoor Recreation NI
• Derry and Strabane Council Local Action Group (LAG)	
• Disability Action	

List of attendees	
• Public Health Agency	• Sinn Féin
• Queen's University Belfast	• TADA Rural Support Network
• Rural Action	• Tourism NI
• Rural Action Board	• Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
• Rural Community Network (RCN)	• Ulster GAA
• Rural Community Network (RCN) Board	• Ulster Unionist Party
• Rural Housing Association	• Venture International
• Rural Support	• Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster
• SDLP	• YouthAction Northern Ireland

Annex 5 - Stakeholder Feedback from Engagement Event Held on 16 January 2020

The table below highlights the high level information gathered at the stakeholder event identifying a number of opportunities, gaps, links and synergies across the five thematic pillars. A number of key messages from the day are also highlighted. This information has been used to inform the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland, particularly in areas such as enhanced broadband, health provision and sustainability etc.

Opportunities/Gaps/Links/Synergies
• **Linkages across thematic pillars** - thematic pillar 5 (connectivity - transport and communications) needs to be prioritised as it is key facilitator and a cross-cutting theme across all other pillars. Any enhancements to connectivity also needs to be affordable. It was noted that there is some crossover between thematic pillar 1 (innovation and entrepreneurship) and thematic pillar 2 (rural tourism). It was noted that the DoH needs to be involved in thematic pillar 3 (rural health and social wellbeing) given that it will have a knock-on effect on the DoH and Health Trust budgets going forward.
• **Working together** - there is a need for a cross-cutting approach across government (Departments, local government) and the wider community and voluntary sector especially in the context of no EU rural development funding. DAERA cannot deliver the framework on its own but should act as a rural champion, bringing rural stakeholders together and facilitating ongoing meaningful partnership working/collaboration. Silos should be avoided at all levels with ongoing due regard for Rural Needs in line with the Rural Needs Act. There also needs to be a common understanding as to 'what rural is'. Stakeholders noted that the framework should influence/link into the PfG as there is no mention of rural in the current draft PfG. The need for cross-border cooperation as well as synergy with UK and EU was also highlighted.
• **Sustainability** - it is important to improve rural communities in a sustainable way. There is scope for increased renewable energy and encouraging increased use of shared/public transport to help minimise any environmental issues. In relation to environment, it was suggested that linkages with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) Partnerships were needed. In regards to creating a more sustainable tourism sector, Tourism NI's 'Embrace the Giant Spirit' represents a real opportunity for branding NI.
• **Community Planning/Bottom Up Approach** - the need for a bottom-up rural community development approach was highlighted in relation to rural development. It was suggested that there should be linkages to Community Planning. Departments already must have regard for Community Plans in the exercise of their departmental functions.

Opportunities/Gaps/Links/Synergies

- **Evidencing Need** - need should be clearly identified with best practice fully shared and disseminated (preferably real-time) to help measure gaps. The focus should be on outcomes to help determine what tools are needed to get there. There should also be a mechanism for local communities to drive their own programme based on the area's specific needs.
- **Funding/Animation/Support** - it was noted that need should be clearly identified and outlined in business cases. The requirements of funding schemes should also be carefully considered for rural areas to ensure better outcomes. Stakeholders noted that sufficient time was required to complete projects to balance the need between quality and cost. It was noted that there were many barriers in the current procurement process. The importance of pre-development and animation work was also highlighted. Stakeholders suggested that some funding should be made available for more flexible innovative funding opportunities. Stakeholders indicated that small rural businesses find it difficult to manage the grants application process and that micro businesses should be supported to scale.
- **Connectivity** - the need for improved infrastructure to improve connectivity across NI was referred to (e.g. motorways). This would help to connect people and communities.
- **Community** - involvement from the local community is important and rural community leadership could be encouraged. Safe, shared spaces and peace and reconciliation are crucial in maintaining vibrant and sustainable communities.
- **Celebrate Success/Share Best Practice** - stakeholders noted that DAERA needed to do more to promote both rural and the framework, particularly in trying to engage with the disengaged. Sharing of and disseminating best practice should be encouraged. The current Rural Development Programme achievements should also be recognised and celebrated.
- **Health and Wellbeing** - reference was made to the benefits of social prescribing and the need to support carers in the community. There is also an ageing population and it can be more difficult to access GPs in rural areas. Food poverty was another issue raised by stakeholders.
- **Planning** - stakeholders noted that rural planning policy can make it more difficult to engage in rural tourism, especially with short-term planning periods. There is also a lack of affordable rural social housing.
- Stakeholders indicated that there needed to be greater integration with the private sector when considering rural development.
- Reference was made to the need to upgrade waste water treatment plants.

Key Messages

- There are too many agencies, which leads to confusion - there is a need for “one stop shop for advice”.
- An exit strategy with sustainable outcomes was required and that long-term support for projects was needed.
- Connectivity is key - for jobs and home working to reduce commuting and the impact on the climate. Fit for purpose Broadband is needed for modern day living and working in rural areas. If connectivity and employability are not addressed, young people will move away from rural areas and they will become unattractive places to live reducing the sustainability of rural areas and communities.
- Co-operation with other Departments and stakeholders is key with DAERA being the rural champion and influencing the PfG. There are structures already in place such as community planning which could support the framework. Details are needed on how the new framework is going to be measured.
- Rural Tourism Theme needs expanded to include Leisure, Sport & Recreation. Increased community engagement is required to use local community and history resulting in a better rural tourism offering.
- Rural areas should be viewed as something positive and actions should draw from an asset-based approach. Affordable rural social housing and Cross Border collaboration is key.
- Support for key individuals in the business and community & voluntary sector will be important.

Annex 6 - Evidence Base Output from Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship Working Group

Issues	Findings
Challenges and Opportunities arising post EU Rural Development Programme Funding	• Uncertainty particularly around future trade agreements and tariffs. • Impact on agri-food and farming e.g. exposure to risk. • Cross-border implications relating to movement of goods, people, animals and services and implications on key sectors e.g. agri-food, tourism, construction, rural villages and retail. • Impact on labour market particularly those sectors dependent on migrant workers with labour retention and availability becoming an increasing concern. • The need to be sensitive to the needs of businesses particularly in rural areas which face a unique combination of challenges was highlighted not least in terms of rural development along the border corridor with Ireland. • Post EU Rural Development Programme funding, there is a need to support cooperation within and between NI, Ireland and UK to maximise opportunities to access and leverage EU and International programmes in support of Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
Other Executive strategies and policies relevant to rural innovation and entrepreneurship	**Economy 2030** • Economy 2030 is the DfE's draft industrial strategy for NI. The proposed new Industrial Strategy sets out the Department's plan to turn NI into one of the world's most innovative and competitive small advanced economies. It aims to develop a globally competitive economy on the pillars of innovation, enhanced skills and employability, an international outlook and the best economic infrastructure that can be built. **Innovate NI, Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014-2025** • This strategy aims to stimulate a step change in innovation across the economy and highlights that skills, design and collaboration between sectors locally, nationally and internationally are essential for innovation.

Issues	Findings
	Draft DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025[27] • The mission of this strategy is 'An innovation ecosystem delivering for the environment, society and the rural economy'. The following three pillars were also identified: Create an Innovative Culture; Provide Effective Leadership; and Enable Connectivity. • DAERA cite a number of barriers to innovation including availability and cost of finance, leadership, technology, research and development and creative thinking skills, risk aversion, and lack of understanding of innovation. **Green Growth/Northern Ireland Environment Strategy** • DAERA has initiated Northern Ireland's first Environment Strategy. DAERA recognises the strategic importance of innovation in addressing the wider climate change, environmental and social challenges associated with growing and rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy. • Green Growth aims to transform our society towards net zero by 2050, protect and enhance our environment and deliver sustainable economic growth and will involve the development and co-design of a multi-decade Strategy and Delivery Framework. **Local Government Community Planning** • All Local Government Districts (LGDs) have developed Community Plans. These plans have been informed by extensive consultation undertaken with local communities and stakeholders. All plans contain key priorities for economic development including actions to drive business growth, as well as supporting actions to drive rural development and regeneration. In this regard there is complementarity between the objective of Thematic Pillar 1 and the priorities of Community Planning.

27 DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025, Public Consultation January 2020.

Issues	Findings
Practices in other jurisdictions	**PEACE PLUS** • PEACE PLUS is the new cross-border programme that will contribute to a more prosperous and stable society in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland. The programme will achieve this by funding peace and reconciliation activities, and by funding activities that contribute to North/ South cross-border economic and territorial development of the region (previously funded under INTERREG). The combination of the PEACE and INTERREG type activities in a single programme is reflected in the name of the programme where 'PLUS' represents the inclusion of wider economic, social and environmental activities. • The draft regulations of the programme identify 5 policy objectives: A Smarter Europe; A Greener, Lower Carbon Europe; A More Connected Europe; A More Social Europe; and A Europe Closer to its Citizens. **UK Shared Prosperity Programme** • The UK will no longer receive structural funding from the EU. Structural funding is used for boosting several aspects of economic development, including support for businesses, employment and agriculture, and is administered by the different nations of the UK. In order to replace this funding, the Government has pledged to set up a Shared Prosperity Fund to "reduce inequalities between communities by raising productivity, especially in those parts of the UK whose economies are furthest behind"[28]. **Europe 2020 Strategy** • The important role of entrepreneurship as a driver of economic growth and diversification has long been recognised at European level. Entrepreneurship is a key component of the EU's Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. **11th OECD Rural Development Conference on Enhancing Rural Innovation 2018[29]** • This conference confirmed that rural development is essential to achieve inclusive growth. Cooperation and collaboration were identified as essential components alongside knowledge exchange, capacity building and investing in softer skills such as creativity flexibility, adaptability and collaboration.

28 Conservative Party, *Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future,* 18 May 2017.
29 The 11th OECD Rural Development Conference on Enhancing Rural Innovation took place in Edinburgh, Scotland in April 2018 supported by the 4 UK Network Support Units including the Northern Ireland Network.

Issues	Findings
	• The main conclusions arising from the Conference included: ~ Accessing international markets, funding and finding skilled workers are recurrent challenges for rural businesses. However, technology can allow business to internationalise and keep up with global trends. ~ Some rural businesses need high amounts of capital, particularly those relating to natural resources. ~ Rural innovation and growth occur through businesses combining resources and ideas for new ways of creating goods and services that are competitive in national and international markets. Rural leadership and entrepreneurship are critical to stimulate growth and can be influenced by public policy. ~ Innovation does not come from isolation, but it is generated from contact and exchange with other sectors and people. ~ Creating platforms that are inclusive to SMEs and promoting work across borders can boost the innovation process in rural areas. **Rural Services Network call for a rural strategy (2019)** • It was highlighted that there are significant challenges in addressing the level of entrepreneurship including: ~ Reducing the productivity gap; ~ Helping rural businesses (especially SMEs) to grow locally; ~ Supporting further diversification, especially into high value-added sectors; ~ Sustaining high streets and their businesses in rural towns; and ~ Creating better paid and more secure jobs. **RoI - Realising our Rural Potential - Action Plan for Rural Development** • This action plan identified supporting enterprise and employment as one of the core pillars to improving the lives of those living and working in rural communities and included the following four key objectives: Growing and attracting enterprise; Supporting sectoral growth; Skills and innovation; and Supporting rural job seekers and protecting incomes.

Issues	Findings
	Royal Irish Academy's 2018-2019 series of rural stakeholders' consultative events • These events organised in association with the DRCD focused on economic development; social cohesion and sustainable communities. It identified a number of actions to assist rural entrepreneurs and businesses to diversify into new sectors including: Embed support for local enterprise; Greater coordination of support structures; Enhance rural community leader development and entrepreneurial activity; New sector potential; and Enhance Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Industry Collaboration.

Annex 7 - Stakeholder Feedback for Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship Thematic Pillar

Working Group 1: Rural Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Feedback from January 2020 Stakeholder Event

What do you agree with?

- **Innovation** - stakeholders agreed that developing a culture of rural innovation was key to future economic growth and a focus on innovation was welcomed. It was noted that innovation was high in the current Rural Development Programme.
- **Farm diversification** - offers huge potential (especially post- EU Rural Development Programme Funding). It should not replace farming but make it more sustainable by providing an additional income to support other members of the family and help them to remain on the farm (i.e. young people).
- **Entrepreneurs** - it was noted that females and young people should be targeted with training to develop their entrepreneurial skills. Support would also be required such as tying into education at a young age or addressing barriers such as childcare and other caring responsibilities etc.
- **Awareness/Support** - it is important to raise awareness of opportunities and potential funding for rural business through animation and publicity. It was noted that the current provision of grants for rural businesses are too prescriptive (i.e. job creation and heavily loaded with paperwork) and that going forward a focus on efficiency and profitability would be welcomed. Mentoring support is key for small businesses. Any championing role will need to ensure a joined up approach with no duplication with others providing business support.
- **Roles/Responsibilities** - the distinct roles of organisations such as Invest NI and Councils needs to be understood. In particular there should be collaborative work across both Departments and linked into the wider sector to maximise impact (e.g. TRPSI approach). Lessons should be learned from any other jurisdictions with any proposed interventions being outcomes focused.
- Good connectivity is required to facilitate the success of Thematic Pillar 1. Businesses could also be brought together in a cluster to reduce isolation.
- Finance is still a barrier for businesses and existing businesses should also be targeted. The model of the DfC town centre regeneration grant was referred to including the opportunity to provide wrap around support with any grant. There is also a key opportunity for social enterprises under this Thematic Pillar.

What might need changed?

- **Social enterprise** - stakeholders noted that the definition of 'social economy' needs transformed and communicated, especially given that many rural organisations do not realise they are a social economy and can avail of support. Some stakeholders noted that innovation needs to be applied to the whole approach of delivering entrepreneurial support to rural dwellers. However, this was with the caveat that a balance needs to be struck between promoting innovation and supporting more traditional businesses as not all rural businesses can diversify.
- **Grant Application Process** - stakeholders noted that the application process should be user friendly. In previous programmes, the provision of grants for rural businesses were seen to be too restrictive in the requirement for job creation and also too heavily loaded with paperwork. There was also a high drop out in relation to Local Action Group (LAG) applications. Stakeholders suggested that the procurement process needs to change as it was too long. In regards to the scoring of applications, it was suggested that not just innovation but also wellbeing, mental and emotional wellbeing impacts etc., need to be scored so as to not disadvantage rural social economy enterprises.
- **Farm Diversification** - there is a need to work out how to accommodate farm diversification into public goods alongside commercial farming. There can also be difficulties between existing farm businesses and ventures such as tourism.
- **Roles/Responsibilities** - stakeholders noted that there needs to be more cross departmental working with the rural framework also resourced across departments and local government. Joined up working should also reduce any duplication of services across government (for example there should be alignment with wider planning policies and processes such as rates, connectivity). There should also be measurable outcomes linked to a strong evidence base.
- **Signposting** - stakeholders indicated that there were too many agencies and that there should be a "one stop shop for advice" (for example information available on an updated hub with appropriate signposting). It was also noted that those living in rural areas were not always aware of council boundaries.
- **Entrepreneurs** - Need to raise awareness and build capacity: need mentors, hand-holders in areas especially for women (i.e. Go for It type initiatives).
- **Awareness/Support** - Stakeholders indicated that the support needed was not always a grant. It could be for example, increased animation before devising business plans. It was noted that significant support is required in rural areas, with the need for championship roles. Volunteer-led organisations require support for accessing funding and capital grants. Also support required in coastal rural areas could be very different to that for inland rural areas.

What might need changed?

- **Training** - there should be appropriate signposting to training programmes. It was noted that third level higher education sector buy in was required, however, apprenticeships and peer learning should also be explored.
- **Connectivity** - networking/speed of broadband key for growth and sustainability of any investment.
- Replicate urban regeneration models in rural areas and demonstrate the value of community hubs. Responsibility for service provision in rural.
- It was noted that there was a need to show the value of the previous Rural Development Programme and to secure funds for immediate interventions. Rural should also not be lost in agriculture, especially given the social value of such initiatives.

What is missing?

- **Collaborative working** - collaboration was seen as a cross-cutting theme and that Departments need to work together. Duplication across bodies should be avoided and that there is an opportunity for better connections and relationships between business (could include Invest NI) and regional colleges including CAFRE. Links also need to be encouraged between small and large businesses to develop the supply chain in rural areas and encouraged shared learning between the businesses.
- **Shared learning** - learning needs to be taken from best practice elsewhere. There is a 'risk adverse' culture and sharing of ideas/think tank is needed to foster creativity.
- **Evidence Base** - rural evidence base is largely supported by AFBI and CAFRE but there could also be a role for Universities. It was also suggested that CAFRE needs to do more on Agri Tec/diversification/innovation.
- **Entrepreneurs** - social infrastructure needs to be sustained in order to encourage young people to remain or return to rural communities and to promote innovation (particularly in Hi-tech industries). Entrepreneurial education is required at an early age in schools. The language around entrepreneurship and innovation needs to be made more youth friendly and providers could include a rural entrepreneurship element to their training. In addition, there needs to be a focus on those who are unemployed to encourage them towards entrepreneurship. Women also need assistance as they tend to be more disproportionately affected by caring responsibilities which can block small business start-up. Leadership skills can be enhanced through for example, the Institute of Leadership and Management.

What is missing?

- **Rural Hubs** - there is a need to consider co-working space and the setting up of local hubs to help support the sharing of ideas, innovation etc. There could be links to community and tourism hubs.
- **Planning** - planning policies often encourage people to stay in towns and cities, rather than rural areas. However, consideration needs to be given to housing, planning and community infrastructure to ensure that people remain in rural areas. This could include the availability of affordable housing (to support those who left the area to return) and signage which is more enabling to rural businesses.
- **Connectivity** - there is need for improved connectivity (transport and broadband) between urban and rural areas and the recognition of interlinkages between the two. There also needs to be a capacity to use the internet, for example, increased usage of webinars and teleconferencing could help promote entrepreneurship. It was noted that it would be interesting to determine what prevents private sector from establishing warehouses, factories and businesses in rural areas.
- **Education and Training** - there were concerns expressed about closure of rural schools with locals choosing to send children to larger schools in towns. There are opportunities to link in with Universities, Alumni Networks etc. to encourage graduates to return to rural areas, particularly in relation to sectors such as engineering. Ensuring there is a skilled and trained pool of potential employees could allow entrepreneurship to flourish. Innovation is also required in relation to apprenticeships and also highlighting to farming communities the transferrable skills they have relevant to business.
- **Innovation and Diversification** - many rural communities/farms have been resourceful in sourcing a range of incomes in innovative ways and have diversified. Innovation is needed in service delivery and consideration should be given as to why there are regional differences in levels of innovation.
- **Business Start-Up** - there are barriers to micro businesses growing and exporting. For example, Invest NI currently focuses on large businesses, export and job creation. It was suggested that more support should be available to help micro businesses to grow such as small capital grants.
- There is also a potential for greater use of renewable energy.

Annex 8 - Evidence Base Output from Rural Tourism Working Group

Issues	Findings
Challenges and Opportunities arising post EU Rural Development Programme Funding **(issues identified prior to 31 January 2020)**	• Tourism is important to the local economy. Overnight trips expenditure accounts for around 3% of regional GVA. Tourism related industries jobs account for approximately 65,000 (10%) of NI jobs. • The EU is a market of half a billion people with tourists visiting from mainland Europe and the RoI accounting for around a third of all external visits. Tour operators programme their business 12-18 months in advance so any real or perceived difficulties of holidaying or trade in NI could have a negative impact. Overseas tourism needs to be secured in the medium term, to ensure that NI continues to grow and does not lose market share to competitors. • As the sterling is weak against the currencies in target markets, it could potentially make the UK including NI, an attractive place to visit. • The retention of the Common Travel Area for citizens of the UK and Ireland, which is of vital importance for the continued development of tourism to NI, is to be welcomed. There is reliance on ease of access to and from RoI for overseas visitors who enter NI via the Republic and for the many tourism projects that employ staff from RoI. • At present around 20% of workers in the local tourism and hospitality sector come from outside of NI. Any new regulations on their mobility and right to reside and work could have a negative impact exacerbating the existing skills deficiencies in the sector and further hindering the planned expansion of local tourism. • Air access is a key enabler for inbound tourism growth. NI is heavily reliant on-air routes in maintaining existing services and attracting new destinations that will bring greater numbers of inbound visitors. • The body of evidence published by the EU, Government (NI and UK) suggests that the potential impacts of a No Deal exit could be wide ranging across the NI economy, at a more significant rate than the UK as a whole given the proximity to the land border with RoI, and with certain sectors and areas within the region hit hardest.

Issues	Findings
Other Executive strategies and policies relevant to sustainable rural tourism.	**Economy 2030** • Economy 2030 is the DfE's draft industrial strategy for NI. The proposed new Industrial Strategy sets out the Department's plan to turn NI into one of the world's most innovative and competitive small advanced economies. It aims to develop a globally competitive economy on the pillars of innovation, enhanced skills and employability, an international outlook and the best economic infrastructure that can be built. **Regional Development Strategy 2035** • The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 provides the regional policy context and aims to protect and enhance the environment for current and future generations. • Regional Guidance 4 (RG4) of the Strategy promotes a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure. Investment in tourism brings new facilities to NI's towns and provides the opportunities to get maximum benefit from our wealth of environmental and heritage assets: our waterways, landscapes, coastline and built heritage. There are also health benefits to be gained by a more active resident population who are motivated to be out and about exploring NI's tourism assets. • Regional Guidance 11 (RG11) sets out to conserve, protect and where possible, enhance NI's built heritage and natural environment. It also aims to maintain and establish ecological networks and suggests that such networks could be of amenity value if linked to the green infrastructure provided by walking and cycle routes to heritage and other recreational interest. **Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland** • The objective of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) is to further sustainable development and improve the well-being of the people of NI. The SPPS looks at a number of subject areas including: ~ **Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation:** The SPPS recognises that open space, sport and outdoor recreation is important to society now and in the future and states that everyone should have easy access to open space and outdoor recreational activity or simply enjoy and have contact with nature;

Issues	Findings
	~ **Natural Heritage:** The SPPS states that NI's natural heritage provides a wide range of opportunities for enjoyment, recreation and sustainable economic activities; ~ **Tourism:** One of the aims in relation to tourism development is to manage the provision of sustainable and high-quality tourism developments in appropriate locations within the natural environment. The regional strategic objectives include: - Facilitate sustainable tourism development in an environmentally sensitive manner; - Contribute to the growth of the regional economy by facilitating tourism growth; - Utilise and develop the tourism potential of settlements by facilitating tourism developments of an appropriate nature, location and scale; and - Ensure a high standard of quality and design for all tourism development. • **Development in the Countryside:** The aim of the SPPS with regards to the countryside is to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities consistent with the Regional Development Strategy 2035. Addressing legislative barriers such as accessing public rights of way to ensure the creation of long distance public walks and trails, also needs future consideration. **Belfast City Region Deal** • Belfast City Region Deal, with an anticipated total investment of over £1 billion, has identified tourism and regeneration as one of four key investment pillars, alongside infrastructure; innovation and digital; and employability and skills. The deal identifies the opportunity for a step change in the tourism offering, delivering a series of internationally visible tourism products that 'will extend the tourist route from Belfast through Carrickfergus, towards the Causeway Coast and Glens, and along Ards and North Down and into the Mourne Mountains'.

Issues	Findings
Practices in other jurisdictions.	**UK Tourism Sector Deal** • The UK's Industrial Strategy has identified tourism as one of 10 sectors in need of particular focus through the Sector Deal. The Sector Deal is forward thinking and has a particular focus on five key areas, namely: Ideas (including creation of a tourism data hub); People (including creation of 10,000 apprenticeships by 2025); Infrastructure (including developing 130,000 bedrooms by 2025, and investment in attractions and innovations. Development of its Maritime and Aviation strategies); Place (including piloting five new Tourism Zones to support the ambition to make the UK the most accessible tourism destination in Europe by 2025 - areas will become Tourism Zones via a bidding process; receiving targeted support from government if successful); and Business environment (including a Business Events Action Plan 2019-25). Work is currently ongoing with the UK Government regarding which components of the Sector Deal should/can apply in NI. • While tourism is a devolved power within Northern Ireland, the British Tourist Authority has responsibility for marketing Britain worldwide and developing its visitor economy. The UK Government is liaising with the devolved nations on future work and identifying projects the devolved governments would like to partner in.

Annex 9 - Stakeholder Feedback for Rural Tourism Thematic Pillar

Working Group 2: Rural Tourism
Feedback from January 2020 Stakeholder Event

What do you agree with?

- **Community buy-in** - the importance of buying in community ownership was recognised rather than opposition to tourism developments. Local community development tourism could be more profitable, however, there needs to be consideration of how tourism is going to be sustainable and benefit those living locally.
- **Types of Tourist Attractions** - it was suggested that current attractions should be exploited more, for example, a focus on outdoor activities/natural assets (e.g. cycling trails, walking, and guided tours) would draw tourists to rural areas. Reference was also made to co-ordination around food/crafts etc. Whilst a limited number of "signature projects" are important, there is also an opportunity to maintain and develop local attractions (for locals in the off-season) but with enough to attract out of state visitors in holiday season.
- **Environment** - a balance is needed in terms of protection of the environment and the need to put in place appropriate infrastructure to support tourism in rural areas. For example, the Dark Hedges was cited as an example where protecting the local environment whilst attracting visitors can be difficult.
- **Opportunities Post EU Rural Development Programme** - it is difficult to know, particularly in terms of land use and subsidies to farmers, whether or not rural tourism will be seen as an opportunity or challenge.
- **Skills development** - agreed that people need skills built to be able to deliver on new ideas for tourism businesses.
- Central & Local Government need to show leadership, working in partnership with other key stakeholders, including the private and community sectors. It was noted that DfE also needs to be committed to it.

What might need changed?

- **Cultural Identity** - stakeholders noted that tourist attractions should highlight the cultural identity (i.e. music, sports, storytelling, food and history) across NI (not just in the cities).
- **Domestic Tourism** - Not all visitors are out of country with domestic tourism, especially with weekends 'staycations', still valuable. Domestic tourism tends to be more leisurely with people stopping to spend time and money in local craft shops and cafes (potentially linking into thematic pillar 1 on innovation and entrepreneurship). However, day trippers are less likely to spend money than those who stay overnight.

What might need changed?

- **Specific Locations** - Natural resources such as the lakes, West of the Bann could be promoted. Areas such as Belleek have the potential to appeal globally. Areas such as the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East could be utilised to draw international tourists who enter through Dublin across the border into rural NI.
- **Adventure/activity Tourism** - this allows the use of natural assets in rural areas and has a dual purpose of promoting local health and wellbeing initiatives. Out of state visitors also need 1-2 weeks of activities to keep them in a region.
- **Marketing/Awareness Raising** - a cultural shift is needed by working with local rural communities to embrace tourists and tourism and understand the target audience. Small businesses may struggle to finance marketing, so there may need to be a subsidised method of marketing the tourism offering. For example, a one stop website would allow tourists to see a range of attractions in an area which may result in them staying longer than a few hours. In order to make NI more prominent for global visitors, there needs to be a joined up approach between Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI.
- **Connectivity** - there needs to be a balance struck between increased visitor numbers and maintaining the environment and local economy. Sufficient infrastructure needs to be in place to support attractions and particularly linkages between urban and rural areas. Any changes to infrastructure needs to be managed sensitively to ensure 'buy in' from local communities.
- **Large vs Small Tourism Attractions** - the regional spread attractions is very important. Stakeholders indicated that the current Tourism Strategy focused on signature projects and that smaller attractions should also be promoted (even if rural experiences are clustered together). The length of the tourism season should be increased where possible.
- **Partnership Working** - stakeholders noted that partnership working was needed with local communities ensuring a bottom up approach where communities are not overwhelmed by the responsibility of managing a tourist attraction. Connections are also needed with organisations such as the National Trust and any tourist attraction should benefit the local rural community.
- **Barriers** - it was noted that barriers to farmers diversifying should be addressed. For example, there is a lot of regulation and the procurement process is lengthy/difficult.
- Stakeholders noted that capacity needs to be built up and significant support provided to those in rural areas. Best practice learning should also be taken into account from other areas (i.e. Culcaigh Way).

What is missing?

- **Accommodation** - there has been an increased demand for Airbnb facilities in rural areas. Airbnb accommodation is unregulated and tends to undercut other accommodation providers. This puts the NITB approved accommodation at a greater risk which has stringent requirements to meet. There needs to be a sufficient regional balance of various types of accommodation to encourage tourists to stay longer in a rural region. There is also an opportunity for agri-tourism - i.e. development of rural accommodation on farms as an agricultural activity. A barrier to developing rural accommodation is the rates aspect, particularly if there is only going to be a very short tourist season.
- **Promotion and Awareness** - market research and branding is important to understand the visitor profile. In addition to marketing NI as a whole (i.e. encouraging the weekend tour of the Game of Thrones, Lakes etc.), year round local marketing should be maximised. Awareness raising opportunities may be needed to ensure people get all the information they need (i.e. where nearest coffee or gift shops are).
- **Infrastructure/Connectivity** - infrastructure is important (real and virtual). The use of technology, especially apps can help tourists to know what is available in particular areas including where to stay and what else to do. In regards to transport, it can be difficult to access rural areas without a car, there is a need to be able to move across NI more easily. The continued links across the border can be maximised upon to attract tourists from the RoI. Stakeholders also noted that Greenways and trails were important and that there was a need for a major project investment which has good infrastructure all year round (e.g. Eden/Center Parcs). There are also linkages to thematic pillar 5.
- **Environment** - stakeholders noted that there needs to be a focus on the environmental impact, including any carbon footprint issues of tourism to local areas. Any tourism should be sustainable and there is potential to explore the activity and environmental tourism market. Blue and Green ways could also be more strategically developed.
- **Types of tourism** - stakeholders referred to many types of tourism which could be considered such as: community led festivals; agricultural shows; food producers in small villages; social economy; activity tourism (i.e. encouraging people outside with forest trails etc.); diversity playparks; golf; coastal tourism; tourist hubs; and maximising on cruise ships.
- **Partnership/Collaborative Working** - co-ordination and partnership is key. Stakeholders noted that there needed to be a joined up inter-departmental and local government approach to tourism. Also there should be a platform for collaboration in rural communities to pull together the tourism offering for a particular area and provide information to visitors.
- **Skills** - there is a shortage in skills sets (e.g. skilled waiters). There is a need to ensure a supply of workers and link into training to ensure customer care to enhance experiences.

What is missing?

- **Statistics** - there is a need to understand the visitors (both internal and external) and what they need. A single source of information to identify any gaps between provision and demand which drills down to rural areas would be useful.
- **Planning/regulation** - planning policies can make rural tourism difficult. There are also issues with active farming requirements which can stop individuals accessing support.
- **Rural Communities** - there is a need to ensure that rural communities benefit from the tourism product. For example, locals may not be able to afford properties in local tourist areas (suggestion for something like 'Barcelona Laws'). There also needs to be a link to Community Plans with the councils driving forward any rural tourism strategy. Rural communities can become champions for their own areas.
- **Financial Support** - resource support is also required to keep capital projects sustainable.
- Stakeholders noted that rural areas need to be both accessible and affordable to encourage families to visit.
- Learning should be taken on board (e.g. how the Wild Atlantic Way managed the flow of visitors).

Annex 10 - Evidence Base Output from Rural Health and Social Wellbeing Working Group

Issues	Findings
Challenges and Opportunities arising post EU Rural Development Programme Funding	• There is a lack of clarity around the challenges and opportunities post EU Rural Development Programme for rural dwellers, and the farming community in particular. There is a potential for increased mental and emotional wellbeing issues in rural communities. This creates a need to prepare the farming community in particular and highlights the need for ongoing support and scope through mechanisms such as Rural Support to address emerging issues. • In particular, there are challenges associated with rural border communities who will be impacted across a range of issues, including access to services and employment and community cohesion. A strategic approach will be required to support rural border communities adapt to these challenges, working with local delivery organisations and promoting potential for joint working, including opportunities such as PEACE PLUS programme funding.
Other Executive strategies and policies relevant to rural social wellbeing	**DAERA Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework** • The TRPSI Framework led by DAERA aims to promote the development of new and innovative approaches to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable rural people. TRPSI provides an opportunity to do the following: ~ Encourage joint working with statutory and community and voluntary sector partners, including inter-departmental collaboration; ~ Supports rural health and wellbeing and increasing access to services, including better use of the rural estate; ~ Promotes social inclusion and community cohesion by providing space and opportunity for rural dwellers to interact; ~ Targets resources and support to the most deprived rural areas; and ~ Supporting grass roots rural community development to reach those most at risk.

Issues	Findings
	The New Decade New Approach agreement (January 2020) determined that a timetable for development and delivery of key policies would be published. Engagement with Civic Society and the principles of co-design and co-production must underpin the development of PfG and its associated budget and strategies. A co-design and co-production approach will be embedded from the outset of the development of an anti-poverty and child poverty strategy and other strategies which DfC is responsible for example Active Ageing, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Gender. Those strategies most applicable to the Rural Health and Social Wellbeing thematic pillar are referenced below in their current status: **Child Poverty Strategy - NI Executive (March 2016)** • The strategy aims to reduce the number of children in poverty and to reduce the impact of poverty on children focusing on economic wellbeing, health, education and safe, secure and stable environments. This strategy has been extended until 2022 as there may be scope to take it forward under a wider anti-poverty strategy. **Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister - Together: Building a United Community Strategy (TBUC)** • The aim of the strategy is to build 'a united community where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.' **Draft Protect Life 2: 2017** • The Protect Life strategy aims to reduce the differential in the suicide rate between deprived and non-deprived areas. It recognises the unique circumstances experienced in rural areas in recent years including an ageing population, decline in farm incomes, changing labour markets, and depopulation/migration in some areas. An enhanced cross-departmental approach is reflected in the revised strategy and contains actions falling to departments other than Health. These include the community sector delivering positive mental and emotional wellbeing messages and identifying specific interventions which improve mental and emotional wellbeing.

Issues	Findings
	Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together - a ten-year road map for the transformation of Health and Social Care services in Northern Ireland • The roadmap envisages a future society where "people are supported to keep well in the first place with the information, education and support to make informed choices and take control of their own health and wellbeing." The focus is on person centred care, which is delivered in a range of environments, including community facilities and where partnership and collaboration are to the fore. **Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Making Life Better 2013-2023** • Making Life Better is the strategic framework for public health. It is designed to provide direction for policies and actions to improve the health and well being of people in NI and to reduce health inequalities. • Key thematic areas such as "Creating the Conditions" and "Empowering Communities" seek to address the wider conditions impacting on health at population level, and within local communities and will align with key government strategies such as those to develop the economy, tackle poverty and promote community relations.
Practices in other jurisdictions/ Evidence & Research Base	**Active Ageing Strategy 2016-2022** • The strategy recognises the positive contribution older people make to society and seeks to provide an active ageing framework which welcomes and values older people, recognising that the number of older people in NI is continuing to increase. **Education Authority Youth Service - Research into Needs of Rural Young People (2019)** • The research highlighted the importance of access to services, including the school estate in rural areas. It was noted that such access should include evening and weekend provision. Compliance with the Rural Needs Act was also noted, reflective of the particular needs of rural communities and the particular forms of deprivation and disadvantage, including access to services, which are faced by rural communities.

Issues	Findings
	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport - A Connected Society - A Strategy for Tackling Loneliness (2018) • This strategy recognises that loneliness can impact on anyone and its consequences can be highly damaging to our health. It also notes that advances in society, including remote working and online activity, can serve to increase a sense of loneliness. The importance of community infrastructure in empowering social connections was highlighted, including making better use of community spaces, and working with transport providers to increase access. **Bringing People Together: how community action can tackle loneliness and social isolation - Community Fund (2019)** • The report highlights the difference between being alone and feeling lonely, recognising the importance of connections to mental and emotional wellbeing and enabling people to re-engage. It also acknowledges that there are a variety of triggers for loneliness and the need for support for people at vulnerable times in their lives. **Loneliness in Northern Ireland 2019/20 - NISRA** • While NISRA found that people in urban areas were “more often lonely” it also noted that deprivation is a factor, with people in most deprived areas being “more often lonely.” People without internet access or access to a car were more likely to be “more often lonely” than those with access, highlighting two key challenges for rural dwellers. People in the 16-24 and 75+ age groups were “more often lonely”.

Annex 11 - Stakeholder Feedback for Rural Health and Social Wellbeing Thematic Pillar

Working Group 3: Rural Health and Wellbeing
Feedback from January 2020 Stakeholder Event

What do you agree with?

- **Making Best Use of Existing Assets/Structures and Funding** - stakeholders agreed that better use should be made of existing rural assets and resources and that there should not be duplication of existing resources. There should be a mix of clearly identifiable funding streams to maintain/sustain any rural infrastructure (e.g. grant aid could enable basic refurbishment or repairs of halls/schools). Examples of making better use of assets included opening schools out of hours; using community premises for activities when empty; and promoting libraries as a centre for home working activities. Additionally there needs to be a strategic approach to funding of community buildings and healthy living centres through for example, options of support for social enterprise delivery of services. It was noted that there were concerns if budget pressures would result in the centralisation of services or cutting of services in rural areas.
- **TRPSI Approach** - there was positive feedback and support for the existing TRPSI schemes (e.g. Rural Support/Farm Family Health van). Stakeholders noted that there was a need to sustain and develop a similar approach to Health and Wellbeing related services in rural areas under the new Framework.
- **Village regeneration** - villages are key to local service delivery and village plans should be built upon. A multi-sectoral approach is required such as linkages to PEACE PLUS. Consideration needs to be given to derelict buildings (e.g. Bushmills cited as an example where tourism but village needs regenerated). Stakeholders noted that the scope of the public sector was limited with the private sector disinvesting by closing banks/post offices/pubs etc. There is a need to repurpose retail buildings in smaller settlements.
- **Partnership Working** - the need for an integrated joined up partnership/networking approach was highlighted (across Departments and local government). The importance of linking into Community Planning and a focus on sharing best practice across regions was also noted.
- **Health and wellbeing** - stakeholders noted that it was good that social and economic factors were being taken into account given the impact on wellbeing across all groups. Rural areas whilst quiet can be isolated when someone tries to access services and loneliness can be an issue. The benefits of telehealth, innovation and social prescribing were highlighted.

What do you agree with?
• **Rural Transport** - stakeholders noted that DfI have made cuts and that public transport is not fully utilised. Service provision is important to keep people in rural areas, especially with issues getting access to transport. • **Community** - It was noted that local ownership was important to enable local solutions to problems. Whilst communities should be central and volunteers have an important role, not all services can be volunteer led. Succession planning also needs to be taken into account with appropriate resources (i.e. paid mentors for rural support).
What might need changed?
• **Reducing rural isolation** - this should focus on younger as well as older people including farmers and new parents. Stigma should be reduced around mental and emotional wellbeing issues and could be done via engagement; mental health support including suicide prevention; support groups for those who feel lonely; encouraging the use and provision of outreach services. Earlier intervention work may lead to better outcomes for local communities (e.g. early mental and emotional wellbeing intervention work may reduce the burden on expensive health services at a later date). • **Connectivity** - lack of access to broadband should be addressed to ensure that it doesn't create greater isolation. Digital means should be explored to bring excluded people in. Access to rural transport is also a key barrier which needs addressed. • **Volunteers** - volunteering should be supported given how important grass roots community and voluntary groups are to the delivery of services for this thematic pillar. Community and voluntary groups need to be properly resourced to deliver initiatives on the ground. A recruitment drive of community volunteers is also needed or a new approach to make such roles more attractive to ensure that responsibility does not fall on the same group of people, leading to possible burn out. • **Rural assets** - best use should be made of existing rural assets, particularly in regards to a rural outreach element. For example, churches, schools, halls could be used to provide additional out of hours facilities on a cross-community basis. This recognises the potential for the rural estate to be utilised for the promotion of inclusion and wellbeing. Adjustments may be needed to the planning system to accommodate such delivery of services. • **Support** - any support provided should be driven by need and not funding/capacity. For example, if volunteering is not strong in a particular rural area this may need to be targeted. Training may need to be provided to increase the capacity of community and voluntary organisations. Longer term wrap around support post grant-aid will also be needed (stakeholders suggested the Maximising Access programme could be funded again).

What might need changed?

- **Collaborative working** - there should be better co-ordination and cross development multi-agency partnerships. For example, support for villages could be for wider rural areas with central hubs. It was also suggested that collaborative work was needed for digital purposes such as Universal Credit applications.

What is missing?

- **Joined up approach** - there needs to be collaborative working across departments and local government. Many stakeholders noted that the DoH should take the lead for this thematic pillar supported by DAERA focusing on the most rural issues. Collaboration will provide a mechanism to share best practice and linkages should also be made to community planning.
- **Funding** - stakeholders noted that funding should be available from a range of sources (not just DAERA) and that any funding should be protected. The funding should also be accessible to small groups in rural areas.
- **Connectivity** - stakeholders noted that this thematic pillar is dependent upon delivery of the connectivity thematic pillar with a need for better broadband and rural transport provision. In order to optimise technology, there is a need for an innovative approach to connectivity of people and communities. Training on how to access online services and use up to date technology such as Alexa and Portal is needed.
- **Identifying need** - stakeholders indicated that a mapping exercise was required to determine what health initiatives were being delivered in rural areas. This would ensure no duplication of service delivery.
- **Shared spaces** - rural assets need to be shared, vibrant and safe spaces available to all abilities/ages/needs within the community. Any division within rural areas can contribute to isolation.
- **Hubs** - a community hall can act as a hub for economic/training/education purposes etc. and can also facilitate outreach facilities.
- **Health and Wellbeing programmes** - stakeholders noted that existing infrastructure (people and buildings) should be built upon to support good mental and emotional wellbeing for all client groups. For example, use of walking trails/hiking; schools; GAA facilities; leisure centres. Social prescribing and social farming have potential to promote health and wellbeing in rural areas. The importance of intergenerational programmes was also referred to and stakeholders noted that carers required more support such as access to affordable transport. Specific events for isolated farmers were also suggested.

What is missing?

- **Voluntary and community sector** - it was noted that community groups should have the capacity to apply directly for grants. In regards to volunteers, succession planning and innovative approaches are required to engage people in volunteering activity. In particular, young people should be encouraged to take up such roles. Sufficient resources and running costs are required to empower people to volunteer. There is also potential for alternative business models such as social enterprises.
- **Housing/Planning** - in rural areas, affordable housing and accessible planning is needed to help keep young people in these areas ensuring that communities remain vibrant.

Annex 12 - Evidence Base Output from Rural Employment Working Group

Issues	Findings
Challenges and Opportunities arising from post EU Rural Development Programme Funding, particularly in border communities	There is potential for disproportionate effects on rural areas given the prevalence of cross border activity in the agriculture and agri-food production industries and the importance of EU funding within rural areas. • **Border issues** - there were a number of challenges identified in regards to the border between NI and RoI and what would happen post EU as follows: ~ Any customs checks at the border would be felt most immediately in the rural communities that surround the border; ~ Differing standards of regulation on either side of the border with implications for the implementation of environmental policy and initiatives. If policies cannot be easily implemented locally, it could lead to serious risks for the local environment; ~ People crossing the border to go to work could be impacted and the impact on cross border trade, opportunities for collaboration and innovation and the competitiveness and productivity of agriculture and other business is likely to be significant. • **EU Funding** - agriculture and rural areas have benefitted from EU Funding of approximately £350 million per year. Farming which is important to the NI economy is subsidised directly through the Common Agricultural Policy. Equally the Priority 6 and RDP programmes have been important to rural areas and the policy instruments used to replace them will be critical to the continued sustainability of rural areas.
Other Executive strategies and policies relevant to training and employment	**Graduating to Success (2012) - A Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland** • This strategy aims to improve rural access to higher education, in partnership with the higher education and further education sectors and is committed to supporting accessibility within higher education through a range of actions, including improving access to higher education in rural areas (i.e. by offering wider geographical access to higher education, potentially through establishment of learning and study facilities at Further Education Colleges).

Issues	Findings
	• Scope exists for a range of actions including working with partners to better connect rural dwellers to higher and further education through hosting of information events and exploring potential for outreach education. **Department for Infrastructure's Regional Development Strategy 2035** • In addition to its Society theme which sets out a goal to "support urban and rural renaissance," the strategy has aims which include: - Supporting strong, sustainable growth for the benefit of all parts of NI; - Supporting towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential. - Increasing employment opportunities for people living in rural areas will be central to plans to regenerate villages and rural communities, including supporting outreach and remote working. **Invest NI Business Strategy 2017-2021** • Invest NI's ambition over the lifespan of this strategy is to contribute to the outcomes of the draft Programme for Government by: - Supporting and encouraging 30,000 - 40,000 additional jobs; - Increasing business expenditure on research and development by £160-£200 million; - Supporting customers to increase their total sales by £3.2-£4.2 billion. • To do this, Invest NI will focus on: - Embedding innovation and entrepreneurship to support more businesses with high growth potential start-up and scale up; - Helping more businesses successfully sell outside NI; - Attracting more quality inward investors; and - Selling NI globally in a much wider context. **Department for Economy (Formerly Department Enterprise Trade and Investment) Draft Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2013 - 2025** • The draft Strategy identifies actions under four themes: Knowledge Generation; Knowledge Exchange; Knowledge Exploitation; and Cultural Change. Its vision is: "Northern Ireland, by 2025, will be recognised as an innovation hub and will be one of the UK's leading high-growth, knowledge based regions which embraces creativity and innovation at all levels of society".

Issues	Findings
	Community Planning • Amongst aims and priorities identified by Community Planning Partnerships which are relevant to Rural Policy Thematic Pillar 4 are:- - Encouraging enterprise and innovation, including pre-enterprise support and the enhancement of the level of local business start-ups; - Upskilling and initiatives addressing skills shortages; - Availability of placements, internships and apprenticeships; building links between business and education sectors; - Respecting the character of rural areas and complying with planning policy; - Supporting the further growth and development of existing sectors such as Agri-Food, Manufacturing, Engineering and Tourism, all of which have much to offer rural communities and economies; - Development of strategic infrastructure and digital connectivity; - Support for social enterprise; and - Support for Micro and Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) across all sectors.

Annex 13 - Stakeholder Feedback for Rural Employment Thematic Pillar

Working Group 4: Rural Employment
Feedback from January 2020 Stakeholder Event

What do you agree with?

- **Childcare** - stakeholders noted that investment in both affordable and accessible childcare was required in rural areas to facilitate parents in gaining employment. Issues were also raised in relation to a lack of free pre-school nursery places for children and wrap around childcare in rural communities given the distances families would have to travel.
- **Transport** - lack of accessible rural transport is a key barrier in gaining employment. If there was a more balanced regional development of the economy, reliance on cars for commuting from rural areas could be reduced, also lessening the negative impact on the environment.
- **Education and skills** - stakeholders noted that education provision needs to be better aligned with business needs. For example, schools and colleges should plan ahead to ensure that any local skills gap is addressed (e.g. engineering, tourism) by building good relationships with local businesses. Young rural dwellers also need to be made aware of the opportunities available locally. Outreach provision from colleges would be of benefit as well as promotion of digital skills to facilitate those remote working. Libraries would also have a role to play.
- **Support for businesses** - support is required for both existing and new rural businesses (both financial and upskilling to bring expertise to local communities). The majority of stakeholders noted that support is specifically required for non-farming rural enterprises given the impact of loss of EU funding on farmers and the need for sustainability in rural areas. High speed broadband is also needed to help rural businesses to work from hope and to help with their online marketing of business.

What might need changed?

- **Connectivity/Rural Hubs** - stakeholders noted that access to appropriate infrastructure (i.e. roads, public transport, broadband and digital hubs) is required to make rural areas a viable option for businesses to relocate to. To date, the development of service hubs has tended to focus on towns and villages. There is potential to regenerate rural derelict buildings into hubs to contribute to employment opportunities (including hotdesking) and to reduce the need for long commutes to work whilst alleviating stress and ill mental health of rural dwellers. Stakeholders also suggested that successful urban businesses could perhaps go rural.

What might need changed?

- **Flexible working** - stakeholders noted that flexible working arrangements (such as home working, different hours, one to one support to disabled employees) were needed within government and other employers. It was suggested that the location of the office could put people off applying for promotions and alternative roles.
- **Linkages between education and private sector** - stakeholders noted that schools and colleges needed to do more outreach work linking in with local businesses, in addition to making training available to the local community. In particular, grammar schools were perceived to be very focused on academic education. Stakeholders noted that there is also a lack of awareness as to what rural business opportunities exist and what it is like to work in a rural business. Therefore, connections between education and private sector are crucial with some areas previously devising schemes to target schools, using role models to educate career teachers on rural business opportunities.
- **Skills Development** - stakeholders indicated that it can be difficult to get suitably qualified/ skilled tutors/trainers in areas such as engineering and manufacturing. It was suggested that Level 2/3 NVQs should focus on skills development and that apprenticeships could be promoted better. Through ensuring that all current employability support has an outreach element, this could allow for delivery in local halls reaching young people. Specific training such as Young Farmers led courses could also be utilised, facilitating small practical learning experiences. Better use could also be made of the Millennium Volunteers Scheme.
- **Benefits** - stakeholders indicated that the benefits gap needs to be closed to fully incentivise people into work. For example, more research is needed on barriers to employment such connectivity (transport and broadband) and capacity of individuals. The impacts of Universal Credit on the unemployed also needs further research.
- **Planning** - stakeholders indicated that planning requirements do not generally facilitate the development of small rural businesses.
- **Childcare** - stakeholders noted that childcare facilities were needed for older children to support parents who want to continue working. Reference was also made to the potential for supporting social enterprises in this regard.
- **Business** - stakeholders noted that emphasis was needed on supporting small and micro enterprises with clarity as to what was considered as a non-farming enterprise. There were also concerns about availability of migrant workers.
- **Stakeholders** noted that the rural framework could only truly support rural communities if there were no division between agriculture, environment and rural development. Cognisance of the DoE strategy is also important.

What might need changed?

- **Wording of Thematic Pillars** - stakeholders noted that there were similarities between thematic pillars 1 (rural innovation and entrepreneurship) and 4 (rural employment). It was suggested that thematic pillar 1 should focus on infrastructure/business and thematic pillar 4 should focus on people/skills. Stakeholders also noted that the identification and of and how need is determined should be clear. In regards to intervention 3, some stakeholders were of the view that the wording was too broad.

What is missing?

- **Agri-food sector** - stakeholders noted that the agri-food sector is one of the largest private sector employers in NI (approx. 100k jobs), especially in rural areas. Stakeholders indicated that the sector should not be overlooked in terms of support for skills development, job creation, manufacturing, maintaining standards, small start-ups etc.
- **Childcare** - stakeholders noted that there was a need for support to enable access to affordable and consistent childcare beyond early years provision.
- **Connectivity/infrastructure** - stakeholders noted that there is a need for connectivity through both improved transport to rural areas and broadband provision. In particular, broadband was seen as critical for well-paid IT jobs.
- **Planning** - planning and infrastructure are critical in rural areas to facilitate employment. Planning restrictions in 'open countryside' can be a barrier for rural businesses. Suggestions were made that there should be zones for employment/business opportunities and that departments should work together to address any planning barriers. There are also issues with keeping families in rural areas given the lack of affordable housing.
- **Skills/Training** - stakeholders suggested that resource funding was required to build community capacity. Linkages between employers and the education sector are essential to ensure skills/knowledge gaps are identified with appropriate training/apprenticeships/ support programmes delivered according to local needs (perhaps similar to previous ACE schemes). It is also important for the education sector to make students aware of different career opportunities (e.g. welding etc.) and to offer some sort of outreach training (perhaps through local halls) and informal courses to assist rural communities. Stakeholders noted that social clauses and apprenticeships should be promoted as good practice and is already a requirement within the public sector. There may be a need to train groups in smaller numbers and to provide different types of training such as hands on skills development.
- **Specialist training** - access to specialist training (e.g. environmental training) should be facilitated at the right stage. Specific training opportunities could be provided for certain groups such as young people, farmers and women etc. For example, an individualised approach to

What is missing?

employability support may be needed for young people with complex issues prior to being able to access employment. However, some stakeholders indicated that training should not be segregated and should be open to all groups (i.e. farming community and non-farmers).

- **Access to Employment** - stakeholders noted that there needs to be a decentralisation of a variety of jobs to result in a more balanced region (e.g. centres such as Ballykelly). The focus should be on quality employment opportunities which will provide higher income levels. Improved access is also needed for public sector and IT jobs which would allow for flexible arrangements such as home working. Extra support may be needed for certain groups such as carers, young unemployed, and those with disabilities to facilitate access to employment.
- **Hubs** - reference was made to developing business capacity and opening routes to market. Rural areas could for example facilitate online business models (i.e. picking/packing/posting/ stock hub).
- **Succession planning** - the cultural mindset needs shifted via an education process to inspire others and enable succession planning for both farming and non-farming businesses. Awareness is also needed in relation to social enterprises where grants are not availed of as rural businesses may not be aware that they are operating a social enterprise.
- A joined up approach is needed across Departments to address this issue and a proper means to measuring success.
- **Wording of Thematic Pillar** - stakeholders noted that thematic pillar 4 enables thematic pillar 1. Some stakeholders noted that the thematic pillar in addition to increasing employment opportunities should incorporate 'improve' and 'enable access' as well. There was some concern about the wording of the priority areas for intervention under the pillar, particularly the 'invest in and develop our rural society' and what it would entail. It was suggested that the theme should also focus heavily on sustainable development, particularly in relation to climate change, renewable energy etc.

Annex 14 - Evidence Base Output from Connectivity Working Group

Issues	Findings
Challenges and Opportunities re connectivity arising from post EU Rural Development Programme Funding, particularly in border communities	• There could be difficulties for people who might have to travel further to access health care and other services. • Loss of EU funding could result in increased budgetary pressures.
Other Executive strategies and policies relevant to transport infrastructure, broadband and mobile communications	**Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016** • The Rural Needs Act places a duty on all Departments, Councils and certain other public authorities to have due regard to rural needs. **Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035** • This strategy sets out the spatial framework to guide future development and aims to address economic, social and environmental issues to achieve sustainable development and social cohesion. It indicates that increased linkages between urban and rural areas are beneficial to both, and recognises that the most thriving rural areas are those that are connected with market towns which are in turn connected with city regions. • The RDS notes that all places benefit from economic growth reflecting the PfG approach of balanced sub-regional growth, recognising the importance of key settlements as centres for growth and investment. It also identifies the need to understand the role and function of settlements and their role in serving rural communities and the importance of promoting co-operation between places. It encourages clustering of towns and cities so that services can be shared and do not need to be duplicated. It identifies those settlements within close proximity to each other which have the potential to cluster helping to address economic, social and environmental issues aimed at achieving sustainable development and social cohesion.

Issues	Findings
	DAERA Vision • Sustainability at the heart of a Living, Working, Active Landscape Valued by Everyone. **Planning Act (NI) 2011** • This requires Councils to keep under review matters which might be expected to affect the development of the district including the communications, transport system and traffic of the district. **Investment Strategy for NI** • Through the Investment Strategy government seeks to tackle regional disadvantage by addressing the issues that affect our communities: tackling poverty, encouraging diversification, enhancing connectivity and improving the overall quality of service provision. • This strategy indicates that increased linkages between urban and rural areas are beneficial to both, and recognises that the most thriving rural areas are those that are connected with market towns which are in turn connected with city regions. **Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy 2014** • This strategy referred to feasibility studies including the longer term extensions of the rail network on the A6 and M1/A4 or A3/A29 corridors. • DfI gave clear evidence that whilst the current focus is on maintaining the safety, capacity and frequency of rail services, they are currently developing a suite of Transport Plans which will set out the priorities for future development. These include a new Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTNTP) which is concerned with strategic roads, the buses which run on them and the rail network across NI.

Issues	Findings
Practices in other jurisdictions/ Evidence & Research Base relevant to broadband, mobile communications and transport in rural areas	• Evidence from elsewhere in the UK and in Europe shows that central Government commitment is necessary for alternative types of transport in rural areas, such as Easilink Community Transport, and it operates best when it is managed at a regional level. • Research from Scotland found that the decision was made to close solicitor offices in cities and relocate to a large market town because customers valued free parking and the experience of going to a rural town. It was easier to recruit staff as they had access to forest runs and cycles. With the increasing focus on wellbeing and health, the benefits of rural locations could be promoted to businesses. The growth in social prescribers as part of the health care system means that the benefits of rural areas can be promoted to urban and rural dwellers and demonstrate the benefits of connectivity.

Annex 15 - Stakeholder Feedback for Connectivity Thematic Pillar

Working Group 5: Connectivity
Feedback from January 2020 Stakeholder Event

What do you agree with?

- **Connectivity (Broadband)** - stakeholders noted that the lack of adequate broadband/ mobile coverage was a barrier to people moving to some rural communities. Reference was made to Project Stratum and the fact that despite substantial investment from Governmental Departments there are rural communities still with limited service. Stakeholders noted that FFNI Stratum 5G also needs to be included. The need for access to high speed broadband is a prerequisite to address many of the thematic pillars. Whilst some rural businesses install satellite broadband at a significant additional expense, it is not always reliable and there is a need for a regional balance.
- **Connectivity (Transport)** - stakeholders noted that a balance was needed in regards to rural transport. For example, funding may be better focused on community transport rather than underused bus services to connect rural dwellers into main transport routes (e.g. ARTS scheme). Park and ride can also service rural areas. Active travel via greenways etc. should also be promoted as it is good for physical activity and also social participation.
- **Rural Digital Hubs** - stakeholders noted that these were worth exploring as they could facilitate flexible working which would contribute to a better work life balance whilst also reducing environmental impacts with less commuting.
- **Skills Development** - stakeholders noted there is a need for a champion role and to facilitate skills development around online usage/knowledge. The community and voluntary sector play an important role, however, there is a need for more support for expenses and training to prevent volunteer fatigue.
- **Wording of thematic pillar** - stakeholders were in agreement with the proposals, however, they noted that a joined up approach was needed across government to ensure successful delivery given that the thematic pillar was seen as ambitious and difficult to achieve. The connectivity thematic pillar was seen as cross-cutting, delivering on many PfG outcomes (i.e. carbon, isolation, health and wellbeing) and a prerequisite to the delivery of the other pillars. Stakeholders noted that service accessibility was key.

What might need changed?

- **Connectivity (Transport)** - stakeholders noted that resources (including public funding) may need to be redirected to ensure that local rural transport needs are realised. For example, it was suggested that there had been an excessive focus on the Glider and routes between Dublin and Belfast. A number of options could be explored such as park and ride sites with sufficient parking facilities; better use of Education Authority buses for out-of-school activities; flexibility around the use of private businesses such as small buses, taxis etc.; use of social car schemes; community social enterprise type travel. Stakeholders indicated that a focus was needed on getting people out of their cars, perhaps at transport hubs, and that there was not sufficient transport options for visitors and local people in rural areas. Additionally, it was suggested that DAERA should move away from pilots and develop a mechanism to invest in a long-term rural transport system.
- **Connectivity (Broadband)** - stakeholders noted that current connectivity needs to be maintained via a range of mechanisms to try and meet the demand for broadband in rural areas (e.g. stratum; Megabit and voucher project; obligations on private broadband providers who receive public funding to invest in the community). Not all customers in rural areas will receive high speed broadband, however, awareness is needed in relation to mobile technology developments and their impacts on rural businesses. There is also an issue of social isolation and the scope for technology to improve people's quality of life, particularly those with disabilities.
- **Education/awareness** - there is a need to educate people to the advantages and disadvantages of better connectivity (i.e. benefits of remote working vs dangers of social media and internet scams which could negatively impact on mental and emotional wellbeing).
- Stakeholders noted that accessibility to key services in health was key
- Stakeholders referred to the INTERREG pilot which failed as Departments did not pool budgets.
- **Wording of thematic pillar** - stakeholders noted that the assumption was that people wanted to travel from rural to urban areas for work and services but that the narrative needed to change to focus on connectivity generally. In regards to the second priority intervention, stakeholders noted that barriers also needed to be identified. Stakeholders also noted that accessibility needed to be reflected within the thematic pillar title and that this pillar is interconnecting with the other thematic pillars and is cross-cutting across Departments. Ultimately the focus has to be on the outcome and taking best practice on board, i.e. what do we want our rural communities to look like in the future?

What is missing?

- **Connectivity (Broadband)** - stakeholders noted that good quality Broadband is crucial in all rural areas. It is important for employment/entrepreneurship and service delivery such as health services. Stakeholders noted that a range of solutions should be considered for rural areas, including a cost/benefit analysis of roll out (i.e. 5G, 4G mobile coverage, Wireless, High Speed Networks). It was suggested that DAERA needed to be represented on Project Stratum at a policy level and that decent Broadband in rural areas should be lobbied and advocated for. Once an appropriate Broadband network is in place, it needs to be appropriately marketed and communicated out to the community.
- **Connectivity (Transport)** - stakeholders noted that to date there has been an over reliance on Translink, although there are some successes such as the Glider and Park and Rides. The Rural Needs Act could be used to ensure provision of appropriate services to rural areas, this is especially needed for tourism purposes with timetables, reliable routes and services. Stakeholders noted that old railway stations could be opened up with better use made of existing stations. Interventions with the private/voluntary and community sector are needed to broaden access to transport. For example, buses could be hired out to the public; a more innovative approach to Rural Transport Fund provision could be considered (i.e. acting as social enterprises at a local level to ensure ongoing delivery for clients who are very reliant on the service). Stakeholders indicated that 'active travel' was important in terms of sustainability but does present health and safety issues on rural roads.
- **Connectivity (infrastructure)** - stakeholders raised concerns about the condition of some roads and suggested that more blueways/greenways, cycle paths/footpaths were needed as well. However, some stakeholders noted that there has been too much focus on connectivity in urban areas such as Belfast. Whilst for example, the M1 and M2 corridors as well as cross-border connectivity is important, there needs to be equal consideration given to connectivity between villages, towns and smaller settlements. Greenways could help reduce congestion on some of the busier routes.
- **Connectivity (Communities)** - stakeholders noted that the priority areas for intervention focused on infrastructure and that consideration should also be given to the community aspect and connecting people.
- **Connectivity (Energy)** - stakeholders noted that connectivity should be future proofed with for example, new houses having electric car charging points. Proper investment is needed in sewerage facilities in rural areas. Connectivity could be more climate friendly whilst still providing a vital service, for example, use of renewable energy to provide power such as wind farms, green energy and gas networks.

What is missing?

- **Remote working** - stakeholders noted that in the first instance, employer attitudes to home working need to change. For example, it was suggested that DAERA could act as a champion and encourage other Departments to adopt remote working as employees do not need to be in the office full time. A suggestion was the use of local remote working hubs (which could be multi-functional) and result in investment in the local economy.
- **Funding/decision making** - stakeholders noted that it should be clear who the decision makers are with decision makers going out directly to rural communities to see what they can offer. It was noted that there is currently too much bureaucracy with more flexibility needed and recognition of the role of the border. The definition of 'rural' should be clear with the needs of urban and rural policies looked at cross-departmentally. Stakeholders noted that sufficient funding for rural communities is critical (for example, health places pressure on community transport services without investment and councils are also trying to avail of funding to close gaps and target hot spots).
- **Awareness** - it is important to make people aware of what is happening in their local rural areas (they could be commuting and not aware of what is available). Best practice from other jurisdictions should also be taken into account.
- **Volunteers** - volunteers need more support generally to encourage the next generation.
- **Planning** - statutory approval processes can hinder development in rural areas.

For further information:

Rural Policy and Delivery Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Tel: 028 7744 5113 - (This is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back)
Email: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

DMS 20.21.042

Appendix 3

Rural Policy Framework *for Northern Ireland*

Response Template

Sustainability *at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

How to Respond

This template replicates the questions posed in the online survey on the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland Consultation found at: https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/daera-central-services-and-rural-affairs/rural-policy-framework

The full text of the consultation can be found on the Department's website at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/20.21.043%20Rural%20Policy%20Framework%20NI%20-%20Consultation%20Final.PDF It is recommended that you read the full consultation document before completing your response, whether you choose to use this template or the Citizen Space Hub.

If you wish to use this template for your response, please reply:

By e-mail to: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk

By post to: Rural Policy and Delivery Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division,
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Early responses are encouraged but all responses should arrive no later than **Monday 6 September 2021.**

Before you submit your responses please read the "Publication of Responses" section below, which gives guidance on the legal position. If you require any further information on this consultation exercise, we would encourage you to contact us via e-mail. If you are unable to access e-mail, you can telephone us on 028 7744 5113. Please note this is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back.

Publication of Responses

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

Section 8(e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this stakeholder engagement exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority (the Department in this case). This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances.

The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties 'in confidence' which is not confidential in nature; and
- Acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office: https://ico.org.uk/

About You

Name (Required)

Mid Ulster District Council

E-mail address (required if responding electronically)

Fiona.McKeown@midulstercouncil.org

Address (required if responding by post)

Organisation/ Respondent type (required)

Public Sector	☑	**Private individual**	☐
Private Sector	☐	**Other (please specify)**	☐
Community/voluntary	☐		

Please provide further details including the name of your organisation below

Q1: Do you agree that the proposed overarching aim 'To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active' for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland is appropriate?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Mid Ulster Council welcomes the development of rural policy framework for Northern Ireland. Close to 70% of Mid Ulster ' s population live in a rural setting, a fact which has strongly influenced the Councils approach to service delivery, investment and long-term planning. The importance of addressing the needs of our rural areas, whether socially or economically, is undiminished and remains one of the Councils corporate commitments.
The overarching aim for the Policy of creating a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active resonates closely with the priorities set with Councils Corporate Plan and the Community Plan for Mid Ulster. We believe this forms the basis for continued partnership working between DAERA and Mid Ulster District Council. In addition we would contend that implementation of rural policy will require a renewed commitment from all central government departments working jointly to provide the resources and funding required to address needs identified within rural society.
In relation to the "live, work and be active" components of the policy aim we would comment as follows:
Mid Ulster Council believes the revitalisation of our towns and villages is and will remain a major challenge for our District. There is an obvious gap in government policy covering the physical regeneration of towns and villages with populations below 5000 inhabitant. Our main towns within district have benefited from public realm schemes supported through the Department of Communities which has a statutory remit for urban centres of over 5000 inhabitants, but there is no specific policy relating to physical regeneration within rural towns and villages. The Rural Policy Framework is an opportunity to embed village regeneration within the statutory responsibility of central government. We therefore welcome the inclusion of interventions focusing on village regeneration under Pillar 3 – Health and Well-being relating to sustaining the future viability of towns and villages as social and economic centres but stress that this will require significant and ongoing funding.

Economic growth will be key in achieving the Policy aim and this has been a pillar of Councils strategic direction since its inception. We have strived to achieve this by ensuring the economic strengths of the Mid Ulster Region are supported, however the within the current context of the coronavirus pandemic it is already clear that short term effects on our local economy have been devastating. This Council has supported our rural business base with recovery funding but a longer term strategic approach focusing on business recovery will be needed which can be aided through the priority areas for intervention outlined within the Policy consultation document.

Through our Corporate Plan we are committed to improving the health and well-being of our communities. Our priorities under this theme have seen continued investment in accessible outdoor recreational activities for all ages and abilities, many of which are to be found in rural areas of the District. Coupled with this, through our community development programmes and partnership working we look to continually build capacity within the community and voluntary sector in rural areas. Again we see strong links between our Corporate priorities and the Policy intervention priority areas focusing on rural health and well-being and would welcome the opportunity to engage further with DAERA in the shaping and delivery of these interventions.

Q2: Do you agree that the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) approach should continue under the wider umbrella of the Rural Policy Framework?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

We note that under the Key principles applying to the Rural Policy Framework, the TRPSI delivery approach is referred to only against deliver of Thematic Pillar 3 - Health and Wellbeing. The Rural Business Development Grants Scheme (RBDGS) funded under the TRPSI Framework has been delivered in partnership between local Councils and DAERA for the past three years and has proved itself to be both a successful delivery mechanism and a beneficial scheme for the rural micro business sector. There has been huge interest in this Scheme within Mid Ulster with over 600 applications received in the three years it has ran. Active promotion by Council through local engagement with rural micro businesses sector has been a key ingredient in generating interest in the Scheme. RBDGS would not appear as a natural fit under Thematic Pillar 3 interventions however we believe a similar partnership approach could be developed between local authorities and DAERA for the delivery of Thematic Pillar 1 interventions under Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Local authorities including Mid Ulster have been involved with the LAG's in the delivery of local rural development strategies under LEADER Priority 6. Through this arrangement, local animation has enabled widespread promotion of funding opportunities available through LEADER. In Mid Ulster, 44 funding workshops were held across the district attended by over 900 people from local businesses and community / voluntary sector groups which provided the opportunity for very clear messaging on the focus of the various funding schemes and this ultimately contributed to the submission of good quality applications.

Poverty
In 2019, in the absence of a Regional Anti Poverty Strategy, Mid Ulster Community Planning partners came together from statutory agencies, business and the community to look at a range of priorities impacting on poverty with the aim to create a Poverty Plan that seeks to identify strategic actions for partner delivery.
The Mid Ulster Poverty Plan does not seek to provide solutions or programmes for all agencies with a remit for addressing poverty but to identify priority issues where agencies can work together to develop localised initiatives and solutions. Mid Ulster Community Planning can again, point to a number of alignments in the priorities of the Rural Policy Framework and the Mid Ulster Anti-Poverty Plan and welcomes the support of DEARA and the TRIPSI Framework in delivering upon its priorities. Whilst we have no immediate objections that the TRPSI approach should continue under the wider umbrella of the Rural Policy Framework, we would ask for assurances that the TRIPSI Framework is aligned to the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy, once it is published and is also capable of adapting at a local level to the Mid-Ulster Anti-Poverty Plan, to ensure it tackles rural poverty, where it exists, in our rural communities.

The TRPSI approach is a means of establishing effective partnership arrangements for delivery and maximising resources across different agencies therefore we would welcome the continuation of this approach with local authorities contributing to both the design and delivery of initiatives that complement local community planning and corporate plan priorities.

Q3: In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five challenges from the options outlined below.

NB: You should only select five challenges from the options provided and rank those challenges by priority from 1 to 5 in the box provided (with 1 being the most significant challenge, 2 being less significant etc.)

Access to public services (e.g. health, education and social services).	5
Availability of appropriate and adequate community facilities/supports for different age groups.	
Broadband/mobile phone connectivity.	1
Changing demographics (e.g. ageing population, new communities, and retention of young people in rural areas).	
Climate change and environmental sustainability.	
Future of farming/agri-food sector.	
Jobs and business.	2
Managing tourism in a sustainable way.	3
Transport and infrastructure.	4

If there are any other challenges you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box on the next page.

This Council is of the opinion that all nine of the challenges presented are important within a rural context. Many are interlinked and impact on each other therefore prioritising a top 5 does not lessen the importance of those that remain. It is important therefore that Rural Policy remains flexible in order to respond to changing needs within rural areas.

In addition to the nine challenges presented we would add the following:

Mid Ulster Council believes that the revitalisation of our towns and villages is and will remain a major challenge for our District. We reiterate there is an obvious gap in government policy covering the physical regeneration of towns and villages with populations below 5000 inhabitant which should be addressed within the Rural Policy Framework. Our villages should create a sense of civic pride for those who live within them however many are blighted by dereliction therefore incentives are needed to promote private sector investment to bring vacant or run down properties back in to economic use.

Mid Ulster District Council believes strongly that the Policy Frameworks ambition to "create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work, and be active" cannot be achieved without addressing the need for social and affordable housing within rural communities. Mid Ulster has one of the highest levels of social housing need and this is reflected in the level of housing stress. At March 2020 there were 501 applicants on the rural housing waiting list for Mid Ulster with 279 in housing stress and only 131 allocations over the year. Mid Ulster Council have been working with NIHE to carry out Latent Demand Tests in rural areas of Mid Ulster. We have been looking at how the process is communicated to the local communities and use Council's Community Development contacts to engage with local community groups and elected members to help with communication and messaging. The aim of this work is to ensure that best response to the Latent Demand Testing and to clearly evidence the true demand for both Social and Affordable Housing in the area. Additional support for this work though the Rural Policy Framework would be welcomed.

Q4: In your opinion, what are the main opportunities facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five opportunities from the options outlined below.

NB: You should only select five opportunities from the options provided and rank those opportunities by priority from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most significant opportunity, 2 being less significant etc.)

Diversification within farming/agri-food sector.	
Economic development of markets (local, national and international) and sectors (both non-traditional and emerging).	
Enabling communities (e.g. supporting local leadership, groups and volunteers, enhancing community amenities).	
Enterprise and employment: expanding opportunities (e.g. Social Enterprise, apprenticeships, supporting entrepreneurs).	3
Joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland.	1
Optimisation of digital connectivity (e.g. Broadband and emerging technologies) (e.g. remote working, research, development and innovation, and future jobs).	2
Revitalisation of towns and villages.	4
Sustainable development and climate adaptation (e.g. renewable energy).	
Tourism: expansion of options including heritage, recreation and activity tourism.	5
Transport infrastructure and services.	

If there are any other opportunities you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box on the next page.

The full list of opportunities outlined above are all relevant to the rural economy and society. Again a flexible approach is needed within the Rural Policy to respond to emerging opportunities as they arise within the options listed. We believe that prioritising a joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland will be the platform needed for a sustained implementation of rural policy going forward. The opportunities listed above extend beyond the remit of DAERA alone therefore a cross-departmental approach will be needed.

The revitalisation of rural towns and villages is one example where current policy is failing with no government department having statutory responsibility for this area. We would again reiterate that there is an urgent need to address this gap in policy.

In terms of the rural economy this Council would contend that future proofing the skills base will be fundamental for creating the conditions within which businesses will growth and become more competitive. This has emerged as a top priority from our engagement with industry representatives and is one of the four core "pillars " of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy (RES). The desired outcome is to ensure that the requisite skills for the future are there in scale and profile (by sector and by levels) to underpin our region's ambitions. This will require an integrated approach from across government and to this end we welcome the inclusion of an employability pillar within the Rural Policy Framework and the planned interventions outlined within it. We have provided further comment on skills and employability under Thematic Pillar 4 below.

Q5: Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship: To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐ **Not Applicable** ☐

If you have selected ***Not Applicable***, please go to ***Question 6***.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Mid Ulster District Council welcomes the inclusion of an innovation and entrepreneurship pillar within the Rural Policy Framework. We would add that increasing productivity within rural businesses should be incorporated as a key objective for this pillar and reflected within the eventual schemes and initiatives developed following the consultation.

Innovation and productivity are embedded within MSW Regional Economic Strategy which contains strategic level projects targeted at the leading sectors in the manufacturing/industrial economy in MSW region which offer greatest potential for growth. This, combined with the approach to fostering rural innovation outlined within the Rural Policy consultation offer great opportunities to rural businesses.

We would raise the following points in relation to planning of interventions under this Pillar:

The concept of innovation differs from businesses to business therefore it will be important to define what it means within the context of the Rural Policy Framework, for the benefit of rural businesses and also to aid monitoring and measurement. For example the Rural Business Investment Scheme within the current LEADER programme supported many businesses to introduce new technologies to improve productivity. These projects were innovative in their own right however the focus of RBIS was measuring job creation therefore the full extent of innovation was not captured.

We note that delivery mechanisms for the roll out of planned interventions under the innovation and entrepreneurship pillar are not included as part of the consultation process. We would strongly contend that further engagement is needed with local authorities during the programming phase of the proposed Business and Community Investment Programme referred to within consultation documents to ensure a local delivery model is incorporated. The reason for this is based on the positive impact of local animation activities in the successful delivery of LAG led Rural Development Programmes and other local economic development initiatives delivered through Council. We would strongly argue that the cost of a local delivery methodology is justified on this basis and that resource funding for future delivery functions must be available to allow this approach to continue.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Develop a culture of rural innovation.
- Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Invest in and develop our rural economy.

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Mid Ulster District Council would agree with the priority intervention areas outlined however we would welcome the opportunity for further engagement with DAERA during the programming phase in order to feed into the design of the interventions to be delivered under the three priority areas referenced.

We would agree with the focus on raising awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship and that there is a need to build the innovation capacity of businesses within the industry sectors displaying greatest potential for growth. It will also be important that support is made available to develop innovation strategies within these businesses to help plan for growth.

We also agree with the principle of providing enabling support in the form of grant aid to improve opportunities for rural innovation and entrepreneurship. The Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy contains an industrial investment challenge fund which will provide capital support for in-house innovation leading to increased productivity. The need for funding support to " de-risk " investment in innovation was been clearly evidenced during engagements with business in the MWS region. We believe both of these initiatives can complement each other and maximise opportunities for realising innovation however further engagement between DAERA and the MSW Council areas will be needed to ensure this.

Q6: Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism: To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐ **Not Applicable** ☐

If you have selected ***Not Applicable***, please go to ***Question 7***.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Please refer part b for additional coments.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for Northern Ireland.
- Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

There needs to be a stronger focus on green and sustainable tourism. With the increased activity in rural areas and the changes in visitor behaviour brought about by COVID, greater demands have been placed on green/outdoor tourism and we believe that this will become a positive legacy of COVID and as such needs supported.
We feel the new programme should move away from the £500k max grants and increase the potential support that will reflect the value of the proposition. In addition to this, consideration should be given towards short term revenue support for capital funded projects.
Look wider and increase the footfall which will then generate wealth in rural economy. Support amenities that will encourage visitors to come and stay in rural areas for longer periods.
We should be supporting existing accommodation providers who are prepared to align their business to the local and national experiences and developments.
Increased support for small and fledgling tourist attractions that are considering expending and are aligned to the local and national tourism strategies.
A much greater emphasis must be placed on major potential tourism projects, such as the Ulster Canal.

We need to avoid duplication across departments when it comes to funding to avoid any waste of valuable resources.

Q7: Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing: To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐ **Not Applicable** ☐

If you have selected ***Not Applicable***, please go to ***Question 8***.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

See additional comments under Q7b below.

b. Do you agree that the five priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

We have made a number of references throughout this response to the importance of village regeneration in rural areas. At a strategic level this will require a step change in policy direction where statutory responsibility for village regeneration (as defined under the accepted definition of " rural ") is clearly assigned within central government. This will provide the starting point for a long term village planning process which can align with Community Plan priorities to deliver the best outcomes for our villages and residents. To this end we would suggest that local authorities are best placed to lead on the delivery of village regeneration actions and that funding made available within Pillar 3 for this purpose is channelled through local Councils.

During Mid Ulster District Council's extensive community consultations to draw up the new Community Plan for Mid Ulster, the issue causing most concern was the ongoing reduction of health and social care services and facilities in the area and the apparent lack of investment in alternative provision. The Mid Ulster Community Plan includes a number of actions to address issues relating to access to services and improving the health and wellbeing of our residents. These include a new initiative focusing on the development of Healthy Places Plans using a Hub and Spoke model whereby main towns act as hubs for the provision of health & wellbeing services such as, GPs, dentists, other Health Trust services, leisure centres, sporting grounds etc. Smaller towns (spokes) also have a role in providing a level of adequate services to meet the health & wellbeing needs of their community utilising local community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing. Whilst this action is only in a conceptual phase, Mid Ulster District Council feels that there is potential within the Rural Policy Framework to bring it to fruition.

Q8: Thematic Pillar 4: Employment: To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 4: Employment is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐ **Not Applicable** ☐

If you have selected ***Not Applicable***, please go to ***Question 9***.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

The Community Plan for Mid Ulster recognises the need to take into consideration all the contributors to economic growth and barriers faced by many in our society to take part in meaningful employment. These include women returning to work, people with children and other caring duties, people with disabilities and those most removed from the labour market or economic opportunity. We therefore welcome the inclusion of employability as a thematic area within the Rural Policy Framework.

A specific aspect impacting on employability within the District is the mismatch which exists between available skills and the requirements of employers. For example the Materials handling sector is short approximately 400 people at present which could equate to approx. £200m in lost exports this year alone. Mid Ulster is heavily reliant on migrant labour and depends on EU nationals to supplement the workforce particularly within Agri-food and Engineering. Moreover, population growth is expected to decline therefore impacting on the local labour pool available into the future. The Council would therefore highlight the importance of a differentiated and more flexible migration policy.

The supply of skilled labour is a major challenge facing the Mid Ulster economy and this Council has been at the very forefront of the skills agenda in Northern Ireland, having established the first ever industry-led Mid Ulster Skills Forum to address the skills and employability issues within our current and potential workforce that are impacting on the economic future of the District.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 4: Employment are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth;
- To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers;
- To invest in and develop our rural society.

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

We agree with the three priority areas for intervention outlined under Thematic Pillar 4 but further opportunity for comment on the initiatives to be developed under each intervention will be needed. We would contend that a skilled workforce will be a key driver of economic growth in the District therefore the intervention areas outlined should align with key objectives of the NI Skills Strategy which looks to address the skills imbalance that exists within the NI economy. We would recommend a number of intervention which are relevant under the employability theme:

Apprenticeships
There are too many generic degrees having no contribution economically. The Council believes that there needs to be a much greater investment in apprenticeships, which unfortunately are still perceived by many as being of lower status than the academic route. The apprenticeship pathway will be a critical skills pipeline in the rebuilding of the NI economy, improving the transition from school to work.

CEIAG (Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance)
There must be a commitment to develop a robust Careers Strategy to ensure " pathways " are much clearer and easier for individuals. Careers advice and guidance must be focussed on supporting the key growth clusters/sectors identified within the 10X Economy.

Initiatives to Promote Career Attractiveness
A range of initiatives that promote career attractiveness in priority sectors/clusters is needed to retain and build key skills in NI. This should include work experience in industry for school age pupils from age 14 and the education of parents on the value of the work-based learning route, including HLAs and Foundation Degrees.

Higher-Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) and Degree Apprenticeships
The Council would advocate broadening the range of higher-level apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships as an alternative, and debt-free, route to higher level qualifications, with greater opportunity to progress into employment. This extended range would be linked to the needs of priority sectors identified in the 10X Economy.

Lifelong Learning
" Creating a Culture of Lifelong Learning " is a policy objective within the NI Skill Strategy. Businesses need to be supported and encouraged to increasingly offer different employment models, flexi-working, job rotation, contract and portfolio working – all of which have the potential to change the way they attract, invest in and develop skills in future.

Q9: Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity: To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐ **Not Applicable** ☐

If you have selected ***Not Applicable***, please go to ***Question 10***.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Additional comments are included under Q9b below.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.
- To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.
- To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live.
- To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas.

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

In relation to public transport Mid Ulster Community Planning has prioritised provision of an Integrated Transport Model for the district, as a response to local communities transport concerns around access needs and rural connectivity. As a first step to improving integration of transport services, it is proposed to establish an integrated working group to look at potential solutions/good practice, taking on board lessons learned from the Integrated Public Passenger Transport Pilot Project carried out in the Dungannon area in 2014/15. However, after discussions with the relevant organisations, it was agreed that progressing with the actions was unachievable without significant policy change and departmental commitment.
Mid Ulster Community Planning would seek the support of DEARA through the Rural Policy Framework to ensure the required policy is implemented and there is cross departmental commitment to deliver an integrated transport scheme across the District, in order to support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centre and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.

The coronavirus pandemic has placed a new emphasis on broadband provision which is now an absolute necessity within every household and business within the District and fundamental to growth within the rural economy.
Mid Ulster District Council is in the unenviable position of having the second worse broadband provision in all of Northern Ireland. We have continually lobbied central government at the highest level to address this longstanding issue which has adversely impacted on our businesses and households especially in rural parts of the district. Project Stratum is now thankfully underway and will deliver enormous benefits to the many homes and businesses that are eligible for this public intervention across predominantly rural areas of Mid Ulster. However, following a recent Mid Ulster Council Project Stratum survey during February and March of 2021 it became alarmingly clear that many more premises in Mid Ulster were outside the scope of the project than first feared. It is imperative that no businesses or households fulfilling the eligibility criteria to avail Project Stratum are left behind. We have continued our lobby efforts with the Department of the Economy to ensure this happens.
Mid Ulster District Council is also participating in the Full Fibre NI initiative and led on the development of a consortium bid along with the other local authorities in NI to secure funding to bring dark fibre to all Council and NHS premises across the district.
We will continue to use our influence to shape and facilitate ongoing improvements to digital connectivity as part of our Corporate Plan commitments to the district.

Q10: What are your views on how the five thematic pillars should be prioritised, ranked by priority from 1-5 (with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest priority)?

Thematic pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship	2
Thematic pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism	4
Thematic pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing	3
Thematic pillar 4: Employment	5
Thematic pillar 5: Connectivity	1

Please choose each number only once.

Q11: Do you agree that the 14 Key Principles outlined below are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Address the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft Programme for Government 2016-21 (PfG);
- Promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities;
- Encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector;
- Recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- Encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- Complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016;
- Be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas;
- Promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities;
- Seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75;
- Seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal;
- Promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation), learning and best practice between organisations;
- Seek to complement the community planning process;

- Recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis; and
- The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Mid Ulster District Council would be in agreement with the principles outlined above.

We would content that ongoing engagement by DAERA in the Community Planning process should form part of the key principles within the Rural Policy Framework – more so than merely seeking to complement the community planning process. Community planning provides an ongoing process for capturing emerging needs and priorities at local level including those within rural areas.

There should be flexibility within the Rural Policy Framework to allow Councils to utilise financial resources from DAERA to target interventions identified from the Community Planning process. Village regeneration is one such example but this could be extended to business support initiatives or skills development initiatives aimed at developing sectoral strengths or address weaknesses of the area. We would ask that this approach is given consideration when identifying implementation arrangements.

Q12: Are there any other aspects of the proposals that you wish to comment on?

Yes ☑ **No** ☐

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

This Council acknowledges that the purpose of this consultation exercise is to confirm need for the priority themes and interventions proposed under the new Rural Policy Framework and the subsequent development of a new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is important however that further opportunities are made available for engagement with DAERA during the " programming phase" following this consultation to allowed feedback on the detail of the schemes emerging under each Pillar which will complement the community planning process.

Q13: Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DAERA in relation to Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland in respect of:

a. The Equality and Human Rights Screening Template

Yes ☐ **No** ☑

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. The Rural Needs Impact Assessment

Yes ☐ **No** ☑

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

For further information:

Rural Policy and Delivery Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Tel: 028 7744 5113 - (This is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back)
Email: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Department of
Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

SKILLS TO SUCCEED

Department for the Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

SKILLS STRATEGY

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

A CONSULTATION

SUMMARY

SKILLS FOR A 10X ECONOMY

This provides a short summary of our consultation on a new Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland: Skills for a 10x Economy. Individuals and organisations that wish to respond to the consultation should review the full version of the consultation document which includes consultation questions and can be found at:

DfE website - Skills Strategy consultation

We will also be hosting open, online consultation events over the consultation period. Details will be published on our website and through our social media channels.

On 11th May 2021, we published our economic vision[1]:

The ambition we have set out in [our] economic vision is for a '10x Economy'.

Northern Ireland's decade of innovation will encourage greater collaboration and innovation to deliver a ten times better economy with benefits for all our people.

We will realise this ambition by focussing on innovation in areas where we have real strengths and making sure these gains mean something to all businesses, people and places in Northern Ireland.

Overall we will see a positive impact on our economic, societal and environmental wellbeing.

1 DfE (2021) *A 10x Economy: Northern Ireland's Decade of Innovation.* Available from: DfE website - 10x Economy Publication

Delivering *'a 10x Economy''* - an economy that is 10x stronger, 10x more prosperous, 10x more resilient - will require transformation in our skills system. In an economy with limited natural resource, the skills of our people are the primary driver of our success. Harnessing talent is not only a key objective in itself, it is integral to every aspect of this vision statement.

It will mean investing in the skills that will drive our key strategic clusters, boosting the research and innovation potential of our workforce and developing Northern Ireland as a global hub of knowledge through strong collaboration between government, business and our world class research institutions.

It will mean working cohesively across our whole education system to address skills imbalances, driving increased participation in the STEM subjects that will underpin our economic success.

It will mean tackling social and educational inequality, ensuring appropriate pathways are in place to enable all our citizens to reach their potential, benefitting from and contributing to a stronger, more prosperous, more resilient Northern Ireland.

This is both urgent and strategic. The skills and talents of our people will be the foundation of our economic success. Harnessing the potential to deliver *'A 10x Economy'* will mean engaging our existing workforce and business base in the collaborative design of a skills system that will maximise our competitive potential over the next decade.

At the same time, we must build on the strengths of our education system, laying the foundations of the modernisation which will ensure a rich vein of talent continues to flow into the heart of our economy, as the primary driver of the rich and prosperous future we envisage for Northern Ireland.

Skills for a '10x Economy'

Our draft consultation document identifies three major policy objectives and three underpinning policy enablers. These align to the principles set out in our economic vision; addressing skills imbalances, providing opportunities for all and placing collaboration and co-design at the centre of our strategy, to support key strategic clusters while delivering meaningful change for everyone. It aligns our skills system to the better jobs and better wages we want to see across our economy.

The Skills Barometer for Northern Ireland provides a clear guide to the skills we require to maximise our potential. It has been used as the primary evidence base to develop this draft strategy which will not only drive economic growth, but also establish a skills framework that addresses the key issues which have constrained Northern Ireland's economic and social development:

- the prevalence of individuals with low, or no qualifications
- limited opportunities for high paying jobs and pathways for career progression
- a 'skills deficit' and comparatively poor productivity performance.

The Skills Strategy and the Opportunity for Generational Change

As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in Northern Ireland in early 2020, the research and stakeholder engagement phase of the development of this strategy had just closed. The evidence compiled and the draft framework of action that had been developed already signified the need for transformational change in our skills system. A number of drivers can be identified for this, which fall under the banner of what we have come to know as the fourth industrial revolution:

- rapid technological advancement;
- an aging population and longer working lives;
- dealing with the impact of climate change and the need for green growth;
- globalisation and an increasingly competitive global environment; and
- the UK's departure from the European Union.

As *'A 10x Economy'* highlights, the Coronavirus pandemic sent a further shockwave through our economy and labour market; a shockwave which has caused much pain to many people. At the same time, it has provided an opportunity for us to reflect on how we recover, rebuild and bounce back stronger than ever.

For our skills system to deliver the talent we need to support a 10x Economy, we must take advantage of our small scale, addressing the fragmentation which has constrained our skills system. We must reverse the trend of declining investment in skills, revitalising our education system to ensure it is strategically aligned and properly resourced to deliver in a modern, small advanced economy. We must ensure that everyone has access to the education and training they need to reach their potential, delivering better jobs to more people.

Policy Objectives and Key Commitments

As illustrated in the diagram above, our draft Skills Strategy is shaped around three policy objectives and three underpinning policy enablers. An overview of the rationale and intentions behind each objective and enabler is provided in the following pages. Individuals or organisations that wish to engage in the consultation process will find the consultation document at the link provided on page two. The full consultation document details our evidence base, the 34 proposed policy commitments and consultation questions.

Addressing Skills Imbalances, Driving Economic Growth

'Addressing Skills Imbalances, Driving Economic Growth' can be seen as an overarching objective. It is at the heart of what the draft Skills Strategy is trying to achieve and considers the change that needs to be delivered at all levels of the qualifications framework.

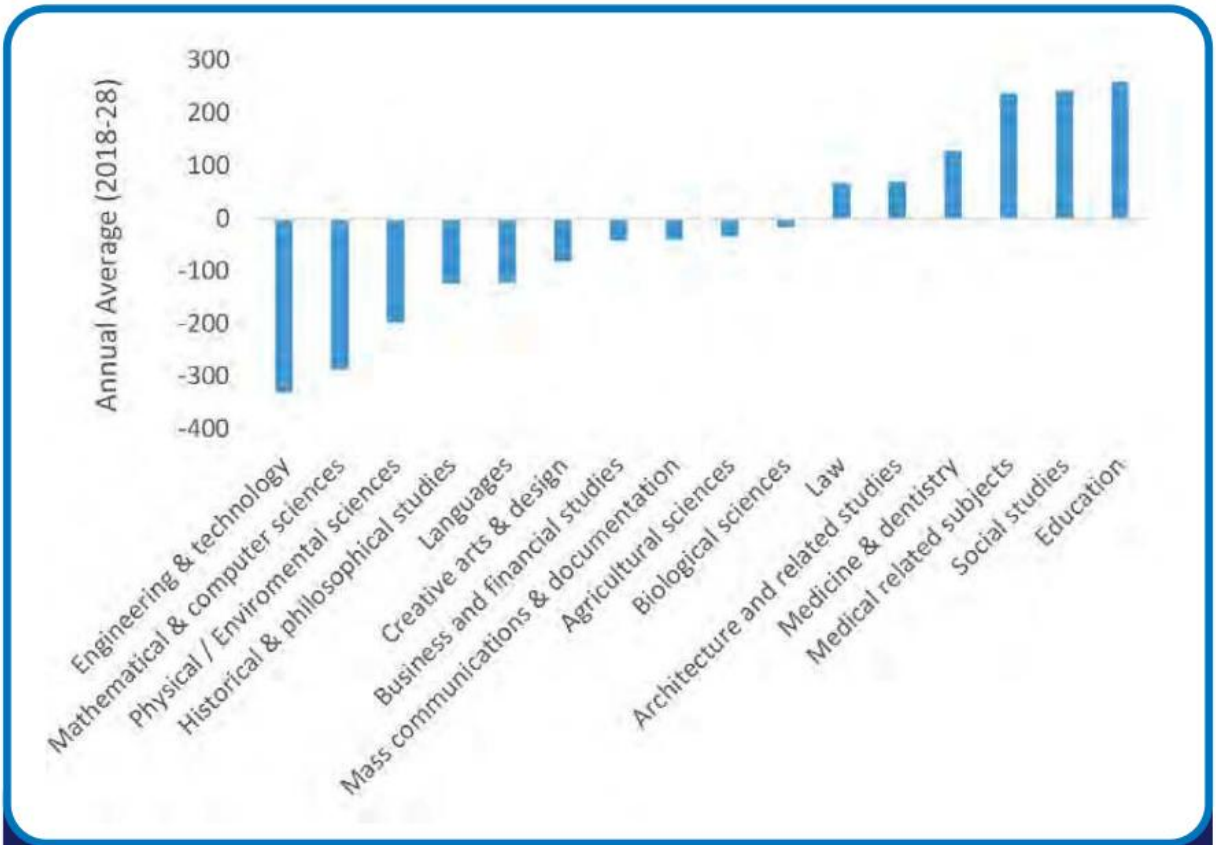
Whilst the draft Skills Strategy (consultation document) reflects a broad range of research which informs these proposals, the Skills Barometer for Northern Ireland is adopted as a primary evidence source, guiding our proposed interventions. Delivering the skills needed under its 'high growth scenario' is adopted as the marker for the strategic objectives which will support our economic vision, a 10x Economy. Whilst work is yet to be done on developing specific metrics - subject to consultation on these proposals – it is proposed that our targets will focus on:

- increasing the proportion of individuals leaving Northern Ireland higher education institutions with degrees and post-graduate qualifications in 'in-demand' STEM subjects, including: physical, environmental and computer sciences, engineering and mathematics;

- significantly increasing the proportion of individuals achieving level 3, 4 and 5 qualifications, in line with forecast demand; and
- increasing the proportion of the working age population with qualifications at level 2 and above.

Degree and Post-Graduate Education

At degree and post-graduate levels, the primary challenge for Northern Ireland is to increase the number of individuals entering the labour market with qualifications in STEM, particularly in the 'narrow STEM' fields: physical, environmental and computer sciences, engineering and mathematics. Success in this area is crucial to our economic vision.



Source: Skills Barometer for Northern Ireland; NQF level 6+ subject balance by subject (1-digit JAC)

At the highest levels of post-graduate education, we want to develop stronger relationships between government, business and our world class research institutions. This is not only intended to address the undersupply of qualifications aligned to the development of our priority clusters and the emerging technologies which will underpin them, but also to drive Northern Ireland's potential as a global hub of innovation and knowledge. This will focus on Northern Ireland's key strategic clusters – and the enabling technologies that will drive them - set out in *'A 10x Economy'*:

- Digital, ICT and Creative Industries (e.g. Cyber Security)
- Agri-Food
- Fintech/Financial Services
- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (e.g. Composites)
- Life and Health Sciences (e.g. Digital Medicine)

Whilst programme design remains subject to consultation and co-design with business and academia, we want to support an increasing number of post-graduate research degrees that are delivered in these areas, with an emphasis on business-led research design, to ensure education is focused on innovation with real market value.

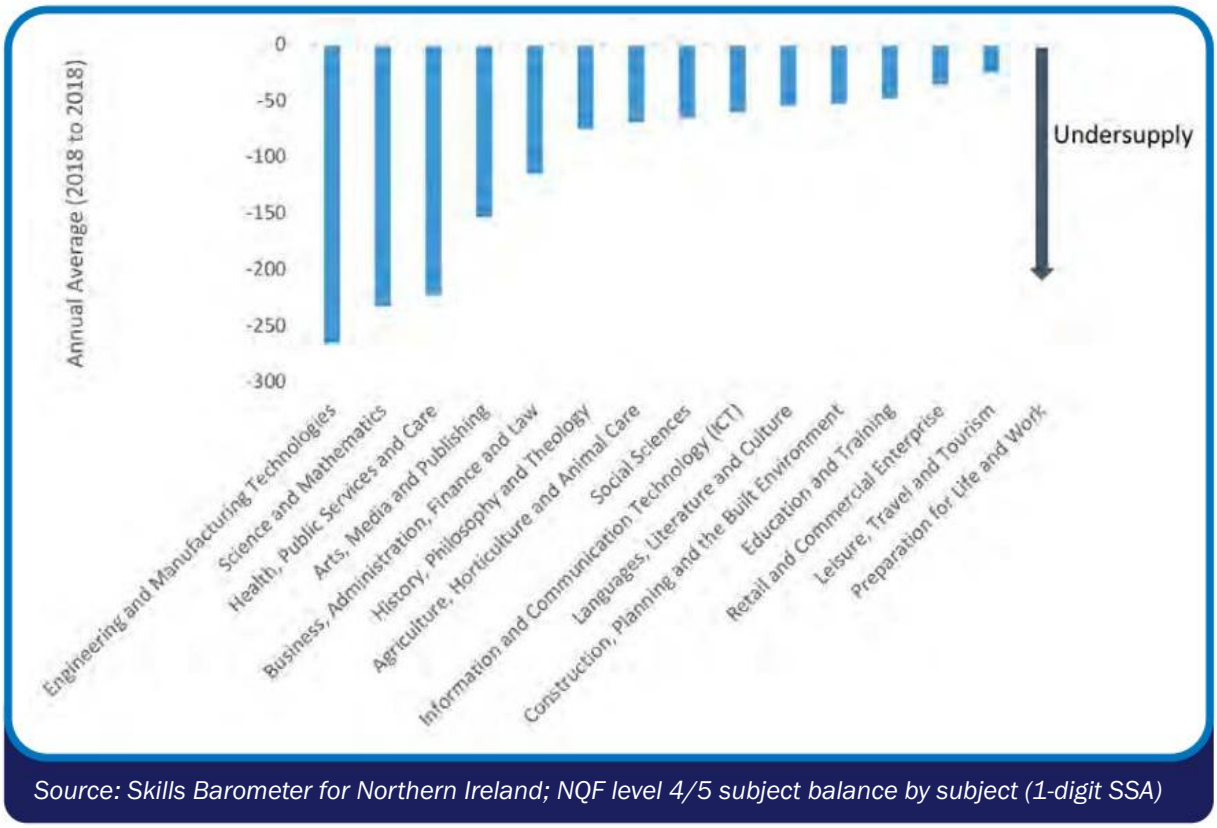
Underpinning this, we need to develop a rich pipeline of talent, increasing the number of individuals who choose to study STEM subjects at degree level. There are a number of ongoing projects which relate to this challenge including:

- *'Women in STEM',* which seeks to address the significant under-representation in these areas of study;
- The joint DE/DfE *'Transition of Young People into Careers (14 – 19) Project';*
- *The Review of HE in FE; and*
- The *'Independent Review of Education',* announced by the Minister of Education in December 2020.

Careers education is recognised throughout these projects. Based on the evidence gathered to underpin the draft Skills Strategy, it is recommended that we reform careers education by introducing new measures of careers guidance outcomes and developing clear, common, transparent and accountable standards.

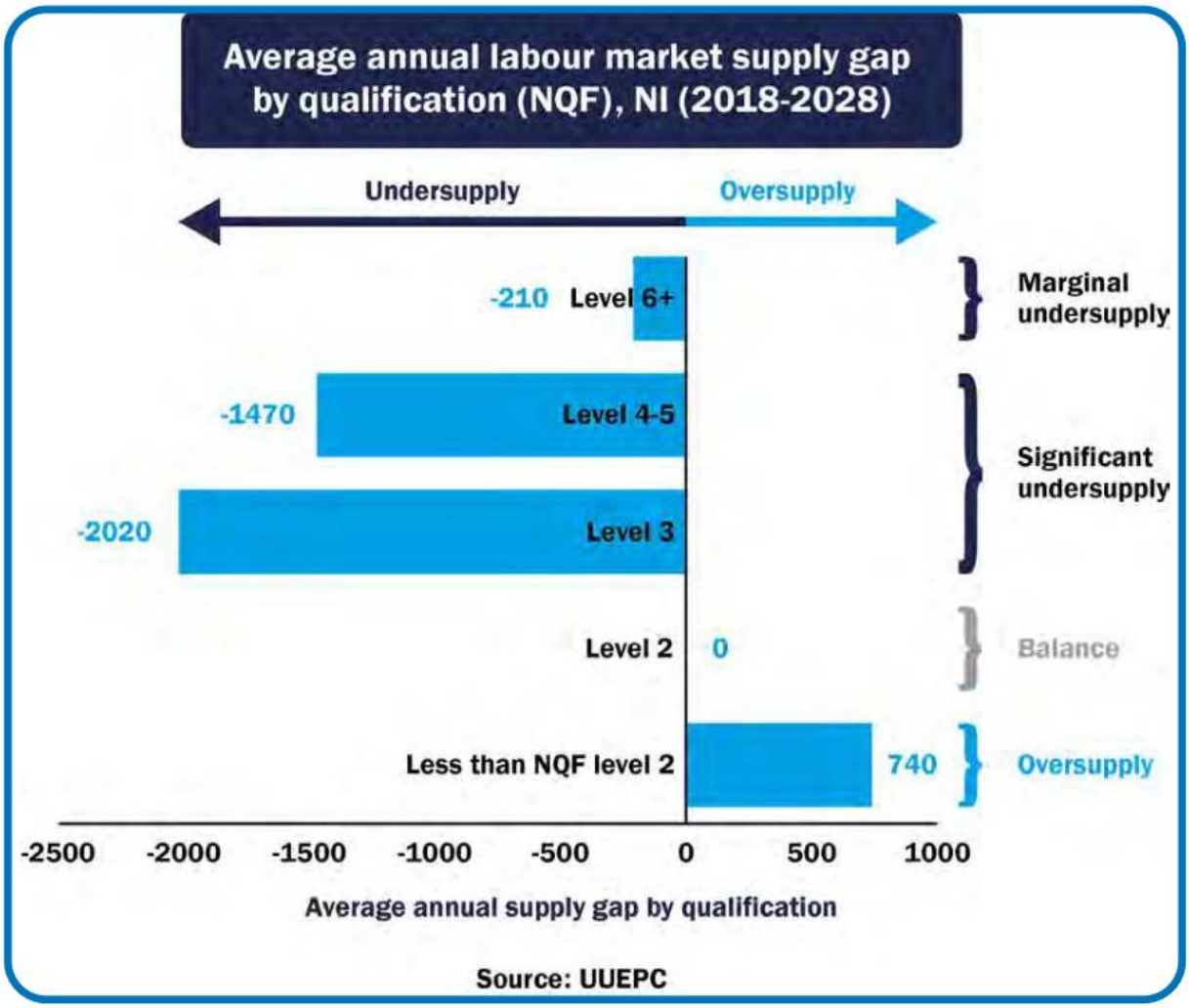
Mid-Level 'Professional and Technical' Education

As our economic vision recognises, degree level employment in Northern Ireland's key strategic clusters will not be suitable for everyone. As our economy develops, it is anticipated that a broad range of opportunities will emerge at mid-level; an area where the Skills Barometer highlights a significant anticipated supply problem across a broad range of fields of study.



Source: Skills Barometer for Northern Ireland; NQF level 4/5 subject balance by subject (1-digit SSA)

Below level 4, the Skills Barometer does not provide a 'by subject' breakdown due to the diverse range of subjects typically studied, but it is clear that there is a substantial anticipated undersupply at level 3 and a significant oversupply of individuals with low or no qualifications.

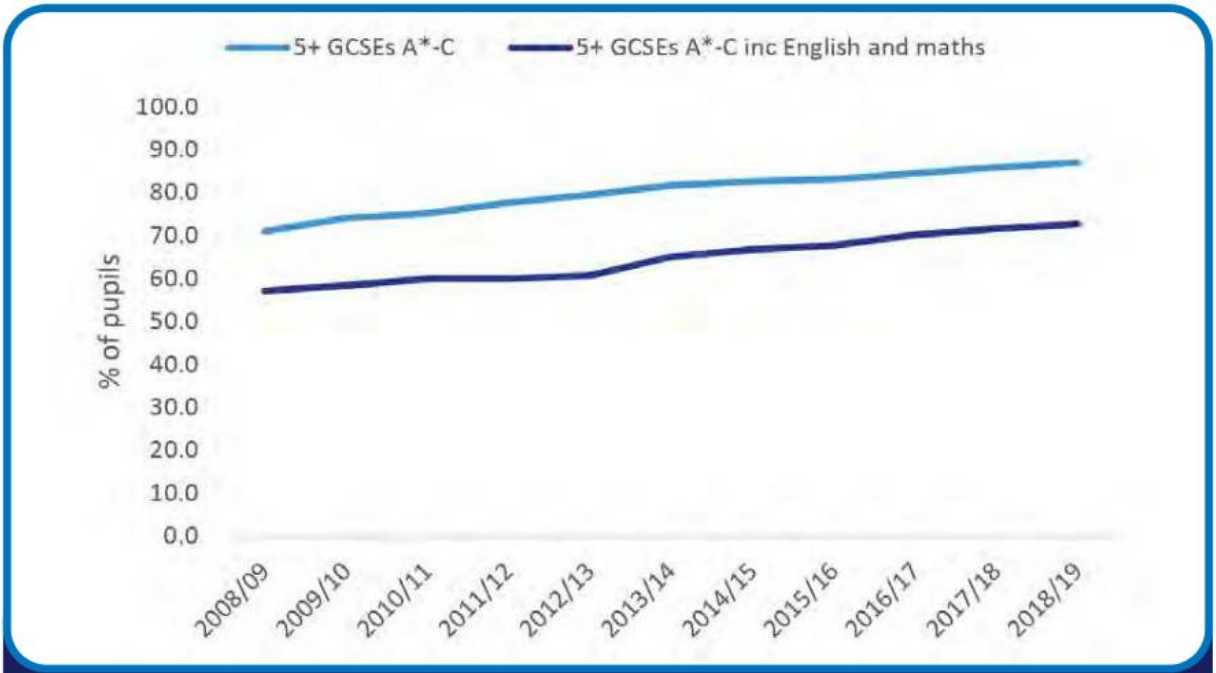


This highlights the key role of Northern Ireland's FE sector in addressing the skills deficit. The FE sector has a 'dual mandate' in Northern Ireland's skills system. It is the primary provider of education at levels 4 and 5 and vocational qualifications at level 3. From a resource perspective, this must always be balanced against the need to maintain provision of entry level education to adults and school leavers. Addressing the mid-level 'skills deficit' must be balanced against the need to provide progression pathways to those who have not reached their potential in school-based education. From both an economic and social perspective, it is essential that the FE sector is properly resourced to deliver this dual mandate.

There are also challenges in understanding and addressing declining participation in level 4 and 5 education; the ongoing work on the *'Review of HE in FE'* will be essential to this.

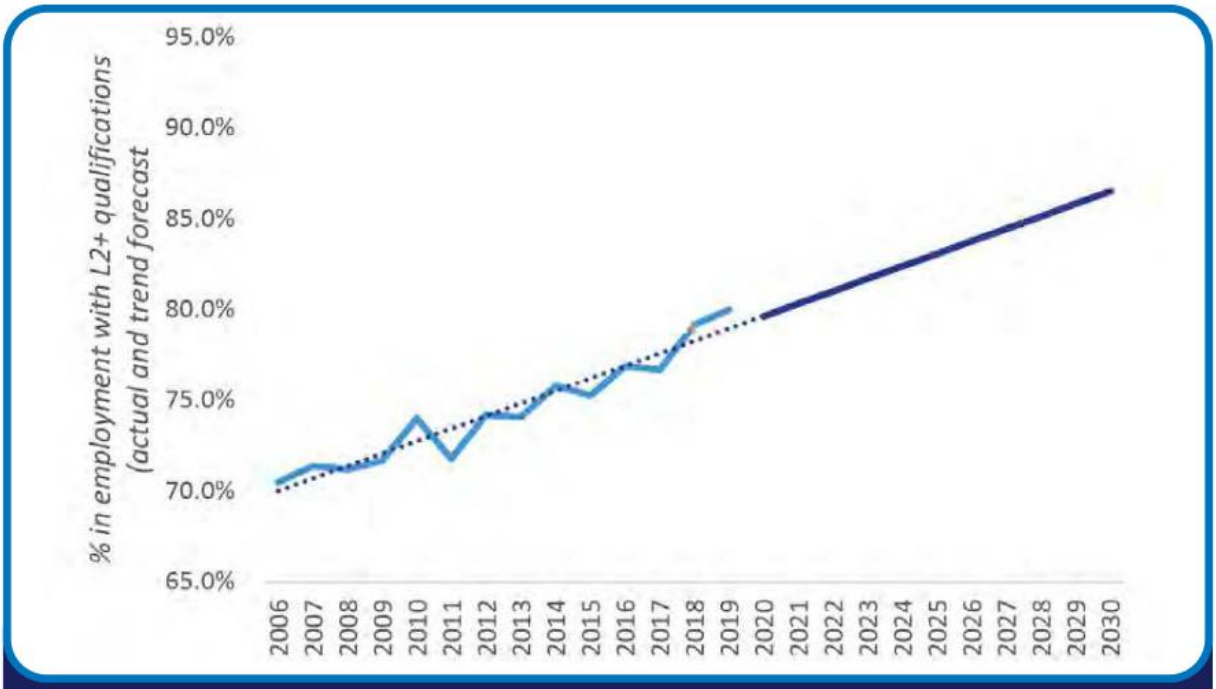
Low or No Qualifications

Over the lifetime of the last Skills Strategy – *'Success through Skills: Transforming Futures'* - there was substantial improvement in the percentage of school leavers achieving level 2 qualifications:



Source: DE/NISRA – Year 12 performance at GCSE 2018/19

And the overall proportion of the workforce with qualifications at level 2 and above:



Source: NISRA - Proportion in employment with level 2 and above qualifications

This is undoubtedly a positive trend we want to see continue, however, it should not mask the disparities and inequalities which are evident in areas of multiple deprivation, where education outcomes are significantly below Northern Ireland averages. Whilst there is a clear correlation between education and employment outcomes, the problem runs deeper. The Northern Ireland Index of Multiple Deprivation (NIMDM) demonstrates that poor education outcomes are also correlated with (but not necessarily the cause of):

- high rates of health deprivation and disability;
- poor living environments; and
- a prevalence of crime and disorder.

As has been noted above, connecting individuals in this cohort with opportunities to develop their skills is key. Collaboration across government, including with local government, will be central to developing cohesive approaches to education, skills and economic policy and supporting individuals to upskill, reskill and where necessary, reconnect with the labour market.

Creating a Culture of Lifelong Learning

'Addressing Skills Imbalances' over the next decade is fundamental to this Strategy. It must be acknowledged, however, that the vast majority of the 2030 workforce has already completed compulsory education. Making a difference in the skills of our working age population will not be achieved unless real opportunities are afforded to individuals to upskill / reskill throughout their working lives.

Participation in lifelong learning in Northern Ireland is comparatively low. We fall behind counterparts in the UK and Ireland, and participation is lower than the OECD average. Evidence from the OECD's *'Skills Strategy Northern Ireland'* highlights the importance of early education in setting learning habits on the right path. Many of the actions outlined under the *'Addressing Skills Imbalances'* heading will be fundamental in achieving long term change in this regard, but the need for more urgent action is present now.

As part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, several initiatives to support our working age population have already been brought forward, for example: investment in apprenticeships; a Flexible Skills Fund to support upskilling and reskilling; and proposals for investment in leadership and management training. These are all vital measures which we want to refine and build on over the lifetime of the new Skills Strategy.

In tandem, there is a longer term, more strategic challenge to consider. We need to develop a comprehensive understanding of why participation in lifelong learning lags behind counterparts and put in place the appropriate measures to make a lasting difference. This will be done under the auspices of Northern Ireland's first ever *'Lifelong Learning Action Plan',* co-designed with business, education institutions and trades unions, with the clear intent of driving a 10x Economy.

Enhancing Digital Skills, Developing Our Digital Spine

Keeping pace with technological change is one of the greatest challenges facing our skills system, as the pace of technological advancement outstrips the speed with which we are responding. Developing a skills system equipped to cope with this is essential, if Northern Ireland is to reach its competitive potential. In one sense, this is absolutely about supporting our key strategic clusters, all of which are being driven by technological change and hold untold innovative potential, if we can develop and harness the skills which will turn potential into commercial value.

The societal importance of improving digital skills should not be overlooked, however. As the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated, access to, and the ability to use digital technology is increasingly fundamental to our capacity to function as an economy and a society. Whilst we want to supply the skills required to bolster Northern Ireland's key strategic clusters, we must also recognise that some level of digital competence is increasingly essential to effective engagement in almost all work environments and a key aspect of an individual's capacity to actively participate in modern life.

For this reason, it is proposed that a *'Digital Skills Action Plan'* is developed to support the objectives of our economic vision: driving our decade of innovation and providing everyone with the opportunity to participate in our 10x Economy. Drawing again on the co-design principles we have set out, an expert panel will be appointed to consider the changing digital skills needs of our economy and identify the substantive changes required in digital education, to meet the current and emerging needs of our labour market and society.

Policy Enablers

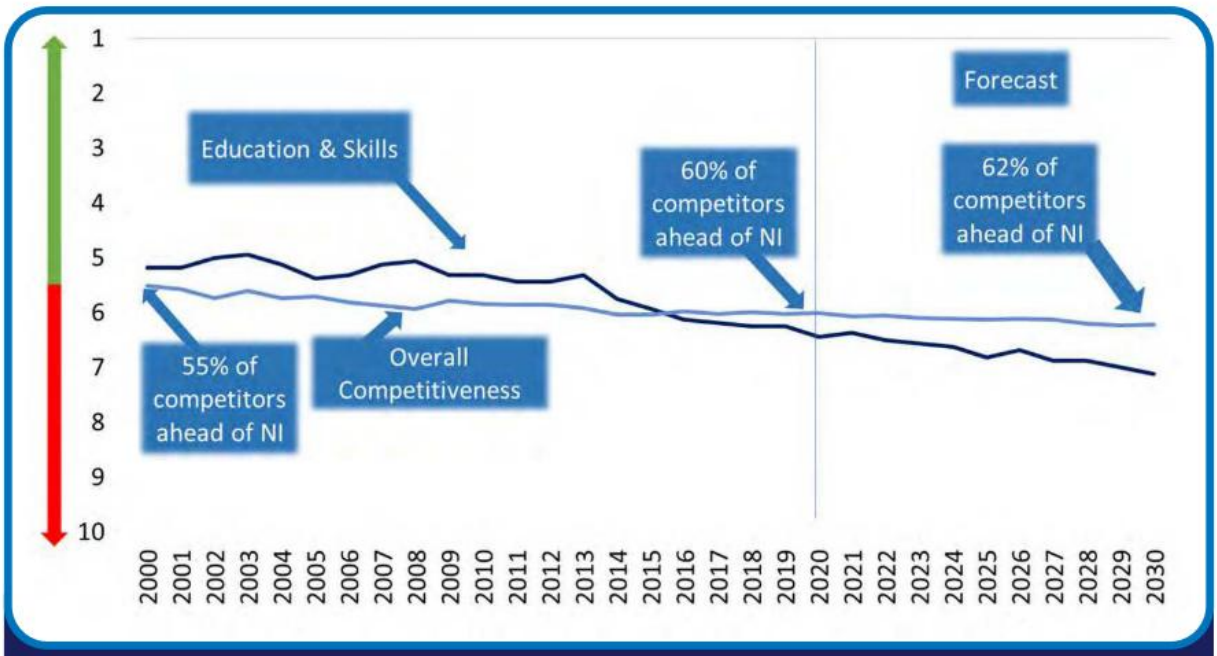
The draft Strategy breaks our policy enablers down into three major areas:

- Developing better policy cohesion
- Building stronger relationships
- Investment in the Skills System

Taken together, these enablers are about improving the governance of the skills system. It means working across government to build more cohesive skills policy solutions, which will drive our objectives of positive economic, environmental and societal outcomes. It means building strong relationships with external stakeholders in business, the education sector and trades unions to co-design skills solutions which support better jobs and better wages for all our people. It is about delivering increased innovation and driving Northern Ireland's position as an elite small advanced economy, through investment in a skills system which enables all our people to reach their potential.

The key action underpinning these enablers will be the development of a new Northern Ireland Skills Council. Whilst the terms of reference and specific make-up of the Council is yet to be agreed, the concept draws on international best practice to establish a forum with ministerial leadership and representation from senior figures in key government departments, business, education and trades unions. Its purpose will be to drive a more collaborative approach to policy, ensuring the skills system is responsive to economic need, strengthened through engagement with employers and employees and that the central importance of our skills system is recognised throughout economic and social policy, as we aim to address the issues which will make a real difference in people's lives.

Finally, we need to prioritise investment in the skills system. Over the last decade, investment in education and skills has fallen significantly. A recent assessment of Northern Ireland's competitiveness by the Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre shows how this has affected our competitive performance, with several small advanced economies now outperforming Northern Ireland[2].



Source: Ulster University Economic Policy Centre

2 In 2010, economies such as Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Estonia, Germany, France, Austria, Ireland, Iceland & Belgium were outperforming NI. In 2020 the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Portugal, Cyprus and Luxembourg can be added to that list.

In 2020/21, the Minister for the Economy secured £50 million of additional funding for skills initiatives as part of our initial COVID-19 response. This was supplemented by a further £50 million to support our economic recovery in 2021/22. This investment has been allocated to a range of initiatives, supporting additional places in existing programmes, including the expansion of apprenticeship opportunties, additional student support and new upskilling measures designed to support those whose employment had been affected by the pandemic. This additional investment has been widely welcomed, however, achieving the objectives as set out in this consultation will require sustained, strategic investment across all elements of our skills system in Northern Ireland.

Not only do we need to reprioritise our investment in education and skills, but we need a commitment to introduce the multi-year budgets which will underpin strategic planning and the transformational change in our skills system that will be required to deliver our 10x Economy.

Appendix 5

Comhairle Ceantair Lár Uladh Mid Ulster District Council

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND SKILLS STRATEGY: SKILLS FOR A 10X ECONOMY

August 2021

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The Council has been at the very forefront of the skills agenda in Northern Ireland, having established the first ever industry-led Mid Ulster Skills Forum to address the skills and employability issues within our current and potential workforce that are impacting on the economic future of the District. The Skills Forum had a very productive and useful consultation meeting with OECD officials in January 2020 in relation to the OECD Skill Strategy Project for Northern Ireland.

An outcome of the Forum's work is the highly regarded MEGA Collaborative Network which aims to attract suitable talent into the industry and reduce the skills gap which currently exists within the manufacturing and engineering sectors in Mid Ulster.

We recognise that the economy of the district needs to be sustained by enticing, engaging and equipping people with the right skills, in order to develop a high performing workforce, thereby successfully future proofing our indigenous industries by building momentum.

The Council's ambition is to ensure that businesses located (or locating to) the district are able to access appropriate scale and scope of skilled future talent, while securing the outcome for the district, as a strong place for business and investment.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF MID ULSTER

The Mid Ulster District Council area represents a multicultural population of more than 146,000 across 1,714 km^2 (14% of the NI land mass) and is the fastest growing new Council area in Northern Ireland (its population is expected to grow to 165,000 by 2030). The area is within a 30 minute reach of Belfast (Dublin - 2 hours), and shares a land border with Republic of Ireland providing access to 450,000 people within a 50km radius.

Mid Ulster is recognised as one of the most entrepreneurial and enterprising regions in Northern Ireland. Its economy is private sector driven, boasting the largest business base outside the Belfast Metropolitan area with over 9,000 VAT registered businesses. The region has higher productivity per head of population compared to the Northern Ireland average and a GVA[1] of £3.24bn (producing 7.7% of NI's economic output).

The Council area has strengths in key sectors, including Manufacturing & Engineering; Food and Agri Food; Construction; Retail, IT and Hospitality. Our businesses are the most export-intensive, accounting for 12% of NI's exports. Mid Ulster businesses embrace innovation, and the region has the largest uptake of Invest NI's Innovation Accreditation Awards outside of the Belfast region.

Mid Ulster is rightly recognised as the centre of manufacturing and engineering in Northern Ireland, where it accounts for 21% of the local economy (providing nearly 11,000 jobs), compared to 9% in NI. The sector is estimated to deliver c£1.67bn GVA contribution to the local economy and over £710m in local wages, directly and indirectly. This world class cluster is of profound importance to the area's economy – especially in key specialisms such as the manufacture of mining and quarrying machinery, production of general and special purpose machinery etc., which have linkages and supply chain associations with the construction and food and agri-food sectors. For instance, 40% of world's mobile crushing and screening equipment is made in the Mid Ulster area.

3.0 COVID-19 IMPACT

The vast majority of jobs in Mid Ulster are in the private sector so the economic downturn as a result of the coronavirus is felt hardest here. A report by the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) identified that the estimated percentage decline in GVA 2020 is -16.3% which is the highest of all the 11 Council areas. This figure exceeds the huge fall in GVA seen in Mid Ulster (-15.6%) at the height of the last recession in 2008-09.

Moreover, a study by the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) reported that Mid Ulster will endure the greatest economic impact of Covid19 in Northern Ireland. The report highlighted Mid Ulster as the only area locally to feature in the top 10 worst-impacted places within the UK's 382 local authority regions. CPP estimates that GVA could temporarily fall by a staggering 45% in the short term, which presents an immense challenge for local companies and jobs.

Skills and access to labour are both a major current and future constraint to growth and economic recovery in Mid Ulster. Moreover, there is a need to promote the wide variety of exciting career opportunities that are available within local industry.

[1] Office for National Statistics 2018

4.0 FEEDBACK FROM COUNCIL ON SKILLS ISSUES

Skills Imbalances / Mismatches

Mid Ulster District Council firmly believes that Education and Careers Policy in Northern (NI) must fundamentally change, as qualifications often do not match skills needed by local industry; we have the wrong mix of skills and skills levels are too low. We are continuing to train and educate people for jobs that don't exist while not training anywhere near enough people for the jobs that do exist now in growth sectors and will exist in the future.

The Covid-19 pandemic had demonstrated that the NI Skills pipeline is not adaptive, responsive or competitive as it needs to be.

For example, Mid Ulster is the hub of manufacturing and engineering in Northern Ireland (NI), where it accounts for 21% of the local economy, compared to 9% in the rest of NI. However, there is undersupply of talent entering this critical sector, which reflects the deficiencies in current skills policy. The Council would highlight the importance of investment in this key priority sector in Mid Ulster which is rightfully recognised as a priority cluster within the NI Skills Strategy and 10X Economy.

Furthermore, for the NI Skill strategy is to be successfully delivered, it will require significant reform and transformation in the NI Skills Eco-System and deeper and greater collaboration with industry, schools and colleges to ensure students study relevant curriculum and subjects needed by the local region and are taught appropriate modern skills to thrive. Employers should play a significant role in shaping the demand for training courses. Education and Training providers must pro-actively engage with employers to ensure they are better informed about job opportunities and industry skills requirements.

Therefore, the Council welcomes the commitment within the NI Skills Strategy for greater collaboration with key stakeholders including industry and trade unions. Industry/employers must be at the heart of the system as we need people leaving the education system ready for the world of work.

Fundamentally the NI system is broken in that it is working against industry and the needs of the local economy.

It is clear that funding for post primary schools should not be dependent upon retaining pupils to study towards the academic route. Incentivising schools to bring more students down an academic path when it is not the right solution for the student is a huge problem. Council would support the proposal that pupils should not be able to leave full-time education in Northern Ireland until 18 years of age, similar to other parts of the UK.

Developing the skills base will be critical to achieving the vision of a 10X Economy. Firstly, by reducing the number of young people with low / no skills and encouraging them to remain in education to the level appropriate with their skills and abilities (the only long term sustainable way to develop an inclusive economy). Secondly,

ensuring young people are given the right advice and guided towards career pathways in tertiary level education that best suit them and also meet the needs of the economy. Finally, providing upskilling and re-skilling opportunities for those already in or seeking to re-enter the labour market.

Access to labour

The Mid Ulster economy has high levels of resident employment and prior to Covid-19 the area was almost at full employment. One of the major challenges facing the Mid Ulster economy is labour supply and a shortage of people which has led to a loss of jobs and will continue to do so until a solution is found. For example the Materials handling sector is short approximately 400 people at present which could equate to approx. £200m in lost exports this year alone.

Mid Ulster is heavily reliant on migrant labour and depends on EU nationals to supplement the workforce particularly within Agri-food and Engineering. Moreover, population growth is expected to decline therefore impacting on the local labour pool available into the future. The Council would therefore highlight the importance of a differentiated and more flexible migration policy that keeps our economy open to all levels of international talent.

The Council welcomes the commitment to supporting the economically inactive cohort back to work as we aim to rebuild our economy in the aftermath of the pandemic. Specific support needs to be developed and rolled out in a co-ordinated and targeted manner to those who have no or very little formal qualifications to help them into employment. Workplace mentors could be identified and funded to help such individuals to gain recognised qualifications.

Apprenticeships

There are too many generic degrees having no contribution economically. The Council believes that there needs to be a much greater investment in apprenticeships, which unfortunately are still perceived by many as being of lower status than the academic route. The apprenticeship pathway will be a critical skills pipeline in the rebuilding of the NI economy, improving the transition from school to work.

The work-based learning route is the priority for Mid Ulster and the Council acknowledges the strong focus on vocational training included in the Skills Strategy. The Apprenticeship offer needs to be increased further to ensure as many people as possible have employment opportunities. A dedicated fund should be established to subsidise the provision of apprenticeships. For example businesses that create new posts and employ under 25's (especially those who have been economically inactive or unemployed) should receive financial assistance for employing and continuing to employ apprentices.

However the current 'off the shelf' apprenticeship model is not working for Mid Ulster so change is needed to drive skills development through practical work based learning. Short-term, therefore, there is an immediate need to work with DfE / the FE Colleges to assess what adaptations could be made to better fit with

immediate skill needs. We have already seen some positive changes with MEGA working in partnership with SWC to develop an Industry Training Centre (ITC) in the local area, which is being supported by DfE.

In order to increase the uptake of apprenticeships the Council believes the Strategy should also focus on '*Shared Apprenticeship models'*. These are typically targeted at SMEs who may not be in a position to offer apprenticeships to young people due to the economic uncertainty across their sector and the short-term nature of their order books. Furthermore, there is interest in exploring solutions that give our employers more control to 'purchase' their own solutions in this regard, which may entail aspects of the voucher system in place elsewhere in GB.

In addition, a policy change is required on the Apprenticeship Levy and age limitations to allow apprenticeship opportunities to be more effective and inclusive.

CEIAG (Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance)

CEIAG underpins any Skills Strategy and the Council welcomes the commitment to develop a robust Careers Strategy to ensure "pathways" are much clearer and easier for individuals. Careers advice and guidance must be focussed on supporting the key growth clusters/sectors identified within the 10X Economy. As previously noted, there is an undersupply of local talent entering Mid Ulster's manufacturing and engineering sector. A survey by MEGA identified that only 4.9% of school leavers (from Mid Ulster post primary schools) entered the sector last year.

It is widely accepted that the lack of consistency in careers education, advice and guidance between schools is huge and needs to be reformed to ensure it is impartial and independent with clear, transparent and accountable standards.

Lessons should be learnt from Scotland which has developed a system of career guidance through Skills Development Scotland. Their 'World of Work' is an award winning career information and advice website for individuals, parents, and staff.

Initiatives to Promote Career Attractiveness

A range of initiatives that promote career attractiveness in priority sectors/clusters is needed to retain and build key skills in NI. This should include work experience in industry for school age pupils from age 14 and the education of parents on the value of the work-based learning route, including HLAs and Foundation Degrees.

Vocational skills could be developed much younger. It is also evident that there is an onus on the employers and businesses themselves to actively promote the development of productive, inclusive and engaging workplaces. The role of entrepreneurship education needs to be expanded.

Furthermore, businesses should be encouraged to offer different employment models, flexi-working, job rotation, contract and portfolio working – all of which have the potential to significantly change the way they attract, invest in and develop skills in future.

Higher-Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) and Degree Apprenticeships

The Council would advocate broadening the range of higher-level apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships as an alternative, and debt-free, route to higher level qualifications, with greater opportunity to progress into employment. This extended range would be linked to the needs of priority sectors identified in the 10X Economy.

The Council considers it essential that Further & Higher Education Colleges continue to develop Educational pathways from levels two to Honours Degree Level 6. The provision of Higher Education full time and part-time courses at all levels within colleges is critical to ensure there is regional balance regarding rural educational opportunities that traditionally are urban centric.

In addition, having Higher Education Degree courses within Colleges supports local industry and provides a pool of skilled talent for now and the future. This will also contribute to reducing the brain drain of talent that leave the region never to return. Honours Degree provision would also support the objectives of the Programme for Government, and contribute support to the College Widening Access and Participation agenda.

There is also a need to promote the value of these options as a route to higher-level qualifications / the 'world of work' with parents of young people.

Management and Leadership Training

Despite being a highly entrepreneurial economy with favourable survival rates, there is evidence that too many of Mid Ulster's indigenous businesses fail to grow. Our engagements indicate that a range of actions are needed to develop strategic leadership talent and management skills alongside technical and professional skills in Mid Ulster. This can be particularly relevant for the SME community and family owned businesses, where succession planning is relevant.

The Council fully supports the commitment for a renewed approach to management and leadership and the development of a dedicated project and action plan.

Lifelong Learning

The Council welcomes that 'Creating a Culture of Lifelong Learning' is a policy objective within the Skill Strategy. It is evident that there is an onus on the employers and businesses themselves to actively promote the development of productive, inclusive and engaging workplaces and instilling a *"culture of lifelong learning*". Businesses need to be supported and encouraged to increasingly offer different employment models, flexi-working, job rotation, contract and portfolio working – all of which have the potential to change the way they attract, invest in and develop skills in future.

It is recognised that that many small businesses find the financial constraints of engaging in management and leadership training too significant. Therefore to

address this, the council would request that funding is secured to address this issue.

The Council welcomes the commitment to develop Northern Ireland's first ever 'Lifelong Learning Action Plan' which will be co-designed with business, education institutions and trades unions, with the clear intent of driving a 10x Economy.

Multi-year Budget Planning

To support the effective long term implementation of the NI Skill Strategy, it is critical that a new policy on budgeting processes is implemented that enables multi-year planning instead of traditional annual budget cycles.

5.0 DELIVERY STRUCTURE

The Council's experience is that skills and education in Northern Ireland is a very fragmented landscape.

Therefore the Council welcomes that the Skills Strategy will be endorsed as an "Across government approach" recognising that all departments have a vital role to play in the outputs of the strategy. Furthermore, the Council would support the establishment of an overarching central Skills Council to implement the Skills Strategy – providing oversight, co-ordination and applying a holistic approach to what is a very fragmented policy area. This should include cross-representation from central and local government, industry, education and trade unions.

The Council would reinforce the benefits of a "bottom-up approach", particularly given the new Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) model, which can identify and align local skills and employability solutions with local industry needs.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Mid Ulster District Council looks forward to the implementation of a robust and ambitious NI Skills Strategy which is flexible to respond to a changing economy.

The Council would assert the importance of securing investment to make the ambitions of the Skill Strategy a reality. Investment needs to be focused and targeted to ensure people in all society have access to acquiring modern skills and better jobs and wages.

Skills is a key driver for economic growth and development and we must attract and retain the best and brightest talent in our key growth sectors in order to achieve the ambition of a '*global competitive economy that works for everyone*.'

Report on	Leisure Participation
Date of Meeting	16th September 2021
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Head of Leisure
Contact Officer	Leigh Gilmore, Participation Manager

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 advise Members on the Council's Participation team activity year to date, to provide information on the intended active lifestyle plan for October 2021 – 31st March 2022 and to seek approval for a new pilot programme of activities to be delivered within the leisure service.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	As previously reported to Members in January 2021, the 5 year lottery funded Sport NI Everybody Active 2020 programme along with its three dedicated coaching staff were due to conclude its operations on 31st March 2021. As a result of this, along with the challenges presented with the covid pandemic, the Council's Participation team have been actively reviewing their active lifestyle plan delivery model in order to meet objectives agreed within the Council's Community Plan 2017-2027.
2.2	While the funded programme has ceased, the aim is still to ensure that targeted increases in active participation are achieved across the Mid Ulster District among traditionally underrepresented groups.
2.3	Therefore, this report seeks to provide an update on the activity delivered year to date along with the intended active lifestyle plan for the remainder of this financial year which also includes a new pilot programme of activities to be delivered within the leisure service.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	The Participation unit of the Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Department wishes to increase opportunities for Mid Ulster District Council residents to participate in a range of scheduled structured and non-structured recreational activities and to meet objectives as set out with the Council's Community Plan 2017-2027 along with contributing towards the Council's Anti-Poverty Action Plan.

3.2	The Participation team's active lifestyle plan broadly focuses on the following areas: • Macmillan Move More (funded programme until July 2022) • Physical Activity Referral Scheme (rolling annual programme subject to recurring funding from the Public Health Agency) • Get Out Get Active (GOGA) • Holiday activity schemes • Support/guidance to the community for Council's various sports and participation led grants
3.3	As stated earlier in the report, with the cessation of the lottery funded Sport NI Everybody Active 2020 programme, the Participation Team have sought to innovate its delivery model within existing revenue budgets and therefore intend to bring forward a pilot programme of activities from October 2021 – 31st March 2022 subject to review and evaluation. This will be delivered by specialised coaches via appointed activity providers within leisure facility environments across the District and focus on targeting specific groupings along with aiming to enhance the profile and services of current Mid Ulster District Leisure facilities.
3.4	This new pilot is intended to bring opportunities for approx. 1351 new activity sessions during this 6 month pilot programme period and the intention is to support existing programmes with the addition of activities within the following areas: • Walk and Run Coordination • Cycle Coordination • Inclusive Coordination • Pre & Post Natal Coordination • Active Aging Coordination
3.5	In order to contribute towards the Council's Anti-Poverty Plan and to encourage more residents to get active, it is anticipated that these additional activities within the pilot programme would be available at £1 per session in order to maximise uptake and participation within specific target groupings and traditionally underrepresented groups that would have been the focus of the previous lottery funded Sport NI Everybody Active 2020 programme: • Women and girls (specifically aged 14-25) • People with a disability; and • Those living in areas of greatest social need (specifically people living within the top 25% of wards designated by NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Index 2010)
3.6	With the covid pandemic, leisure facilities have been closed for large part of 2020 and 2021. Details of activity achieved since leisure was able to re-open following covid easements in May 2021 along with planned activities from October 2021 to 31st March 2022 are included within Appendix A.

4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: Planned activity can be derived via existing revenue budgets for 2021/2022. New pilot programme to be delivered in partnership with Good Relations and a budget allocation of £5,000.
	Human: Officer time to co-ordinate, implement and monitor the planned activity. Can be delivered within existing resources with support from specialised coaches via appointed activity providers (costs of which can be derived via existing revenue budgets for 2021/2022 and within Council procurement guidelines).
	Risk Management: Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures. Available on request.
	Rural Needs Implications: Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures. Available on request.
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	To note the Council's Participation team activity year to date, to note the intended active lifestyle plan for October 2021 – 31st March 2022 and to seek approval for a new pilot programme of activities to be delivered within the leisure service.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
6.1	Appendix A – Active Lifestyle Plan October 2021 – 31st March 2022.

Appendix A: Active Lifestyle Plan October 2021 – 31st March 2022.

(1) Review of Activity within Mid Ulster District Council Leisure Facilities May 2021 – 31st August 2021 *(leisure service closed until late April 2021 due to covid restrictions)*

Participation Area	Additional Details	Approx. Attendance Figures May 2021 – 31st August 2021
Leisure Facility General Attendances (ie. gym, swim, sports hall,etc)	Approx number of users that have visited and paid to use Council leisure facilities – figures include those on paid in advance/recurring membership packages along with those who have paid casually to attend	Cookstown LC: 32,955 Dungannon LC: 31,829 Greenvale LC: 44,017 Maghera LC: 14,493 Tobermore Golf Centre: 8,958 Moneymore Rec Centre: 1,060 Gortgonis Citizen Centre: 1,143
Leisure Centre Group Exercise Programme Attendances (ie. spin, circuits, pilates,etc)	Approx number of users that have took part and paid in Council led structured group exercise activity sessions – figures include those on paid in advance/recurring membership packages along with those who have paid casually to attend	Cookstown LC: 3,494 Dungannon LC: 3,732 Greenvale LC: 16,401 Maghera LC: 2,721 Moneymore: 513
Sports Arena Attendances (ie. indoor/outdoor activities)	Approx number of users that have visited and paid to use Council leisure facilities. Sports pitches attendance include all those facilities that are not on site at Mid Ulster SA or Meadowbank SA.	MUSA, Meadowbank, Sport Pitches and Outdoor Facilities: 42,033
Summer Camps	Approx number of users that paid and took part in Council run summer camps (£26 per week). Mon-Fri 10am-3pm. 4 x weeks in each of Cookstown LC, Dungannon LC, Greenvale LC, Maghera LC and Meadowbank SA. 2 x weeks in Moneymore Rec.	Cookstown LC: 161 Dungannon LC: 47 Greenvale LC: 95 Maghera LC: 110 Meadowbank SA: 169 Moneymore Rec Centre: 45
Summer Sports Camps	Approx number of users that paid and took part in Council run summer sports camps. 3-5 days per camp. 1-3 hrs per activity.	Canoe, Dance, Gymnastics, Tennis, Golf 220 Participants
Summer £1 Activities	Approx number of users that paid to take part in targeted £1 activity sessions within Council leisure facilities during June and July 2021	£1 – Swims, soft play, teen gym, courts, driving range, Par 3, athletics track, tennis & 3g pitch. 5,743 Participants
Summer Free Entry Youth Wellbeing Activity Vouchers	Approx number of users that redeemed their free entry voucher(s) to take part in targeted activity sessions within Council leisure facilities during June and July 2021. The free voucher scheme (10 visits each) was distributed to post primary pupils across the district to young people on Free School Meals)	Vouchers - Swims, soft play, teen gym, courts, driving range, Par 3, athletics track, tennis & 3g pitch Redeemed: 188

(2) New Proposed Pilot Programme: Planned Activity within Mid Ulster District Council Leisure Facilities October 2021 – 31st March 2022

All activities including dates/times/booking/payment arrangements to be advertised via social media, website and also within leisure facilities.

Walk & Run Coordination			
Activity	**Target Group**	**Location**	**Programme & Session**
Couch 2 5K:	6yrs-18yrs	Maghera LC Meadowbank Sports Arena Mid Ulster Sports Arena Drumcoo 3G	Oct - Dec 9 weeks & Jan - Mar 9 weeks (36 sessions)
Locations x 6	18-64	Aughnacloy 3G Fivemiletown 3G	Jan - Mar 9 weeks (18 sessions)
1 x hour session	65+		
2 x days per week Max Numbers anticipated per session: 50			
A programme that helps those new to running to be able to aim to jog 5k by the end of 9 weeks.			
Couch 2 3K:	6yrs-18yrs	Maghera LC Meadowbank Sports Arena Mid Ulster Sports Arena	Jan - Mar 9 weeks (18 sessions)
Locations x 6	18-64	Drumcoo 3G Aughnacloy 3G Fivemiletown 3G	Oct - Dec 9 weeks (18 sessions)
1 hour session	65+		
2 days per week Max Numbers anticipated per session: 50			
A programme that helps those new to running to be able to aim to jog 3k by the end of 9 weeks.			
Walking Group:	18-64 65+	Cookstown LC Dungannon LC Greenvale LC Maghera LC Meadowbank Sports Arena Mid Ulster Sports Arena Moneymore RC Gortgonis Aughnacloy Playing Field Fivemiletown St Georges	1 Morning per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Locations x 10. 1 x day per week. 1 x hour session. Max Numbers anticipated per session: 20			
A community walking for health programme.			

Cycle Coordination			
Activity	**Target Group**	**Location**	**Programme & Session**
Cycling:	6yrs-18yrs	Dungannon Park	1 Morning per week (2x10 sessions)
Locations x 1. 1 x hour session. 1 x day per week.	18-64 65+		
A community cycling for health programme. Cycles provided. Max Numbers anticipated per session: 12			

Pre & Post Natal Coordination			
Activity	**Target Group**	**Location**	**Session**
Buggy Fit:	0-5 yrs	Cookstown LC Dungannon LC Greenvale LC Maghera LC Moneymore RC	1 Morning per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Locations x 5. 1 x hour session. 1 x day per week	Max Numbers anticipated per session: 25		
A fitness class for expectant mothers and mother and babies			
Mums and Tums:	0-5 yrs	Cookstown LC Dungannon LC Greenvale LC Maghera LC Moneymore RC	1 Morning per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Locations x 5. 1 x hour session. 1 x day per week	Max Numbers anticipated per session: 25		
A fitness class for pre and post-natal expectant mothers			

Active Aging Coordination			
Activity	**Target Group**	**Location**	**Session**
Tai Chi / Chi Mi:	18-64 65+	Cookstown LC Dungannon LC Greenvale LC Maghera LC	Morning 29 weeks per year- no school holidays
Location x 4. 1 hour session. 1 day per week	Max Numbers anticipated per session: 25		
Tai chi - Involves a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner and accompanied by deep breathing. combining deep breathing, relaxation and flowing movements. Chi-Me is a low Impact and light intensity class which is based on a series of Tai Chi influenced exercises that can help to improve mental wellbeing whilst improving strength, flexibility, balance and co-ordination			
Active aging 65+ activities:	65+	Cookstown LC Dungannon LC Greenvale LC Maghera LC	Morning 29 weeks per year- no school holidays
Location x 4. 1 hour session. 1 day per week	Max Numbers anticipated per session: 25		
A multi sport club focusing on activites for older people to include pickleball and walking football			

Inclusive Coordination			
Activity	**Target Group**	**Location**	**Session**
Developmental coordination disorder (DCD):	6yrs-18yrs	Dungannon LC Maghera LC Meadowbank Sports Arena Mid Ulster Sports Arena	1 Afternoon per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Locations x 4. 1 hour session. 1 day per week. Max Numbers anticipated per session: 20			
A multi sport club focusing on facilitating primary school aged children with Dyspraxia/DCD to do things at their own pace, and for parents to get information and support.			
Autism Club:	6yrs-18yrs	Dungannon LC Greenvale LC Maghera LC Mid Ulster Sports Arena	1 Afternoon per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Locations x 4. 1 x hour session. 1 x day per week. Max Numbers anticipated per session: 10			
A multi activity club focusing on facilitating primary school aged children with Autism to do things at their own pace, and for parents to get information and support.			

Disability Hub:	6yrs-18yrs 18-64	Mid Ulster Sports Arena	1 Afternoon per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Location x 1. 1 x hour session. 1 x day per week. Max Numbers anticipated per session: 10			
A multi activity session for adults and or children using the inclusive sports equipment, cycles and chairs.			
Autism Play:	All Ages	Cookstown LC	1 Afternoon per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Locations x 3		Dungannon LC	1 Afternoon per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
1 x hour session 1 x day per week		Greenvale LC	1 Afternoon per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
A designated play session that will be catered towards individuals and families – arrangements include use soft play area (no open session or group bookings taking place during this time).			
Autism/PAN Disability Swim Sessions:	All Ages	Cookstown LC	1 session per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
Locations x 3		Dungannon LC	1 session per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
1 x hour session 1 x day per week		Greenvale LC	1 session per week – no school holidays (29 sessions)
A designated swim session that will be catered towards individuals and families with Autism/PAN Disability – arrangements include exclusive use pool sessions (no open swim session, users group bookings or swim lessons taking place during this time). Any main sensory elements aim to be reduced (ie. music, lighting). Support for exclusive use of changing rooms both pre and post sessions.			

Appendix C: Additional Leisure Service Activities Programmes

GOGA

Get Out Get Active (GOGA) is an exciting programme that supports disabled and non-disabled people to enjoy being active together and is delivered by 1 x co-ordinator for the Mid Ulster District Council area. Funded by Spirit of 2012, all partners are focused on getting some of the UK's least active people moving more through fun and inclusive activities.

	Mon	**Tues**	**Thur**	**Fri**	**Sunday**
Morning	Multiple Zoom sessions	**Group:** Over 50's **Activity:** Exercise **Dates:** July to Dec **Venue:** Dungannon LC	**Group:** Mix disabilities **Activity:** Dog walk **Dates:** Ongoing **Venue:** Various	**Group:** Mixed Group **Activity:** Nordic Walking **Dates:** Mid Sept to Dec **Venue:** Knockmanny Forrest	**Group:** Mix disabilities **Activity:** Cycling **Dates:** TBC **Venue:** MUSA

	Mon	**Tues**	**Wed**
Afternoon/ Evening	**Group:** Down Syndrome group. **Activity:** Dance **Dates:** August to December **Venue:** Tamnamore Community Centre	**Group:** Mental Health Group **Activity:** Pilates/boxericse **Dates:** Ongoing **Venue:** Niamh Louise Foundation	**Group:** Autism **Activity:** Multi-skills **Dates:** Ongoing **Venue:** Moneymore Rec **Group:** Children with PD **Activity:** Wheelie Active **Dates:** Mid-September to Mid-December. **Venue:** Moneymore Rec **Group:** Adults with PD **Activity:** Boccia **Dates:** End of September **Venue:** Dungannon area

Park Run & Junior Park run
Parkruns are free, weekly, community events. Saturday morning events are 5k in distance and take place in parks and open spaces. On Sunday mornings, there are 2k distance junior parkruns for children aged four to 14.

Activities	Sat	Sun
Park Run	Dungannon Park	
Park Run	MUSA	
Junior Park Run		PolePatrick

Physical Activity Referral Scheme (rolling annual programme subject to recurring funding from the Public Health Agency)

Selection Criteria -
Anyone aged 16 and over who currently has one or more of the following conditions:

- high blood pressure
- controlled diabetes or a strong family history of diabetes
- heart disease or risk factors associated with coronary heart disease
- anxiety, stress, depression and controlled mental health problems
- overweight or obese
- well-controlled lung problems such as asthma, bronchitis or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- mild to moderate joint problems such as osteoporosis
- another condition that does not prevent you taking part in physical activity

Referral Pathway:
Via GP or health care professional who will assess suitability and will complete a referral form and send it to a leisure centre. The leisure centre will then contact you to make your first appointment.

Each participant is eligible for discounted leisure centre membership upon conclusion of their 12 week programme.

Activities	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Physical Activity Referral Programme ***Cookstown LC in Development & Pending Referrals**	Maghera LC Dungannon LC	Greenvale LC Maghera LC Dungannon LC	Maghera LC Dungannon LC	Greenvale LC Maghera LC Dungannon LC	Maghera LC Dungannon LC

Macmillan Move More

Move More NI is funded for three years by Macmillan Cancer Support (due to end July 2022) working in partnership with physical activity providers, local councils and health and social care trusts all over Northern Ireland to provide the support that people living with cancer need to improve their fitness.

Each participant is eligible for discounted leisure centre membership upon conclusion of their 12 week programme.

Activities	**Mon**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
	Cookstown LC	Greenvale LC		Dungannon LC	Dungannon LC
1.Spin **2.Cancer Rehab**	9.30am 10.00am				
1.Spin **2.Pilates** **3.Open Gym**		10.30am 11.15am 11.40am			
1.Open Gym **2.Cancer Rehab**				10.00am 10.30am	
1.Open Gym **2.Pilates**					9.30am 10.00am
Pre-Hab	1-1	1-1		1-1 x2	1-1 x2
Outdoor walks			Magherafelt area		Dungannon area

Leisure Centre Group Exercise Programmes

Activities that are included within membership packages. Can also be booked/paid for on a casual/ad hoc basis if customer does not have a membership package. Timetables subject to change each quarter depending on usage, customer demand and instructor availability.

Cookstown LC							
Activities	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thurs**	**Fri**	**Sat**	**Sun**
Bodyweight HIIT	06.30						
Postnatal	10.00						
Spin	18.15	06.30 18.15	06.30 18.15	18.15	06.30 13.15 18.15	10.00	
Circuits	19.30						
Body Blitz		19.15					
SWEAT			10.00				
Cardio Box			19.15				
Body Combat				06.30	19.15		
Metcon				19.15			
Virtual Spin	13.15 20.00	10.00 13.15 20.00	13.15 20.00	13.15 20.00	10.00a 13.15	14.30	09.00 13.00 14.30
Boot Camp						09.00	

Dungannon LC							
Activities	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thurs**	**Fri**	**Sat**	**Sun**
Spin	06.30 18.00	19.15	13.00		06.30 18.00		
Pilates	13.00		13.00				
Yoga	19.15	13.00	19.00				
Pod training	19.15			18.30			
Early Burn	06.30		06.30				
Circuits		18.00					
Spin & Circuits			06.30 18.00				
Pilates P&PN				11.30			
Bootcamp						10.00	
Sunday sweat							09.15
Greenvale							
Activities	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thur**	**Fri**	**Sat**	**Sun**
Bootcamp	06.30	06.30 18.00	06.30	06.30	06.30	09.00	10.00
Met Con	10.00		18.00		10.00		
Ageing Well	11.30		11.30				
HIIT	13.15						
S&C	18.00	10.00	13.15	18.00			
K'bell & Core	19.00	20.00		19.00			
Pilates		17.30					
20/20		19.00	10.00		18.00		
Core			19.00				
HIIT Core				10.00	13.15		
Spin				19.00			

Virtual spin	07.15 11.30 13.00 17.00 20.00	07.15 11.30 13.00 17.00 20.00	07.15 11.30 13.00 17.00 20.00	07.15 11.30 13.00 17.00 20.00	07.15 11.30 13.00 17.00 20.00	11.30 13.00 14.30	10.30 13.30 15.30

Maghera LC							
Activities	**Mon**	**Tue**	**Wed**	**Thur**	**Fri**	**Sat**	**Sun**
Spin	18.00		19.00	06.30	18.00		
Circuits	19.00		10.00		10.00		10.00
20/20		06.30	18.00				
Kettlebells		18.00					
Pilates		18.45 19.45					
Step & Pump		19.00					
Shred & Burn			06.30				10.00
BLT	10.00						
Bars & Bells				18.00			
Spin Abs				19.00		09.00	
Barbell Circuits					06.30		

Report on	Sports Representative Grants
Date of Meeting:	16th September 2021
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Head of Leisure
Contact Officer	Leigh Gilmore, Participation Manager Margaret McCammon Community Development Officer

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 present to Members the proposed community grant allocations for the range of: • Sports Representative Grant - Team and Individuals (February 2021 – August 2021)
2.0	**Background**
2.1	The Sports Representative Grants (Individual and Team) is a continuous rolling programme.
2.2	Previously in February 2021, Members approved the recommendation for the period February 2020 – to January 2021.
2.3	Eligibility criteria compliance was completed by officers followed by grant programme assessment.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Detailed analysis of the proposed grant awards are attached with Appendix A for information.
3.2	Summary detail is as follows: The Sports Representative Grant: • 10 Individual applications were received during this period and proposal to award a total of £2,275. • No Team applications were received during this period.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: The Sports Representative Grant is a continuous rolling programme with an annual allocation for 2021/2022 of £15,000; however £8,000 was allocated in June 2021 to Small Sports Grants leaving a revised budget of £7,000. Should the grants recommendations

	contained within this report be approved, £4,725 remains available to be allocated for the remainder of this financial year until March 2022.
	Human: Officer time.
	Risk Management: In line with Council policies and procedures.
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	To note the contents of this report and give approval for the sports grant allocations as recommended within this report.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
6.1	Appendix A: Grant recipients and amount of grant award.

Sportsperson Representative on eligible cost to a max of £250

Name		Project Title	Amount Requested	Band	Amount Awarded
Janine	Boyd	World Open Classic Powerlifting Championships 2021	£400	1	£250
Catherine	Clarke	World Dance Championships 2021	£500	2	£225
Abbie	Harkness	National Regional Championships – Dressage & Showjumping	£250	2	£225
Lewis	Henry	National Skeet Home Internationals	£1,013	2	£225
Conor	Kennedy	National Regional Championships – Dressage, Showjumping & Cross Country	£250	2	£225
Aoife	Mallon	National Regional Championships – Showjumping	£250	2	£225
Keeva	McElhattton	National Regional Championships – Dressage & Showjumping	£250	2	£225
Lucy	Orr	National Regional Championships – Eventing	£1,162	2	£225
Sorcha	Owens	National Regional Championships – Dressage & Showjumping	£250	2	£225
Linton	Selfridge	Fitasc Sporting Home Internationals	£250	2	£225
Total					**£2,275**

Band	Amount
1	**£250.00**
2	**£225.00**
3	**£200.00**
4	**£175.00**
5	**£150.00**

Minutes of Meeting of the Development Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Wednesday 7 July 2021 in the Council Offices, Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt and by Virtual Means

Members Present	Councillor Molloy, Chair Councillors Ashton, Black, Burton, Clarke*, Corry*, Cuddy*, Doris*, Elattar*, Hughes*, Kerr*, McNamee, Milne*, Monteith*, Quinn*, Wilson*
Officers in Attendance	Mr McCreesh, Chief Executive Ms Campbell, Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation Mr Browne**, Head of Tourism Mr Gordon**, Head of Leisure Mr Hill**, Head of Parks Ms Linney**, Head of Community Development Ms McKeown**, Head of Economic Development Mr Fred Greer ICT Support Mrs Forde, Member Support Officer
Others in Attendance	Councillor S McGuigan

* Denotes Members present in remote attendance
** Denotes Officers present by remote means
*** Denotes Others present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the meeting through the Live Broadcast. Cllr Molloy in introducing the meeting detailed the operational arrangements for transacting the business of the committee in the chamber and by virtual means, by referring to Annex A to this minute.

D127/21 Apologies

None

D128/21 Declarations of Interest

The Chair, Councillor Molloy reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declaration of interest highlighting agenda items 10 and 19 in particular which dealt with grants.

C129/21 Chair's Business

The Chair, Councillor Molloy advised that the Head of Arts & Culture had taken ill and conveyed best wishes on behalf of the committee.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy drew attention to 'Chatty Benches' and advised that the Chair of Council had unveiled one in Dungannon Park and he had been approached by rate payers seeking similar for Dungannon for example Railway Park, Hill of the O'Neill and also Moy.

Councillor Burton shared that these had been promoted on television and she would like to see them introduced in other areas for example Fivemiletown particularly along areas where people would shop.

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve the recommendation to explore the possibility of funding for the provision of 'Chatty' benches in the district to include Moy, Dungannon town, Railway Park, Fivemiletown.

C130/21 Deputation: Killeeshil & Galbally First Responders

The Chair, Councillor Molloy welcomed Paul McCaughey Killeeshil & Galbally First responders.

Mr McCaughey shared presentation entitled Kileeshil & Galbally Community First Responders. He gave an overview of the First Responders and their role in the community.

At the conclusion of the presentation Mr McCaughey highlighted the need for additional kits for first responders. He also highlighted the need for people to display house numbers, the necessity of detailed maps with postcodes and emphasized the difficulties being experienced in attaining banking services.

The Chair thanked Mr McCaughey for the presentation highlighting the need for the service and gave assurance that Council would do all in its remit to help. He said that in relation to banks it had been highlighted by other groups.

Councillor Clarke stated the he himself was a first responder in a very remote area which was at least an hour from an acute hospital and could identify with the issues raised. He concurred with the difficulty in only receiving a postcode as often if you had a name a local person would know where you were looking for. Speaking in relation to the banking issues he suggested that possibly credit unions could help. Councillor Clarke concluded the work of first responders saves many lives and stressed the importance of awareness.

In response Mr McCaughey said that his local credit union did not offer community groups accounts and the only way around it was for a member of the organization to open an account in their name but most members already had a personal account.

Councillor S McGuigan said he was a neighbor of the group and commended them on what had been achieved. In relation to credit unions he stated he had had other groups reporting the same and unfortunately the regulations of the credit unions did not allow this. He thanked Mr McCaughey for the service he was providing to the community.

Councillor Ashton suggested that the group touch base with Armagh and Tyrone First Responders who had been very successful in drawing down grant aid and perhaps they could share knowledge. In response Mr McCaughey advised that the groups had talked but there was a reluctance to merge.

Councillor Monteith commended the work of the group and suggested that Council senior management team discuss the banking issues many community groups were facing and explore the option of a community funded bank hosted by Council or another organisation. He further suggested that Council seek a meeting with credit unions saying that some offer group banking but only if the group was within their boundary. He said the credit union movement across Ireland was based on serving the community and important this continues.

Councillor Kerr concurred with Councillor Monteith and spoke of Christen Eriksen the Danish footballer who had a heart attack at the Euro's. On a more local level he shared how a life had been saved at Ardboe when a nurse had access to a defibrillator at a match. He said Council should do all it could to raise awareness for the army of first responders in the district.

Councillor Corry thanked Mr McCaughey for the presentation and said in relation to house numbers Council should promote and encourage this highlighting the necessity for house numbers to be well displayed.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy thanked Mr McCaughey for attending and said that Council would work on the actions which would hopefully prove useful in the future.

Mr McCaughey left the meeting at 7.30pm

The Chair, Councillor Molloy took a roll call at which time all Members were present plus Councillor S McGuigan.

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers that Council

(i) Explore bank provision opportunities for community groups who cannot gain access to banking facilities, example a community bank hosted by Council or another organisation.
(ii) Arrange a meeting with credit unions in the district to explore options for community group banking facilities; and
(iii) Council promote a publicity campaign to encourage people to display house numbers to assist First Responders and NI Ambulance Service in reaching patients as quick as possible.

Matters for Decision

C131/21 Cyclical Leisure Equipment Replacement Programme

The Head of Leisure presented previously circulated report and sought Member's approval to re-allocate and utilise remainder of the 2021/22 budget assigned to 7 year cyclical leisure fitness equipment capital replacement programme for the current purposes of addressing areas for equipment replacement and/or additions where health and safety issues have been highlighted.

Proposed by Councillor Clarke
Seconded by Councillor McNamee

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve the recommendation to re-allocate and utilise remainder of the 2021/22 budget assigned to the 7 year cyclical leisure fitness equipment capital programme for the current purposes of addressing areas for equipment replacement and/or additions at outdoor pitches where health and safety issues have been highlighted.

C132/21 Moyola River Inclusive Angling Partnership Project

The Head of Parks presented previously circulated report and sought approval for Council Partnership with Moyola Angling Association to provide inclusive angling facilities on Moyola River.

Councillor Elattar said it was a great idea to provide more accessible angling facilities at Moyola River.

Proposed by Councillor Elattar
Seconded by Councillor Milne

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve –

(i) The project as described and provide projected match funding of £1,500 from Council Capital Outdoor Recreation Strategy allocation subject to successful DfC application for the Curren Inclusive Angling Development project.

(ii) To extend current management, maintenance and insurance to cover the new additional angling stands and associated improvement works subject to obtaining approval from the Department of Infrastructure (DFI) for the installation of the additional services.

C133/21 Iniscarn Forest, (TRPSI) Development Project

The Head of Parks presented previously circulated report and sought approval from Members for the:

- Development of Iniscairn forest and to update on the application made to DAERA for TRPSI funding to assist in the development of Iniscairn Forest.
- Outdoor Recreation capital budget and to enter into a lease agreement with Forest Service NI (FSNI) to allow for the creation of a carpark and play area within the forest.

Councillor Clarke welcomed the progress stating that it was a jewel in the crown of Mid Ulster with the outstanding views. He stated that he had been glad to be involved in the project which has been in progress over a number of years and had been in talks with local farmers regarding various issues. Councillor Clarke stated whilst he welcomed the project's progress he said that there had been no consultation or contact with Members involved on what was being worked up or planned. He said as local councillors they should have been kept on board but for some time had not been aware of any progress and stressed the importance of keeping Members in the loop.

Councillor Elattar concurred with comments especially with regard to communication and stated she was happy to second the proposal which would be welcomed by the local community. In response to her query regarding all ability play equipment and accessible picnic benches the Head of Parks agreed that the project would be inclusive. He further clarified that the 12 picnic benches highlighted in the access and inclusion programme were new and it would be the desire to equip all new facilities with the accessible equipment and furniture and in the fullness of time replace existing.

Councillor Kerr welcomed accessible picnic benches and highlighted that in Drumcairn Forest the area was overgrown with grass and asked if Council officers could make contact with the forestry service to tidy up the area. In response the Head of Parks said he would pass the request to the Forestry service.

Councillor Burton welcomed the project stating that forestry areas had come to the fore during lock down and asked for an update on progress with regard to Lumford's Glen as it had been a long time on the agenda and she was aware of recent meetings between Forestry Service and officers.

In relation to President Grants play park which was recently re-opened Councillor Burton asked if more monies become available if more play equipment could be added as for older children the removal of the slide had been a disappointment.

Councillor Burton also sought an update in relation to White Lough and the request for Council to work with Rivers Agency to provide bins in the area. She highlighted that people from Benburb and Aughnacloy were being encouraged to utilise the facility but the litter problem needed to be dealt with.

Councillor Cuddy sought clarification in relation to the cost of the project in response the Head of Parks clarified that the total cost is £275k 75% funding with Council contribution of £68k which would be allocated from the Outdoor Recreation Strategy capital allocation approve by Council which totals £250k annually.

Councillor Wilson sought clarification in relation to what poses as a conflict of interest stating that a Member said he had been involved with negotiations in the early stages, with local farmers, but had not declared an interest then have proposed the project.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said the Members had been involved in the project initially but it had then been progressed by Council officers.

Councillor Wilson drew attention to comments by a Member in relation to discussing issues with farmers.

In response the Director of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation said the project is with the Forestry Service and lands are owned by them thus there was no conflict.

Councillor Wilson stated he had to accept what they were told but negotiations had been mentioned.

Proposed by Councillor Clarke
Seconded by Councillor Elattar

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve –

(i) The development proposal for Iniscairn project as described in the report.
(ii) To present the Iniscairn Forest development proposal to the Policy and Resources committee for approval of the Council match funding subject to funding being approved from DEARA as part of the TRPSI funding allocation.
(iii) The request to enter into a lease agreement with FSNI to allow for the development of a carpark & play area within Iniscarn Forest.

Councillor Burton again sought an update on Lumfords Glen.

In response the Chair, Councillor Molloy stated the officer would report to the Member.

Councillor Burton stated that it was not easy to get an update unless it was formally requested at Committee. She also sought an update regarding White Lough.

In response the Head of Parks said that Council did not own White Lough but had worked with the Fisheries and had agreed to provide three litter bins. He further stated that this was an interim measure and it was hoped that a service level agreement would be discussed in the future.

With regard to Lumfords Glen the Head of Parks advised that Council had met with the Forest Service and it had been identified as a future TRPSI project. With regard to President Grants play area the Head of Parks advised he had noted the comments and would follow up at a later stage.

C134/21 Sliabh Beagh Masterplan

The Head of Tourism presented previously circulated report and sought Members' approval to establish a Sliabh Beagh Partnership and to progress the Sliabh Beagh Masterplan in partnership with Omagh and Fermanagh District Council and Monaghan County Council.

He sought nominations for two elected Members to represent Council on the Sliabh Beagh Partnership.

Councillor McNamee stated that if nominations were by d'hondt Sinn Féin would have the first choice and if it was appropriate to propose a Member who did not sit on Development Committee he would proposed Councillor S McGuigan.

In response the Chief Executive advised there was no compulsion to nominate from the Development Committee.

Proposed by Councillor McNamee
Seconded by Councillor Doris and

Resolved That Councillor S McGuigan represent Council on the Sliabh Beagh Partnership.

Councillor S McGuigan stated he would be delighted to be involved with the partnership highlighting that some of the actions would benefit the Clogher Valley which as often stated by Councillor Burton feels left behind.

Councillor Ashton proposed Councillor Burton as DUP would be next to select.

Councillor Burton said as chair of the Tourism Forum this is something that should be progressed and she would be keen to push on and engage with others and put this section on the map. She said there was a lot of hidden gems and it often drove her insane when people indicated that the Clogher Valley was the gateway to Fermanagh. Councillor Burton concluded that she would be delighted to work on the partnership and encourage people to stop and experience what the Clogher Valley had to offer.

Proposed by Councillor Ashton
Seconded by Councillor Black and

Resolved That Councillor S McGuigan represent Council on the Sliabh Beagh Partnership.

Councillor Cuddy expressed concern that Council always reverts back to the beginning of the d'hondt grid thus Sinn Féin and the DUP were always represented and smaller parties and Independents do not get a fair share. He proposed that Council ask if the partnership would accept four representatives from Mid Ulster Council. He said that the UUP had Members who would be equally passionate about the project as those already put forward. He concluded that Mid Ulster Council application of d'hondt was weak in relation to the aforementioned.

The Chief Executive stated that the majority of appointments of representatives to outside bodies took place at the Annual General Meeting of Council and parties receive their allocation according to party strength. He advised that the current d'hondt grid for Council was 1 SF, 2 DUP, 3 SF, 4 SDLP so even with four representatives the UUP would not be represented. He clarified that the Council had been asked for two representatives as was the case of each Council.

Councillor Cuddy asked if the Chief Executive accepted that not carrying on the allocation of d'hondt and going back to the beginning each time eliminated smaller parties and independent Members.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy stated it was Council policy.

The Chief Executive stated any change to policy should be discussed at Policy and Resources.

Proposed by Councillor Burton
Seconded by Councillor McNamee

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve that two Mid Ulster Council members to be nominated to join the new Sliabh Beagh Partnership with first meeting proposed for September 2021.

C135/21 Mid Ulster Anti-Poverty Plan – Council Action Plan

The Head of Community Development presented previously circulated report to agree a Mid Ulster District Council Anti-Poverty Action Plan.

Councillor Monteith proposed the document but suggested that on page 97 in relation to outdoor recreation Council is still approving housing developments without decent recreational open space. He said that the developers are running rings around policies and there is a nut to crack as in 2021 adequate recreational space should equate to a green space in sight of every house. He suggested that Council should promote a village green concept as parents need to be able to see children as they cannot go out on their own. He stated that areas where the houses are cheaper the issues come back to Council with Members being lobbied for green space and this needs to be in the action plan.

Councillor Monteith made reference to Council grant schemes and suggested that grants should be introduced to encourage recreational sport. He highlighted that Council has excellent facilities and should add into the action plan funding for recreational sport. Councillor Monteith referred to page 98 and said it may be an organizational development aspiration but council should state that they are opposed to zero hour contracts and this should be incorporated into tenders. He highlighted that Council should adopt a similar process to that of the Department of Finance seeking assurance that employees of successful contractors appointed in a tender process receive the living wage and that Council's opposition to zero hours contracts should also be included.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said the aforementioned points should be included.

Councillor Quinn shared that he worked with the foodbank and St Vincent de Paul in Coalisalnd together with Councillor Kerr and highlighted initiatives such as school uniform recycling. He also stated that good work is carried out by the arts by Bardic and Craic. He concurred with Councillor Monteith in relation to zero hour contracts and the living wage emphasising Council should be promoting same. He also highlighted the challenges in relation to obesity and said that the plan was very good with just a few tweaks needed.

Councillor Doris stated the plan was comprehensive and was a great approach for tackling poverty. She proposed that in the education section it would be beneficial if Council explored the possibility of the credit union hosting money management classes for young adults and teenagers as it would be a good approach in teaching young people about this.

Councillor Kerr seconded the proposal and commended the team on the initiatives. He concurred with regard to the zero hour contracts stating that they were barbaric and inhuman. In relation to the uniform grant he said he saw the hardship endured by his mother getting uniforms for his brothers and himself.

Proposed by Councillor Doris
Seconded by Councillor Monteith and

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to - Explore with credit unions the promotion of money management classes for young adults/teenagers;

The Head of Community Development said she would incorporate the comments but said the issue in relation to zero hour contracts would need to be discussed through HR processes and through the Policy and Resources committee. She said that not all zero hour contracts are the same, that some can be based on good principles of the living wage and flexibility.

The Chief Executive concurred and said that whilst all had their view on governance in relation to the issue of zero hour contract the suggestion could be discussed through policies when its appropriateness, legality, implementation and cost to Council would need to be discussed.

Councillor Monteith said that the proposal in relation to the living wage for employees of contractors appointed to Council tender may well have financial implications but Council should have been at this place a long time ago.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said the action plan was a working document across all departments and commended staff.

Councillor Burton commended officers and drew attention to theme three in relation to health and wellbeing and asked if Sure Start now covered the Castlecaulfied area.

In response the Head of Community Development said that Surestart was a superb programme but it was area based at the moment and did not measure the deprivation of the individual and Council was lobbying not for additional coverage regarding area boundaries but for individual people in poverty to be prioritized. Thus for example people in Castlecaulfield in identified need use for example the Dungannon Surestart programme.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor Quinn

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to agree a Mid Ulster District Council Anti-Poverty Action Plan incorporating the undernoted points agreed at committee

- New residential developments be designed to take account of quality open space that is usable for children to play and is central to the development and in the sightline of the homes;
- Ensure Council sports grants are targeted at groups who provide for recreational activity over and beyond more formalized sports delivery;
- Explore with credit unions the promotion and delivery of money management classes for young adults/teenagers;
- Future discussions to take place to explore Council policy in relation to zero hour contracts and for procurement of contacts to consider living wage and zero hour social clauses.

C136/21 Community Development

The Head of Community Development presented previously circulated report to provide an update on key activities and sought approval for the following:

- To agree the rolling grant awards - Local Community Festivals, Good Relations and Decade of Anniversaries.
- To consider and approve the Community Planning consultation responses.
- To update on Community Development.

Proposed by Councillor Doris
Seconded by Councillor Monteith

(i) Rolling Community Grants Awards – Local Community Festivals, Good Relations and Decade of Anniversaries

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve grant award recommendations outlined in Appendix 1.

(ii) Community Planning Consultation Responses

The Head of Community Development said that there was a Housing member meeting scheduled to take place and any amendments or proposals would be incorporated into the consultation.

Councillor Doris stated that she was uncomfortable with the policy only targeting those on universal credit as often people are cut out of childcare provision if they are on a low income and have to incur the total cost.

In response the Head of Community Development said there had been comments received in relation to this regarding the working poor and the response would be strengthened in this area.

In response to the Chair's query the Head of Community Development said that the main aim of the Council response was if you are going to address poverty and educational attainment and good mental health then an accessible pre school place should be available for every child.

Councillor Monteith concurred with Councillor Doris and said that if it is based on the income of the house only this leads to economic segregation and stressed that the ethos should be provision for all, and ensure those who are financially deprived don't miss out. He concluded that the Department's approach was simply not good enough and was a make do solution.

With regard to the Department of Communities Housing Supply Strategy Councillor Monteith commended the work but raised the undernoted points:

- Page 109 the last paragraph and highlighted that social housing is not affordable housing and is an issue raised regularly.
- Page 113 affordability – rent allowance is set at £102 per week yet it is at least £150 per week in Dungannon and emphasis needed to be given to this. He stated that social housing should not be pricing rents for profit.
- Page 110 2nd paragraph in relation to place shaping – this is based on city dwelling houses of multiple occupation for example young professionals renting flats and apartments.
- Page 112 it should be mandatory that every residential development should be mixed tenure and have an element of social housing and stated that in a rush to sort one housing crisis another is created because majority of estates are all social housing.
- Intimidation and Section 75 issues well covered but highlighted that he had dealt with a number of homophobic abuse issues and often what an organization is stating is not the case on the ground.
- Many instances of homelessness is because people can't afford the house they are living in and independent rent assessments would help alleviate this problem.
- Housing Fitness: the district is miles behind in proper decent housing for all.

Councillor Kerr concurred with Councillor Monteith and highlighted affordability in private rentals naming areas such as Coalisand and Dungannon where there is

families working and having to decide either to pay the rent or eat and said that it was an indictment that people can only do one or the other. He also spoke of the huge disparity of private landlords with no law to stop them putting financial pressure on people and stressed the need for an independent body to determine rents and give people a chance of living a decent life.

Councillor Elattar commended the report and said affordable housing tends to be a grey area and that housing executive rents were lower than housing association rents as the latter were businesses but it would be hoped that revitalization under Minister Hargey will bring change. She said there had to be affordable housing and opportunity for those who want to buy a home needs to be worked on highlighting that in Draperstown there is currently only 5 houses for sale. She said much work needed to be done and it will take time to alleviate the pressures caused by different decision making by various Ministers over the years but it is hoped that things will now move forward.

Councillor Wilson commended staff and said it was interesting to hear all points of view but the fact that any grants to build only go to housing associations allows them to build the houses and increase rents and that is an issue. He stated that the grants should be made available to other organisations to build social housing.

Councillor Burton concurred and said if it was a proposal she would second. She also spoke of single mothers who would like to send children to school near their place of work not necessarily in the vicinity of their homes and stressed the need for flexibility as the goal is to improve life for everyone which includes the employed.

Councillor Corry said a lot of valid points had been covered. In relation to both affordable and social housing in rural areas older people needed to be considered and ground level homes provided. In relation to private renters Councillor Corry highlighted that Minister Hargey had introduced a bill the previous day aimed at restricting rent increases and it was hoped the NIHE would be building homes again.

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve the proposed responses with additional comments raised at committee to both consultations and the comments from the working group arranged for Thursday 8th July to the Department for Communities Housing Supply Strategy 2021, note appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

(iii) Community Development Update

Noted.

C137/21 Economic Development – OBFD

The Head of Economic Development presented previously circulated report to provide an update on key activities and sought approval for the following:

i) Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme

In response to Councillor Ashton's query the Head of Economic Development advised that businesses in Mid Ulster must have a company registration number or HMRC self assessment number to be deemed eligible to apply.

Proposed by Councillor McNamee
Seconded by Councillor Ashton

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve that the Chief Executive be awarded delegated authority to sign and issue letters of offer to businesses, up to a maximum of £300 per company, following the completion of eligibility checks on business applications received. This will allow funds to be disseminated to businesses at the earliest opportunity. A list of approved projects will be brought to Committee for noting in September 2021.

ii) Mid Ulster Gift Card Programme

Proposed by Councillor McNamee
Seconded by Councillor Doris

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve that the Chief Executive be awarded delegated authority to appoint the successful tenderer following the procurement exercise which will allow work to commence over the summer months. A full report on the tender process will be brought to Committee in September 2021 to update Members.

iii) DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre

The Head of Economic Development drew attention to the previously circulated report and advised that following discussions with Coalisland Town Centre Forum, it is proposed that Council make an application to the value of £250,000 to the Department for Communities to include festive lighting, development of a town brand and, purchase of branded merchandise and a Lineside Environmental Improvement Scheme which would include a new entrance and welcoming feature signage to the Gortgonis Centre, pedestrian rest areas with street furniture etc as outlined in the report.

Councillor Quinn welcomed the plans especially the works around the Gortgonis Centre and highlighted that smaller businesses in towns needed assistance and that the gift card scheme was excellent.

Councillor Doris said that the town centre looked great but she would request more flowers along Barrack Street, the Dungannon Road and Platers Hill.

Councillor Kerr welcomed the proposal and said that the Coalisland Canal and pathway should have been the centrepiece. He also stated that any new street furniture should be accessible as the area was used by all types of people and the history of the area should be promoted.

Councillor Ashton said that £80k seemed quite a large spend on festive lighting and asked if the funding that is normally allocated from Council for Christmas lighting in Coalisland would be freed up and made available for allocation in other towns in the district.

In response the Head of Economic Development said that following the completion of a public realm scheme, the Department for Communities normally provides some funding to help give the town a boost following the upheaval of the works. She said that the funding is ring fenced for Coalisland town and whilst a small percentage of the funding could be attributed towards revenue projects, DfC prefer the lion's share to be spendt on a capital scheme(s).

Councillor Ashton stated her question in relation to Christmas lights funding was not answered.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said this would be reported back.

Councillor Burton concurred with Councillor Ashton and said she had raised it at NILGA the fact that public realm scheme criteria excluded smaller towns and villages highlighting examples in Fivemiletown and Caledon where footpaths were in a woeful condition and that people had to negotiate them to get their shopping. Councillor Burton stated that when Council was meeting Ministers this should be highlighted to get smaller villages on the radar scheme.

The Chief Executive said this was a relevant question and Members would recall that the focus has been regeneration for urban areas which are defined at 5000 people are more. He said there was no specific programme that addresses lesser populations and Council has highlighted this. He said that the statutory agency for rural areas was DEARA and today they had issued their Rural Policy Framework a consultation and Council needed to make its response clear for the need for physical regeneration of smaller towns.

Councillor Monteith supported Councillor Burton and said that there was significant gaps with regard to funding and Council should lobby with other Councils. He also concurred with the Chief Executive but said that Council should continue to lobby as people in the smaller towns and villages were suffering from the poor footpaths. He said he had no argument with Coalisland receiving the funding but asked if Dungannon and Cookstown received a similar funding package following their public realm schemes.

In response the Head of Economic Development said in the past the funding from DfC had generally been around £150,000 per town, following the completion of public realm schemes but when the larger sum of £250,000 was ringfenced for Coalisland Council will gratefully accepted it, subject to making a successful bid to DfC.

Councillor Quinn asked if 'Chatter benches' would be included in the scheme. The Chair, Councillor Molloy advised that he had already raised this in Chair's business and Council would explore their provision throughout the district.

Proposed by Councillor Quinn
Seconded by Councillor Doris

iii) DfC Revitalisation Scheme 2021/2022 – Coalisland Town Centre

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve -

(1) An application be submitted to DfC for Revitalisation Funding in 2021/2022 for the following schemes; Festive Lighting, Developing a Town Brand and Purchase of Branded Merchandise and Lineside Environmental Improvement Scheme
(2) That delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to accept a Letter of Offer from Department of Communities (DfC) for the Revitalisation Project, subject to Council's application being approved.
(3) That the appropriate tender/quotation exercises be commenced, upon receipt of a letter of offer from DfC, to enable works to commence as early as possible as the schemes need to be completed by March 2022. A full report on the tender process will be brought to a future Committee Meeting to update Members.

iv) Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Consultation

Proposed by Councillor McNamee
Seconded by Councillor Corry

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve that delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to approve Council's Skills Strategy consultation response and submit the response to DfE by 19th August 2021. The draft consultation response will be furnished to Members for information at the September 2021 Committee Meeting.

v) 4C Ur Future Live Careers Event

The Head of Economic Development drew attention to the previously circulated report and in particular to options one and two outlined in the report.

Councillor McNamee expressed disappointment that all post primary schools could not be included but said Council had tried and thus he would propose option one.

Councillor Ashton thanked the Officers for exploring further options but asked could Council host the event in order to facilitate all schools. In response the Head of Economic Development said that Council did not have the staff resource to do this in house and highlighted that this was a pilot scheme and the scheme organisers hoped to upscale the event in the second year in order that all schools could be included and reiterated that Council did not have the resource to do this internally.

Councillor Ashton noted that Cookstown High School was included but Drumglass High School wasn't and asked was there a waiting list if schools dropped out.

In response the Head of Economic Development said that they were proposing that the organisers select the schools with the remit that there is a geographic spread from across the district.

Councillor Doris said whilst everyone had issues with schools left out she thought Council should proceed as it was a pilot scheme.

Councillor Monteith asked if they are using Mid Ulster Sports Arena if this was an additional cost. In response the Head of Economic Development said no MUSA's cost were it was included in the financial request.

Councillor Monteith asked if budget could be identified to provide funding to the schools who could not avail of the opportunity in order that they could do a careers initiative in house.

In response the Head of Economic Development stated Council would not have the budget fund all post primary schools to the same level as those schools who would participate in the 4C Ur Future event, but could perhaps give an allocation of up to £300 per school.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy asked if Council was considering hosting a job fair as had been the case in previous years.

The Head of Economic Development said that offices were in discussion with Department for Communities to deliver a Mid Ulster Jobs and Careers Fair early in 2022 and it is likely to be a virtual event due to the uncertainty around the Covid pandemic.

Councillor Ashton said if Council did not fund the 4C Ur Future event could the £6500 be used to give all schools the opportunity to host a careers event inhouse.

Councillor Monteith said that the £6500 plus additional funding mentioned by the officer could be divided between all schools and said whilst he knew officers had done their best he was angry that the organisers want more money yet only a small amount of schools would benefit.

The Chief Executive said that whilst he understood the concerns of Members this was a pilot scheme across the 11 Council areas and it was designed that the learning could be brought forward in future years. He stated that option one was reasonable and officers could explore if there was any available monies within community budgets to assist schools but the opportunity should not be lost.

The Head of Community Development said that this could be explored with the Community Planning Education Skills Forum.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said that 4C Ur Future event was a pilot scheme and thus he sought proposer for option one with the proviso that other funding is sourced to support schools who are not included.

Councillor Burton concurred with Councillor Monteith and said that rural schools often miss out on such opportunities as it is difficult to transport students to other towns. She said she was not happy and Council should ensure rural proofing and equality for all.

The Chair, Councillor Molloy said if Council did not participate it would weaken the experience for all.

Councillor Ashton stated that the £6500 for the 4C Ur Future event should be fairly distributed across urban and rural post primary schools the district.

The Head of Economic Development stated that the choice of schools could be selected to represent urban and rural.

Councillor Monteith proposed that the remainder budget should be distributed to other schools.

Proposed by Councillor McNamee
Seconded by Councillor Doris

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to

1. Progress option one with the stipulation that schools are representative of both urban and rural areas throughout the district;
2. Explore with the Community Planning Education Skills Forum opportunities to engage the other schools not identified for the Ur Future Live Careers Event to support them, using remaining Economic Development funding & other Community funding to host ‘careers activities’ additional to normal curriculum activities to support young people with career development/opportunities.

vi) Request for Ministerial Meeting to discuss the new Rural Affairs Policy Framework

The Head of Economic Development drew attention to the proposal and sought direction from Members.

Councillor Monteith stated that he would have an issue if there was a meeting with civil servants and independents were not included as had happened in the past.

Councillor Wilson stated that Council had complained about the Minister for Department for Infrastructure not meeting with Members, Land and Property Services refusing to meet and proposed that Council request a meeting with the Minister for DEARA.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor McNamee

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve that a further request be issued to the DAERA Minister, Mr Poots, acknowledging the update meeting held between DAERA officials and Council staff, but seeking a further strategic level meeting with the Minister and a member delegation from Council to discuss the Rural Affairs Policy Framework, given its importance to Mid Ulster's rural economy.

C138/21 ESF Call 3 Match Funding Requests (2022-23)

The Head of Economic Development presented previously circulated report to consider financially supporting a number of match funding requests under ESF Call 3 (2022-23). She updated Members that officers had attended a recent meeting organised by the Department for Economy at which DfE advised it had approached the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government who indicated they are willing to receive a collaborative bid to the UK Shared Propsperity Fund to match fund existing ESF projects for a further year (2022/23). She advised if this was the case, then 3 of the 4 projects (ie, 5.1.1, 5.1.2 and 5.1.3) would be included and if successful, receive funding from this source. With this in mind, approval in principal is sought for all 4 projects, but should projects 5.1.1, 5.1.2 and 5.1.3, receive match funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, then Council funding would not be required.

It was also noted that Council had received a late ESF funding request from Enterprise NI for the 2022-23 financial year and this would be brought to Committee for consideration at the September meeting.

Councillor Doris welcomed the additional funding and highlighted that many groups were desperate for funding and asked if more could be distributed to them.

In response to a query from Councillor Ashton, the Head of Economic Development advised that this is separate funding to that provided by Community Development's strategic projects.

Declaration of Interest

Councillor Wilson declare an interest of Cookstown Enterprise Centre as the organisation is a member of Enterprise NI.

Councillor Monteith said if First Steps Women's Group did not receive match funding they could not progress the proposed project and asked if Council could provide the additional monies given them the full £25k requested.

In response the Head of Economic Development said once officers knew the outcome of whether some of the aforementioned ESF projects would get match funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, then an updated report could be brought back to Committee to consider if they wished to uplift the funding to First Steps Women's Group from £12,500 to £25,000.

Councillor Burton left the meeting at 9.30 pm

Proposed by Councillor Doris
Seconded by Councillor Kerr

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve –

1) In principal the undernoted match funding requests under ESF Call 3 (2022-23) for Mid Ulster District, subject to the organisations being successful in their ESF funding bids, noting that programmes (i) to (iii) may qualify for match funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and if so, then match funding will not be required.

   i) **SUSE+**
   A financial contribution of up to £25,000 to South West College for the period 2022-23 to deliver the SUSE+ Programme.

   ii) **Up for Work Programme**
   A financial contribution of £6,250 to Network Personnel for the period 2022-23 to deliver the Up for Work Programme.

   iii) **Job Match Programme**
   A financial contribution of £6,250 to Network Personnel for the period 2022-23 to deliver the Job Match Programme.

   iv) **Women Towards Education and Employment Programme**
   A financial contribution of £12,500 to First Steps Women's Centre for the period 2022-23 to deliver the Women Towards Education and Employment Programme.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor Doris and

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve in principle that if it is confirmed that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will provide match funding for the SUSE+, Up for Work Programme and Job Match Programme, then Council will uplift it's funding to the Women Towards Education and Employment Programme from £12,500 to £25,000, being the original request received from First Steps Women's Centre.

D139/21 Irish Language Activity Funding Programme 2021/22 and Irish Language Action Plan 2021/22

Councillor Ashton proposed that the Irish Language Activity Funding Programme 2021/22 and Irish Language Action Plan 2021/22 could be considered in open business. In response the Head of community Development stated that the paper referred to public grants and thus should present no difficulty. The Chief Executive concurred.

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve consider agenda item 19 in open business.

The Head of Community Development presented previously circulated report to:

- To seek members approval for the Irish Language Action Plan for 2021/22.
- To seek members approval for the allocation of funding towards the delivery of the annual Irish Language Activity Funding Programme 2021/22.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Councillor McNamee

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve –

i) The revised Irish Language Action Plan for the remainder of 2021/22 (appendix 1)
ii) The funding allocation to the groups identified as part of the annual Irish Language Activity Funding Programme as detailed in section 3.3.

Matters for Information

C140/21 Minutes of Development Committee held on 17 June 2021

Members noted Minutes of Development Committee held on 17 June 2021.

In response to Councillor Monteith's query regarding an update on lands at Drumcoo were there was dispute over who was responsible for weeds the Chief Executive advised that a letter had been received and an officer meeting was scheduled to identify solution.

Councillor Monteith stated that on a more strategic level there was unadopted roads throughout the district and proposed that Council lead DEA meetings with the NIHE and DfI Roads to identify unadopted roads t and progress a plan to upgrade.

Proposed by Councillor Monteith
Seconded by Molloy and

Resolved That it be recommended to the Chief Executive that he operate his Delegated Authority Resolve under Section 3.3 of the Scheme of Delegation for Senior Officers to approve Council initiate meetings at DEA level with NIHE and DfI Roads to identify unadopted roads throughout the district and progress a plan to upgrade.

Councillor Kerr drew attention to D107/21 and said he had tried to raise the issue at the Council meeting and advised that he had joined the rescue team on a tour and experienced how they had to go at a snails pace at some locations due to waterways not being clear and at times they could experience a 15 minute delay and if someone was in danger in the water this could be fatal.

Councillor Kerr proposed to invite ABC Council and relevant stakeholders to a round table discussion to try to find resolution. He further highlighted that the rescue boat was being damaged and money could be better spent.

In response the Chair Councillor Molloy said it was in the sentiment of the motion to host such discussions.

Councillor Doris advised that Sinn Féin had written to DfI regarding the Lough and said she would support Councillor Kerr's proposal

Councillor Doris also stated she would like to see revitalization plans on the agenda for the September Committee in relation to Sandyrow and Newtownkelly.

Councillor Quinn said that Council should endeavor to find resolution in relation to the issues at the Lough as fishing boats were also being damaged and there was problems at the Blackwater River also.

The Chief Executive stated whilst he agreed with the sentiments of Members Council had no authority or responsibility for Lough Neagh and he would encourage Members to lobby their parties to drive the matter forward at NI Assembly level. He said Council funded Lough Neagh Rescue but what was being requested was beyond the remit of council. He referred back to the motion carried by Council and said it asked Council to engage with neighbouring Council and stakeholders to discuss the issues raised but stressed that only those who have responsibility for the Lough could address these significant issues.

C141/21 Department for Communities Access and Inclusion Programme 2021/22

Members noted the following:

- 2021/22 Department for Communities Access and Inclusion funding Programme.
- The range of projects being submitted to the 2021/22 Access and Inclusion Programme by Mid Ulster District Council.

Councillor Ashton drew attention to proposed resurfacing works at Dungannon Park and said it needed sorted as soon as possible and whilst she did not wish to hold up the applications but asked for a report on maintenance budget as Council did not appear to have the budget to maintain its premises.

C142/21 Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre Refurbishment Works

Members noted update on development works/refurbishment works undertaken at the Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre during the period of closure.

Councillor McNamee commended the refurbishment works at the Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre.

C143/21 Mid Ulster District Tourism Development Group

Members noted Minutes of the Tourism Development Group meeting held on 24 February, approved at the Tourism Development meeting held on 28 April.

C144/21 External Investment Leverage 2020/21

Members noted external investment leveraged by the Business and Communities Department to support Council priorities in 2020-21.

The Chair Councillor Molloy highlighted the total of external funding leveraged and said it did not highlight enough its success in this field.

C145/21 Economic Development - OBFI

Members noted update on key activities as detailed below:

- TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22
- Parkanaur College Update
- Mid Ulster MEGA - NI Apprenticeship Week 2021 (NIAW21)
- Rebel On Demand – Pilot Proposal

In response to Councillor Black's query the Chair advised there was a number of organisations on the list to present and there would be a special meeting early September.

Live broadcast ended at 9.46 pm

Local Government (NI) Act 2014 – Confidential Business

Resolved In accordance with Section 42, Part 1 Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public be asked to withdraw from the meeting whilst members consider items D14/21 to D147/21.

Matters for Decision
D146/21 Economic Development – CBFD

Matters for Information
D147/20 Confidential Minutes of Development Committee held on 17 June 2021

D148/21 Duration of Meeting

The meeting commenced at 7 pm and concluded at 9.55 pm

_____

Chair

_____

Date

Annex A – Introductory Remarks from the Chairperson

Good evening and welcome to the Council's [Policy & Resources/Environment/ Development] Committee in the Chamber, [Dungannon/Magherafelt] and virtually.

I specifically welcome the public watching us through the Live Broadcast. The Live Broadcast will run for the period of our Open Business but will end just before we move into Confidential Business. I let you know before this happens.

Just some housekeeping before we commence. Can I remind you:-

- If you have joined the meeting remotely please keep your audio on mute unless invited to speak and then turn it off when finished speaking
- Keep your video on at all times, unless you have bandwidth or internet connection issues, where you are advised to try turning your video off
- If you wish to speak please raise your hand in the meeting or on screen and keep raised until observed by an Officer or myself
- Should we need to take a vote this evening I will ask each member to confirm whether they are for or against the proposal or abstaining

- When invited to speak please introduce yourself by name to the meeting

- For any member attending remotely, if you declare an interest in an item, please turn off your video and keep your audio on mute for the duration of the item

- If referring to a specific report please reference the report, page or slide being referred to

- Lastly, I remind the public and press that taking photographs of proceedings or using any means to enable anyone not present to see or hear proceedings, or making a simultaneous oral report of the proceedings are not permitted

Thank you and we will now move to the first item on the agenda - apologies and then roll call of all other Members in attendance.

Report on	Mid Ulster District Tourism Development Group
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Mary McGee/Mary McKeown

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	**OM Dark Sky Park & Observatory** 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. 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.
3.1.2	**Davagh Solar Walk** 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.

3.1.3	**Davagh Archaeology Walk** 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.
3.1.4	**US Grants Homestead, Ballygawley** 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. 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. 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.
3.1.5	**Ballyronan Marina** 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 360º view of the Lough Neagh. DAERA funded 75% of total project cost £651,293.
3.1.6	**Access & Inclusion Projects**
3.1.7	**Ballyronan Marina & Newferry** £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 *activity* fully accessible to all. Provision of the hoist will also support private enterprises such as the River Bann boat tours, and Portglenone Paddlers. 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.
3.1.8	**Changing Places Facilities Bridewell** The Bridewell, located in Magherafelt Town Centre, houses the Visitor Information Centre, library and a community hall on the lower ground floor. 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.

	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. 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. Installation of automated doors to main hall and hearing loop system - £9,450. Completed by March 2022.
3.1.9	**Sculpture Trail** 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. 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). 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. 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.
	Appalachian Way 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. 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.
3.2	**Revenue Projects**
3.2.1	**Tourism Marketing, see Appendix 1**
3.2.2	**Touch Screens**

	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
3.2.3	**Mid Ulster Tourism Website** 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. 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. 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.
3.2.4	**Mid Ulster Video & Photography** 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: Stars and Stones taking in OM Dark Sky Observatory, Davagh Mountain Bike Trails, Beaghmore Stone Circles and Sperrinview Glamping Three Sisters Tour focusing on the three ladies from Springhill House, Lissan House and Killymoon Castle. Fed and Watered highlighting Woodlab Distillery, Spice Cottages, Wee Buns Cookery School and Tomneys, Moy. Outdoor and adventure activities at sites throughout mid ulster, including equestrian, angling, mountain biking, watersports and adventure Virtual Tours of hotels in Mid Ulster to promote wedding and conference venues
3.2.5	**DAERA Experience Development Programme** Council have been successful in securing 100% funding from DAERA to deliver on the Rural Tourism Collaborative Experience Programme. This project comprises to elements 1. Mid Ulster Heritage 2. Lough Neagh Shoreline in conjunction with Antrim & Newtownabbey Council. 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

	and action plan and finally identify key stakeholders and partners who can support the clusters and bring the experiences to market.
3.3	**Lough Neagh Partnership (LNP) Core Funding** Mid Ulster Tourism, along with the 5 Council's around the Lough shore, provided funding o £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 an 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 Lot funding to deliver a Landscape Partnership project worth £3.5 million together with an Indu Heritage project in Coalisland attracting over £430,000 into the village. The Partnership ha received funding from DAERA to implement two major Environmental Farm Group Scheme an ASSI shoreline management plan for Lough Neagh.
3.4	**Lough Neagh Rescue (LNR)** 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.
3.5	**Business Engagement** The Council Tourism Business Engagement programme continues with a high level of engagement from the tourism and hospitality sector.
3.5.1	**Webinars** 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. 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. Businesses have been encouraged to sign up for the Embrace a Giants Spirit brand with TNI Business Solutions Team. 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. 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.

3.5.2	**What's App group** 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.
3.5.3	**Mentoring** 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.
3.6	**Tourism Development Group** 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. This group also comprises representatives from the following cluster groups.
3.7	**Archaeology, History and Heritage Cluster** 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
3.8	**Heaney Cluster** 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.
3.9	**Hotel Cluster** 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.
3.10	**Outdoor & Events Cluster** 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. 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. 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.

4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial & Human Resources Implications** N/A
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	**Risk Management Implications** 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

Appendix 1- Virtual Exhibitions, Sales Calls and Shows 20-21

All of the Business to Business promotions and shows continued throughout 2020 and 2021 and indeed given the ease of virtual connections some new events were added to the calendar. Staff also networked and brought these contacts to fruition by organising one to one and Mid Ulster cluster business calls to individual key operators. Whilst the group tour businesses is quiet at the minute, we are starting to see some bookings materialise in particular from UK based operators and 2023 bookings are starting to register from Canadian and US based Operators.

The staycation market and domestic tourism has provided this year again a real boost for our sector with businesses reporting excellent footfall and in some cases 100% occupancy.

Date	Event	Market
July 2020	Meet the Buyer	International Operators from all markets worldwide
November 2020	World Travel Market	All international markets represented
November 2020	Flavours Of Ireland	International Coach and Group Tour Operators workshop with European Tourism Association
November 2020	Abbey UK & Ireland Webinar	North America & Europe team members joined.
January 2021	Britain & Ireland Marketplace	UK and Ireland based operators
January 2021	Meet the Industry NI	All Mid Ulster businesses invited to meet and network across NI industry
February 2021	Incoming Tour Operators Association (ITOA)	ROI based Destination Management Companies serving worldwide markets
March 2021	Explore GB	
March 2021	N America Expo	
March 2021	Abbey Tours Webinar	Luxury high end American tour operators – Only NI business asked to join this presentation
April 2021	Meet the Buyer	
May 2021	CEM China	
	Unikereisen - Denmark	B2B Operators sales Calls
	Carrolls Tours – ROI	
	Mund Touristik - Germany	
July 2021	Tourism Ireland USA and Canadian Adventure Market	649 US and Canadian Tour Operators webinar, the only NI business asked to present.

TV/Radio

RTE Radio one – Dark Sky interview lunch time show

Radio Ulster, Your Place or Mind and the Lynette Faye Show

BBC 1 Barra on the Foyle

Channel 4 – Derry Girls star Siobhan McSweeney (Sister Michael) on touring around Northern Ireland

Virgin Media 1 – Embrace the Giant Spirit, featuring in series 1, 2 and 3

Featuring in Tourism NI Embrace the Giant Spirit television and social media campaigns with airport 48 sheet advertising at Belfast City and International airport.

RTE 1 Today television show – Travel feature with Ed Finn

NI Opera televised a show featuring OM Dark Sky and Observatory which will be shown on PBS (USA television)

National Geographic with Pol O'Conghaile who is also a travel editor for Irish Independent and Independent.ie

Influencers campaign with Paulo Ross from Cool Fm – supported by Tourism NI

Staycation Campaign rolled out from Monday 9th August until 30th August, this included Facebook, Google PPC, Google display, outdoor billboard campaign, bus promotions plus UTV TV advertising. This campaign targeted the ROI and NI staycation market. Tourism NI funded the campaign, total cost £33k

Report on	1. Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme Update 2. TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22 3. Department for Communities Funding Immediately after Public Realm Schemes
Date of Meeting	16 September 2021
Reporting Officer	Head of Economic Development

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 provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	**Background**
2.1	**Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme Update** Mid Ulster Economic Development Plan 2021/2022 was approved at Development Committee May 2021. An integral element of the plan was the delivery of Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme, to support the immediate needs of Mid Ulster companies to help promote their business during the recovery phase of the Covid19 pandemic.
2.2	**TRPSI Rural Micro Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22** The Rural Micro Business Development Grant Scheme is funded through DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation programme (TRPSI). This year's Scheme opened for applications on 1st July 2021 and closed at 12noon on 30th July 2021.
2.3	**Department for Communities Revitalisation Funding Post Public Realm** At a previous Council Meeting, Members requested details of funding allocated by Department for Communities (formerly Department for Social Development) immediately following the completion of Public Realm Schemes. DfC provides such funding to town centres in acknowledgement that businesses have endured a lot of disruption throughout the duration of the public realm works.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme Update** The Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme provides a 100% discretionary grant, up to £300 per company, to businesses trading within the Mid Ulster Council area. The focus of the grant is to support businesses undertake marketing/promotional activities during the recovery phase of the pandemic. Following receipt and review of online applications, funding is allocated to businesses on a first come, first served basis and this will continue until Council's

total budget of £250,000 is committed.

The scheme opened to applications at 9am on 2nd August 2021. An update on the scheme as of 23 August 2021 is provided below;

Number of applications received	442
Number of successful applications & letters of offer issued	416
Total Value of Grant Aid awarded up to 23 August 2021	£124,936

Delegated authority has already been approved for the Chief Executive to sign and issue letters of offer for the Scheme. A list of successful businesses granted funded up to 23 August 2021 is contained on **Appendix 1.**

3.2 **TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22**

This Scheme is targeted at the rural micro business sector and provides capital grant aid of up to £4,999 funded at 50% of eligible costs. Mid Ulster Council has an allocation of £140,000 in funding for this year's scheme.

208 applications were received before the closing date and a further 12 received late. Sifting of projects received is ongoing to identify further late applications received in full or in part as well as applications submitted from other Council areas in error.

Eligibility checks will now be carried out on applications received before they are assessed and scored.

The value of applications received is in the region of £640,000 so considerably above the funding allocation available. This means that all eligible applications will be scored and ranked highest to lowest with grant awarded in ranked order until the budget is exhausted.

The target timescale for assessment of eligible applications and issue of letters of offer is mid-October 2021.

Delegated authority has already been approved for the Chief Executive to sign off letters of offer approved under the Scheme with a full list of grant recipients to be brought to Committee for information as soon as possible following letter of offer issue.

3.3 **Department for Communities Revitalisation Funding Post Public Realm**

There were 4 public realm schemes completed in Mid Ulster; Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland. A further public realm scheme is currently being progressed for Maghera.

The undernoted funding was received from DfC, immediately following the completion of public realm schemes.

	Dungannon received **£81,369** from DfC in 2016/17. The funding was spent on shop front improvements, Christmas lighting, branding and marketing. *(Additionally, MUDC invested a further £292,163 in public realm improvement works at Market Square, Dungannon, after the completion of the initial scheme).* **Cookstown** received **£90,700** from DfC in 2016/17. The funding was spent on shop front improvements, Christmas lighting, promotional and marketing materials, videos and marquees. **Magherafelt** received **£165,176** from DfC in 2018/19. This funding was spent on upgrading two strategic linkages from the car parks to the town centre, aligned to the Seamus Heaney Home Ground project. **Coalisland's** public realm scheme was recently completed. DfC requested Council submit a bid to the value of **£250,000** and which Members agreed this should focus the following 3 areas; Lineside Environmental Improvement Scheme, Festive Lighting and Development of a new Town Brand and purchase of Branded Merchandise. Council is awaiting the outcome of the bid.
	Other Considerations
4.1	**Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**
	Financial: **Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme Update** £250,000 available from Council's economic development budget 2021/2022. **TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22** Grant aid to be provided by DAERA. An administration budget of 10% of the funding allocation will be available to Council.
	Human: **Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme Update** Officer Time **TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22** Officers time
	Risk Management: **Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme Update** Council procedures are being adhered to in the roll out of this funding **TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22** Council procedures will be adhered to in the roll out of this plan
4.2	**Screening & Impact Assessments**
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:

	TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22 Equality and Good Relations screening will be carried out prior to commencement of the Scheme.
	Rural Needs Implications: **TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22** Screening was carried out prior to commencement of the Scheme.
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	**Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme Update** **Note** update on the Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grant Scheme; 416 letters of offer issued to businesses totalling £124,936, up to 23 August 2021.
5.2	**TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22** **Note** progress on the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme.
5.3	**Department for Communities Revitalisation Funding Post Public Realm** **Note** funding received from Department for Communities immediately after completion of the public realm schemes in Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt, with a further funding award pending for Coalisland.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
	Appendix 1 - Business Marketing Grants Scheme - Letters of offer issued up to 23.8.21

Appendix 1

Mid Ulster Business Marketing Grants Scheme
Eligible Applications (4 - 23 August 2021)

Ref No.	Business address	Town	Grant Amount
MG01	6-8 Union Arcade	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG02	6 Lineside	Coalisland	£300.00
MG03	Unit B9A, Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG04	43 Ballygittle Road	Stewartstown	£300.00
MG05	18-22 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG06	6 Scotch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG10	3C, Killycurragh Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG11	30 Westclare Court	Dungannon	£300.00
MG13	65 Drumgrannon road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG14	1 The Square	Moy	£300.00
MG15	8 Union Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG16	171 Aughrim Road	Antrim	£300.00
MG17	2 Oldtown Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG18	3a Meeting Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG19	58 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG20	72 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG22	21 Cabhan Aluinn	Pomeroy	£300.00
MG24	22 Northland Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG27	7 Garden Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG28	7 Church Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG29	5 Castle Court	Cookstown	£300.00
MG30	3C, Killycurragh Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG31	36 Dungannon Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG32	34 Queen Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG33	36 Lisnagowan Road, Carland	Dungannon	£300.00
MG34	4 Oldtown Arcade	Cookstown	£300.00
MG35	Unit 1, 40 Circular Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG36	12-14 High Street	Draperstown	£300.00
MG37	17 Linen Green	Dungannon	£300.00
MG38	72 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG39	30 Drumflugh Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG40	29 - 31, Church Street	Maghera	£285.00
MG41	3C, Killycurragh Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG42	89A Tamlaghtmore Road, Stewartstown	Dungannon	£300.00
MG43	29 Hunters Chase, Moy	Dungannon	£300.00
MG45	55 St Patrick Street	Draperstown	£300.00
MG46	14 Linen Green	Dungannon	£300.00
MG47	58 Loy Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG49	2 - 4 Main Street	Maghera	£285.00
MG50	8a Broad Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG51	Unit 3 Moyola Industrial Estate	Castledawson	£300.00
MG52	Unit 55 Dungannon Enterprise Centre, 2 Coalisland Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG53	3 Craigadick Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG54	Dungannon Business Park, Killyliss Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG55	44a Farlough rd	Dungannon	£300.00
MG56	8 Ardboe Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG57	56 William st	Cookstown	£300.00
MG58	8 Broad Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG59	80 Stiloga Road,	Dungannon	£300.00
MG60	Unit 1a Linen Green	Dungannon	£300.00
MG61	Unit 3, Oona Valley Business Park, 148 Eglish Rd	Dungannon	£300.00
MG62	5 Union Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG63	39 Newell Rd,	Dungannon	£300.00
MG64	5 Northland Place	Dungannon	£300.00
MG65	166B Mullaghboy Road	Portglenone	£300.00
MG66	53 Broagh Village	Castledawson	£300.00

MG67	Unit 44-49, 51 Dungannon Road,	Coalisland	£300.00
MG68	39A Aughintober Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG69	124A, Sixtowns Road, Draperstown	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG70	36 Brookend Road Ardboe	Dungannon	£300.00
MG71	39 Newell Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG72	302 Killymoon Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG74	144a Ballyronan Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG76	33, Moneymore RD	Desertmartin	£300.00
MG77	36 The Oaks	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG78	Unit A11 & 12, Kilcronagh Business Park	Cookstown	£300.00
MG79	40-42 James Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG80	2 Drumgrannon Heights, Moy	Dungannon	£300.00
MG81	26 Mackenny Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG82	27 Desertmartin Road	Tobermore	£300.00
MG83	36 King Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG84	17 Annagher Hill	Coalisland	£300.00
MG86	46a Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG87	23 Lough Fea Rd	Cookstown	£300.00
MG88	142 Moy Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG89	17 Murley Road	Fivemiletown	£300.00
MG90	38 Brackaghreilly Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG91	6a Gulladuff Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG92	24a Fairhill road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG93	12 Dungannon road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG94	44 The Square	Coalisland	£300.00
MG95	Unit 14 Miltown Business Park, 88 Castledawson Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG96	28 Moneygaragh Road	Dungannnon	£300.00
MG97	6B Tobermore Rd	Draperstown	£300.00
MG98	44 Queen Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG99	52 Killyman Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG100	155 Main Street	Fivemiletown	£300.00
MG101	53a Kilrea Road	Upperlands	£300.00
MG102	Unit 2 Derryloran Business Centre, Derryloran Business Centre	Cookstown	£300.00
MG103	53 Kilrea Road	Upperlands	£300.00
MG104	Unit 4, 1A Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG105	16 Irish Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG106	55 Moneymore Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG107	36 Moy Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG108	4 The Square	Moy	£300.00
MG109	Unit 10, The Linen Green, Moygashel	Dungannon	£300.00
MG110	58-60 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG111	Unit 12 Station Road Industrial Estate	Magherafelt	£294.00
MG112	55 Mullan Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG113	21a William Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG114	Moyola Industrial Estate	Castledawson	£300.00
MG115	22 Derryvaren Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG116	2-4 Kilrea Road	Swatragh	£300.00
MG117	112a Innishrush Road,	Portglenone	£300.00
MG118	79 Altaglushan Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG119	73 Castlecaulfield Rd	Donaghmore	£300.00
MG120	44/46 William Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG121	36 Main Street	Donaghmore	£300.00
MG122	132A Tirkane Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG123	38 Main Street	Donaghmore	£300.00
MG124	80 Loup Road, Moneymore	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG125	16 Oldtown Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG126	12 Elm Avenue	Dungannon	£300.00
MG127	1 Loves Hill, Castledawson Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG128	132A Tirkane Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG129	A19 Kilcronagh Business Park	Cookstown	£300.00
MG130	6 Fairhill Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG131	9 Irish Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG132	Unit 1, Glenshane Ind Park	Maghera	£300.00
MG134	15a Quilly Road	Moneymore	£300.00

MG135	1 Broad Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG136	15a Quilly Road	Moneymore	£300.00
MG137	Unit B14, Kilcronagh Business Park	Cookstown	£300.00
MG138	16 Oldtown Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG139	5 William street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG140	14a Feddan Road	Ballygawley	£300.00
MG141	9a Burn Road	Cookstown	£260.00
MG142	15 Maghadone Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG143	42c Queen street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG144	9a Irish Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG145	43 Ballynagarve Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG146	36a Slaughtneil Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG147	Unit 5E, Shivers Business Park, 21 Hillhead Road	Toomebridge	£250.00
MG148	1 Moyard Way	Benburb	£300.00
MG149	16 Oldtown Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG150	Moy Business Park, 237 Trewmount Road	Moy	£300.00
MG151	Union Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG152	29b James Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG154	Unit 16, Derryloran Industrial Estate, Sandholes Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG155	82 Creevelough Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG156	5 Roughan road Stewartstown	Stewartstown	£300.00
MG157	74, Fairhill Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG158	Unit 10B, Moyola Industrial Estate	Castledawson	£300.00
MG159	37a Mountjoy Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG160	19 Broagh Village	Castledawson	£260.00
MG161	Oakland Cresent	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG162	6 Quarry lane	Dungannon	£300.00
MG163	14 Scotch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG164	Unit 2, Cookstown Enterprise Centre	Cookstown	£300.00
MG165	24 Cookstown Enterprise Centre, Derryloran Industrial Estate,	Cookstown	£300.00
MG166	66 Scotch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG167	43 Drumreagh Crescent, Newmills	Dungannon	£300.00
MG168	Unit 1, The Linen Green, Moygashel	Dungannon	£300.00
MG169	7A, Derrynoyd Lanes, Draperstown	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG170	79 Cunninghams Lane	Dungannon	£300.00
MG171	8 Rainey Street Car Park	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG172	25 St Patricks Street	Draperstown	£300.00
MG173	Unit 1 Belvedere Park, Gortmerron Link	Dungannon	£300.00
MG174	45 Main Street, Bellaghy,	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG175	6-8 Oldtown Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG176	1-3 Meeting Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG177	1-3 Lime Kiln Lane	Cookstown	£300.00
MG178	57 Drum Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG179	1 Killyman Street	Moy	£300.00
MG180	2 Moyard Way	Benburb	£300.00
MG181	36 Scotch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG182	8B Union Road,	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG183	12 John Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG184	2 Molesworth Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG185	22F Gort Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG186	43 Cordarragh	Draperstown	£300.00
MG187	17 Broad Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG188	1 Glen Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG189	30 The Meadows	Bellaghy	£300.00
MG190	2 Laurelbrook	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG191	39 Irish Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG192	32 Frenchmans Lane	Dungannon	£300.00
MG193	44 Circular Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG194	55, Tullyard Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG195	38 Beaghbeg Rd	Cookstown	£300.00
MG196	112a, Moneymore Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG198	99a Mullinahoe Road	Ardboe	£300.00
MG199	9-15 Barrack Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG200	126d Killycolpy Road	Dungannon	£300.00

MG201	59 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG202	49 Irish Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG205	115 Moneymore Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG206	74 Cullenramer Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG207	74 Cullenramer Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG208	2 Queen Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG210	12 Derrylaughan Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG212	49 Ferny Park Gardens	Donaghmore	£300.00
MG214	12a Coleraine Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG215	61a Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG216	10 Bramblewood	Dungannon	£300.00
MG217	62 Annaghnaboe Road, Coalisland	Coalisland	£300.00
MG218	Office 2, 10 Main Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG219	60 Dunamore Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG220	22-24 Orritor Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG221	60b Dunamore road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG222	Unit 3 Dungannon Enterprise Centre, Coalisland Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG223	135 Dungannon Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG224	55a, Sherrygrim Road	Stewartstown	£300.00
MG225	9 James Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG226	1 Union Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG227	266 Orritor Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG229	3 Sheers Place, Cabragh	Dungannon	£300.00
MG230	96a Ballymacombs Road	Bellaghy	£300.00
MG232	2 Clare Lane	Cookstown	£300.00
MG233	Unit 5, Scotch Street Centre, Scotch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG234	83 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG236	35 The Square, Moy	Dungannon	£300.00
MG237	42A Mullan Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG238	Unit 1, Dungannon Enterprise Centre, 2 Coalisland Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG239	4 Mullantain View	Stewartstown	£300.00
MG240	Unit 3, 127 Ballynakilly Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG241	Unit 8 Torrent Valley Business Park	Donaghmore	£300.00
MG242	2 Coalisland Road,	Dungannon	£300.00
MG243	42a Legilly Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG244	1 Castle Court Thomas Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG245	132B Tirkane Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG246	70d Loughbracken Road	Pomeroy	£300.00
MG247	32, Irish Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG248	Unit 2, Dungannon Enterprise Centre, Coalisland Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG250	10-12 William Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG251	10 Chruch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG252	2b Coleraine Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG253	4 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG254	4 Victoria Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG255	5 Moygashel Mills Park	Moygashel	£300.00
MG256	109a Mullaghboy Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG257	14 Queen Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG258	51 Broagh Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG259	9A Broad Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG261	4 Union Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG262	4 Union Road	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG263	123 Benburb Road, Moy	Dungannon	£300.00
MG264	102 Kilrea Road	Upperlands	£300.00
MG265	5 Union Buildings, Union Place,	Dungannon	£300.00
MG267	13 Main Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG268	102a Kilrea Road	Upperlands	£300.00
MG269	Clonoe Business Park, 98 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG270	Unit 17, 98 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG274	42 Queen Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG275	34a William Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG276	8 The Square	Coalisland	£300.00
MG277	50b, Gortindarragh Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG279	16 b, Oldtown Street	Cookstown	£300.00

MG280	47 Annaghnaboe Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG281	Unit 17 Mid Ulster Business Park, Derryloran Ind Estate	Cookstown	£300.00
MG282	87 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG283	16 Market Square	Dungannon	£300.00
MG284	63 Aghintain Road	Fivemiletown	£300.00
MG285	199 Bush Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG286	45 Scotch St	Dungannon	£300.00
MG287	93 Coash Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG288	2a Clabby Road,	Fivemiletown	£300.00
MG289	Unit 14 98 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG291	Unit 10, 98 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG292	14 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG293	20B Farritor Road	Cabragh	£300.00
MG294	26, Catle Villas	Cookstown	£300.00
MG295	20 Farritor Road, Cabragh	Dungannon	£300.00
MG296	5 Fairview Park	Dungannon	£300.00
MG299	28a Dungannon Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG300	13 Castle Villas	Cookstown	£300.00
MG302	2nd Floor, Corner House, 64-66a Main Street	Coalisland	£300.00
MG303	620 Church Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG304	Unit 7, 98 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG305	Unit 8, 98 washingbay road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG306	Unit 1, 98 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£250.00
MG307	15B Thornhill Park	Magherafelt	£250.05
MG308	64-72 Coagh Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG310	74 Gortgonis Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG311	45 Quarry Lane	Dungannon	£300.00
MG312	39 Molesworth Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG313	Unit 4, 98 washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG314	12 Annaghmore Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG316	158 Ballinderry Bridge Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG317	18 Ballygittle Road	Stewartstown	£300.00
MG319	133 Moneymore Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG320	51c Drumearn Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG321	51c Drumearn Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG324	27 Millrace Drive, Turnaface Road,	Moneymore	£300.00
MG325	44a Sherrygrim Road	Stewartstown	£300.00
MG326	40 The Milestone	Dungannon	£300.00
MG327	First Floor, 4 Market Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG328	Unit 6, Kilcronagh Business Park	Cookstown	£300.00
MG329	85 Newmills Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG330	18 Hawthorne Road	Maghera	£300.00
MG331	58A Ardboe Rd	Cookstown	£300.00
MG332	150 Bush Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG333	Second Floor 9A Burn Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG334	31B Carnaman Road, Knockloughrim	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG335	7 Dungannon Street	Moy	£300.00
MG336	6b Kilcronagh Business Park, Unit 6	Cookstown	£300.00
MG337	89 Main Street	Fivemiletown	£284.16
MG338	2 Dunree House, Thomas Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG340	Unit K Toome Retail Park	Toomebridge	£300.00
MG341	46 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG342	38 to 40 Scotch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG343	88 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG344	112 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG345	6b Tobermore Road	Draperstown	£300.00
MG346	74 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG347	53 Cranlome Road	Galbally	£300.00
MG349	2 Ballynagilly Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG350	14 Thomas Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG351	6F Drumard Lane	Draperstown	£300.00
MG352	16 Derganagh Road, Knockloughrim	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG354	133 Moneymore Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG355	9 Laurel Grove	Coalisland	£300.00

MG357	UNIT 8-9, Dungannon Enterprise Centre, Coalisland Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG358	15 Hollyfields	Dungannon	£300.00
MG359	46 Chapel Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG360	18-22 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG361	22-24 Queen Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG365	7 Tullyvar Rd	Aughnacloy	£300.00
MG366	59 Cadian Road, Eglish	Dungannon	£300.00
MG367	12 Molesworth Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG368	4a Far Circular Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG369	3-5 Ballyneill Road	Ballyronan	£244.00
MG370	26 The Brambles	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG371	7 Carndaisy Lane	Moneymore	£300.00
MG372	1A The Square, Moy	Dungannon	£300.00
MG373	1 The Square, Moy	Dungannon	£300.00
MG375	221 Orritor Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG376	22c Gort Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG377	Black Lane	Dungannon	£300.00
MG378	2B Cabragh Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG380	45 The Square	Coalisland	£300.00
MG381	Unit 1 Dinree House, Thomas Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG382	2 Sanaghanroe Manor, Eglish	Dungannon	£300.00
MG384	4 Scotch St Centre	Dungannon	£300.00
MG388	135 Annagher road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG389	96 Piney Hill	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG390	46 Derryoghill Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG391	141 Main Street	Fivemiletown	£300.00
MG392	69-75 Main Street	Clogher	£300.00
MG393	4 The Glassan	Cookstown	£300.00
MG395	53 Tartlaghan Road, Bush	Dungannon	£300.00
MG396	7 Corchoney Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG397	30 Killywoolaghan Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG398	24 Main Street	Augher	£300.00
MG400	37 Eglish Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG401	22 Northland Row	Dungannon	£300.00
MG402	74 Fairhill Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG403	90-92 Moore Street	Aughnacloy	£300.00
MG404	40 Caledon Road	Aughnacloy	£300.00
MG405	39 William Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG406	86 Moore Street	Aughnacloy	£300.00
MG407	92 Moore street	Aughnacloy	£300.00
MG410	22 Market Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG411	5 Springhill road	Moneymore	£300.00
MG412	33 King Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG414	24 Main Street Augher	Augher	£300.00
MG415	4 Blackwater Terrace	Coalisland	£300.00
MG416	Brigh Road Stewartstown	Stewartstown	£300.00
MG417	56 Scotch Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG418	300 Newtownsaville Road	Augher	£300.00
MG419	50a Dunamore Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG420	77 Kinrush Road	Coagh	£300.00
MG421	7 Hillside Crescent	Augher	£300.00
MG422	15 Tirgan Road, Moneymore	Maghera	£300.00
MG424	3 Moneysharvin road	Swatragh	£300.00
MG425	67 Legilly Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG427	2 Tandragee Road, Pomeroy	Pomeroy	£300.00
MG428	Unit 5 Clonoe Village Business Park	Dungannon	£300.00
MG430	89 Ballynakilly Road, 91	Dungannon	£300.00
MG431	11A Drumard lane	Draperstown	£300.00
MG432	Unit 6 Glenone Park, Kilrea Road	Portglenone	£300.00
MG433	22 Carrowmenagh Lane	Maghera	£300.00
MG434	69 Ranaghan road	Maghera	£300.00
MG435	Unit 7B Moyola Road	Castledawson	£300.00
MG436	3 Tullyreavy Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG437	5 Georges Street	Dungannon	£300.00

MG439	1A Irish Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG442	41 Castle Glen Avenue	Dungannon	£300.00
MG443	37 Aghindarragh Road,	Augher	£300.00
MG445	Torrent Complex, 9 Hillview Avenue	Donaghmore	£300.00
MG446	6a The Dye House, Linen Green	Dungannon	£300.00
MG447	Derryloran Industrial Estate, Sandholes Road,	Cookstown	£300.00
MG448	Unit HD4 Dungannon Enterprise Centre, Coalisland Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG449	12, Derrylaughan Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG450	64 Annaghmore Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG451	2nd Floor, The Cornmill Lineside	Coalisland	£300.00
MG452	6 Derryloughan Avenue	Coalisland	£300.00
MG453	232 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG454	Unit 3 98 Washingbay Road	Coalisland	£300.00
MG455	11 Lisdoart Terrace	Ballygawley	£300.00
MG457	206 Termon Road	Pomeroy	£300.00
MG458	33 Rainey Sreet	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG459	244 Drum Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG460	32 Littlebridge Road	Moneymore	£300.00
MG461	17 Ardboe Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG462	Unit 1, 1 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG463	Unit 2, 1 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
MG465	Unit 1, Thomas Street	Dungannon	£300.00
MG466	60 Church Street	Magherafelt	£294.00
MG467	52 Letteran Road	Moneymore	£300.00
MG468	57a Drumgrannon Road	Dungannon	£300.00
MG469	31 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG470	55 Main Street	Castledawson	£290.00
MG471	Unit 1 Moyola Industrial Estate	Castledawson	£300.00
MG472	Unit 18, 6 Derryloran Industrial Estate	Cookstown	£290.00
MG473	Main Street	Augher	£300.00
MG474	22 Market Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG475	First Floor, 9A Burn Road	Cookstown	£300.00
MG476	12 Rookery Drive	Dungannon	£300.00
MG477	26 Rainey Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG478	100 - 102 Church Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG480	Union Arcade	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG481	10 Market Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG482	17 Queen Street	Magherafelt	£300.00
MG483	52 James Street	Cookstown	£300.00
MG484	102 Main Street	Maghera	£300.00
Total value of letters of offer issued to 416 businesses as at 23/8/21			**£124,936.00**

Remaining budget as of 24 August 2021 is £125,064