

Tourism Development Group Minutes and Officer Cluster Reports

MID ULSTER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GROUP MINUTES Wednesday 25th January 2023 at 10am via Microsoft Teams

Attendees	
Cllr Frances Burton	Chair of TDG, Mid Ulster District Council
Cllr Niamh Doris	Mid Ulster District Council
Fiona McKeown	Mid Ulster District Council
Mary McKeown	Mid Ulster District Council
Laura Shannon	Mid Ulster District Council
Genevieve Bell	Mid Ulster District Council
Charmain Bell	Mid Ulster District Council
Martha Beattie	Mid Ulster District Council
Allison O'Keefe	Mid Ulster District Council
Grace Booth	Mid Ulster District Council
Brian McCormick	Mid Ulster District Council
Martin Graham	Tourism NI
Dermot Friel	Hospitality
Cathy O'Neill	Hospitality
Norman Bell	Visitor Attraction
Lara Goodall	Consultant

	DISCUSSION	ACTIONS
	<p>Welcome</p> <p>The Chair, Cllr Burton, welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Cllr Burton expressed her condolences to the management and staff of the Glenavon Hotel on their recent bereavement and asked that the sympathies of the Mid Ulster TDG are extended to the family.</p> <p>Apologies</p> <p>Simon Wiggans, South West College Tanya Purvis, South West College Richard Mulholland, Ballyscullion Park Rosalind Mulholland, Ballyscullion Park Anne Reid, Mid Ulster District Council Aoibheann Doherty, An Carn Claire Doherty, An Carn Maeve McNeill, J&K Coaches / Croga Tours Shauna McElhone, J&K Coaches / Croga Tours</p>	<p>Send sympathy card from the Mid Ulster Tourism Development Group to the management and staff of the Glenavon Hotel</p>

1.	<p>Minutes of Meeting held on 11 November 2022</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2022, having been circulated to all members in advance of the meeting, were taken as read and correct.</p> <p><i>Proposed: N Bell Seconded: D Friel</i></p>	
2.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>None</p>	
3.	<p>Loughinsholin Branding Presentation – Lara Goodall</p> <p>L Goodall, Lara Goodall Consulting, attended the meeting to present the new Loughinsholin brand, formerly known as Seamus Heaney Cluster.</p> <p>L Goodall explained that the name Loughinsholin derived from the oldest barony in Mid Ulster. The area sits between Belfast and Derry providing a strong selling point to capture tours.</p> <p>She explained that the brand encompasses the place, the people, sustainable products, commercial aspects and connectivity. She added that the success of the brand is in the fact that the businesses have bought into the core values and incorporated them into their own business.</p> <p>Lara discussed the brand personality and with it the tone of campaigns being presented and delivered as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sincerity - wholesome and honest • Excitement – imaginative and creative • Competence – reliable, intellectual, successfully dealing with customers and operators • Sophistication • Ruggedness <p>L Goodall explained the brand logo, a heart to represent the heart of Mid Ulster and the generations of stories interlinked. The colours green and blue represent land and water, tying in with Unwinding Time brand and Embrace a Giant Spirit.</p> <p>Lara discussed plans for 2023 focusing on a marketing plan, themed itineraries to showcase all members, attendance at trade/consumer shows and launching new tours with Croga Tours.</p>	<p>M Graham asked officers to circulate a copy of the presentation to members.</p>

	<p>D Friel stated his appreciation for the support tourism businesses have received from Council.</p> <p>In response to a query from the Chair, L Goodall stated that Seamus HomePlace was still synonymous with the cluster and was very much involved in the re-branding process. B McCormick commented that the branding process allows freedom and is encompassing of the other 14 businesses within the cluster. He added that the cluster provides a platform to move forward with no conflicts of interest.</p> <p>L Goodall left the meeting at 10:30am</p>	
<p>4.</p> <p>4.1</p>	<p>Industry Updates – TDG Members</p> <p>Sector representatives gave an update on their business developments and sectors.</p> <p>TNI – M Graham</p> <p>M Graham gave a brief overview of opportunities available to tourism businesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring Marketing Campaign (NI/ROI) – 30 Jan to 31 March 2023 • Corporative Marketing Fund - £20K open to Councils/DMO's • NI Hotels Federation Corporate Marketing Fund - £5K open to hotels and accommodation sector • Meet the Trade event - virtually 2 February 2023 • Range of workshops and events, such as, Sustainable tourism, Leaner, greener tourism, cost reduction, water conservation and carbon literacy. <p>M Graham discussed TNI were trialling and testing a new credit card data analysis system, however, there may be some caveats around its accuracy. He reported that ROI spend had increased to over 76%, showing a significant recovery in comparison to domestic spend at just over 12%. He added the following stats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bars and Taverns up 51% on the same period in 2019 pre COVID. Eating places and restaurants up just over 2%, hotels/motels and resorts up nearly 10%. Overall 15.5%. • ROI spend in areas, such as, accommodation and food down 3%, spend in arts, entertainment, recreation down over 2% and wholesale/retail down 4%. • ROI consumers are one of our key markets in terms of how they plan to spend. 13% of those surveyed 	

would say they eliminate spend on holidays at home altogether in the coming months, 6% will eliminate leisure day trips and 14% blended holidays abroad.

M Graham also informed that Department for Economy is currently developing a new tourism strategy for Northern Ireland with sustainable tourism at the core of this strategy. He added that the strategy focus on consumer spend and visitor dispersal from areas, such as, Causeway, Mourne, Titanic.

M Graham stated that TNI have participated in the consultation of product review during 2022 looking at investment and public sector. The product review is looking at 'where to invest' in the region. M Graham commented that the review and subsequent results be useful in planning ahead in the months and years ahead. F McKeown commented that she was looking forward to receiving information and results from TNI's product review.

M McKeown informed that Council had submitted a successful application to TNI for funding towards tourism spring marketing campaign and would receive a Letter of Offer by next week.

Seamus Heaney HomePlace

4.2 B McCormick reported that working collaboratively with other tourism businesses has provided opportunities to maximise engagement with tour operators.

Friels Bar & Restaurant

4.3 D Friel reported that Friels Bar and Restaurant saw a successful year trading in 2022. He noted that rising costs were a challenge. He added that he was working to develop a visitor centre with TNI and applied for planning to extend the motorhome park from 6 to 12 pitches. D Friel informed that C O'Neill completed a Carbon Literacy course which will be applied to their new kitchen renovation with assistance from Invest NI.

South West College

4.4 L Shannon provided an update in the absence of S Wigan from South West College.

- Dungannon Campus Open Day - 24 January 2023

The first Tourism and Hospitality Academy delivered by SWC in association with Mid Ulster District Council began 16 January 2023 with 10 students. This 4 week course provides a general introduction to hospitality and tourism. It serves as a taster experience for unemployed students

	<p>providing them with skills and knowledge to progress into employment. Employer engagement through site visits will take place during the 4-week duration.</p> <p>SWC will host an Employer Engagement morning in the coming weeks to highlight apprenticeship opportunities.</p> <p>SWC will provide Level 2 Barista Skills training over 7 weeks (21 hours) commencing 25 January 2023 in the Dungannon campus. This course has proven popular with both industry and the general public. Should interest remain high they will consider running a second course in the Spring.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Business Engagement Programme – L Shannon</p> <p>The Chair welcomed L Shannon to the Tourism Development Group.</p> <p>L Shannon informed that she will be attending Holiday World Show, Dublin this weekend with the tourism team and trade and following this intends to go out and visit businesses to introduce herself and discuss how tourism team can provide support.</p> <p>L Shannon reported that she will attend Meet the Buyer to sell Mid Ulster to incoming tour operators.</p> <p>L Shannon informed that social media workshops for businesses will take place during February and March 2023. She also informed that TNI will host a webinar on waste management during March which will be of benefit to businesses.</p> <p>L Shannon reported that tourism have submitted an application to TNI for marketing funding for the spring campaign. The campaign will focus on high quality video content of attractions across Mid Ulster and will be used in TV advertising and social media campaign.</p> <p>Cllr Doris highlighted that the Mid Ulster Gift Card could tie in with the spring campaign. M McKeown explained this wasn't possible for the current programme as the social media campaign has already taken place, however this will be explored for further campaigns.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Cluster Reports</p> <p>The following Cluster Reports were circulated in advance of the meeting.</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loughinsholin • Clogher Valley Cluster • Archaeology, History and Heritage • Outdoor Activities • Hospitality and Taste – no report as cluster is currently being set up. 	
<p>7.</p>	<p>Visitor Monitoring – M McKeown</p> <p>M McKeown gave a brief overview of visitor monitoring figures collated at key sites throughout mid ulster. The following were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During lockdown outdoor spaces were highly utilised. • The National Trust have no desire to replace Wellbrook monitor. • Plans to install a new touch screen in Coalisland. The visitor figures are encouraging. <p>Following a comment by the Chair at promoting US Grant Homestead, M McKeown responded that tourism team promote and sell the experience at trade and consumer shows. She added that costumes were bought and a script developed to bring living history to the tours. The Chair suggested including the Ulster Scots dancing team along with actors to promote US Grant experience.</p> <p>During discussions around the US Presidential trails, M Graham informed that other homestead sites required significant investment before piloting to US markets. F McKeown asked M Graham to use US Grants Ancestral Home as part of the pilot to promote to the US market. M Graham advised he will feed this back to TNI.</p> <p>D Friel added that An Carn could benefit greatly from funding to upgrade their walk. M Graham responded that there may be funding opportunities to develop existing routes through the new Walking Experiences Strategy.</p>	<p>Following request made by Cllr Doris, M McKeown to investigate possibility of moving the monitor from Wellbrook to Drumcairn.</p> <p>M Graham to liaise with Oliver McKeown about USG, to tap into American markets.</p> <p>M Graham asked D Friel to liaise with M McKeown on background to An Carn.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Brown Signage Audit – G Bell</p> <p>G Bell stated that G Darby is carrying out a brown signage audit of all attractions and accommodation within Mid Ulster on behalf of Council.</p> <p>G Bell said that the findings from the audit and subsequent report should be completed by Spring 2023. She added that an Expression of Interest would be promoted via social</p>	

	<p>media channels to raise awareness of the criteria and payment process for tourism businesses wishing to apply.</p> <p>F McKeown informed that a request was made at the last committee meeting to write to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and TNI to review brown signage policy.</p> <p>M Graham stated that he previously spoke with C Calderwood, TNI, regarding the issue and it was felt that a review was required. He added that TNI have previously raised issues of obsolete signs, cost of signs and additional findings to DFI, however, DFI did not see it as a priority within current resources.</p>	<p>Letter to be sent to DfI and TNI to review brown signage policy and invite John McGrillen, CEO TNI, to meet Council's Development Committee Members</p>
9.	<p>Market Led Programme – M McKeown</p> <p>M McKeown informed that tourism had received an SLA from TNI securing £33,000 funding to enhance existing tourism experiences within the district that will include 30 Bluetooth headsets and 1 speaker for local tour guides usage, a new lightshow being developed for OM, creation of a living wall at Seamus Heaney HomePlace and Banquet at Hill of the O'Neill.</p> <p>M McKeown reported that a TNI Meet the Buyer FAM trip will bring industry and international tour operators together at the Banquet on the Hill, Dungannon on 24 March 2023.</p>	
10.	<p>Spring Marketing Campaign 2023 – M McKeown</p> <p>M McKeown outlined the Spring Marketing Campaign will target markets within NI and ROI. A strong outdoor and heritage product will appeal to these target markets. Businesses are encouraged to promote their offers on Visit Mid Ulster website.</p> <p>M McKeown said as part of the campaign a TV advertisement will run from 13 – 27 March 2023 along with digital platforms and radio campaigns with Cool FM and Northern Sound. There will also be a focus on video content with the themes 'value for money' and 'open for business'.</p>	
11.	<p>Sliabh Beagh – Shared Island – M McKeown</p> <p>M McKeown briefed members of the joint Sliabh Beagh project with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Monaghan County Council and Mid Ulster Council through the Shared Island fund.</p>	

	<p>M McKeown informed that following successful application to Shared Island €145,000 has been secured to appoint Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI) to carry out feasibility studies on 7 work packages to develop Sliabh Beagh as an eco-tourism destination. The shelf ready and RIBA stage 2 work packages will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycling • Walking • Equestrian • Gateway signage and public art • Accommodation and axillary services • Hero attractor • Identification and engagement with potential investors <p>She confirmed that Lumfords Glen and Knockmany Forest are within the Sliabh Beagh catchment area and will be considered as part of the ongoing studies.</p> <p>In Mid Ulster, initial consultations are being scheduled with MUDC Councillors and staff, and ORNI will also undertake wider consultations with key stakeholders across the Sliabh Beagh region, as part of the engagement process.</p>	
<p>12.</p>	<p>Any other Business</p> <p>The Chair informed that through her position on NILGA discussions have taken place for cross-border shared projects to return railways to the west. She also added that funding could also be looked at through Peace and Growth Deal and that the initiative would bring ease of transport and greater accessibility to the area.</p> <p>Date of Next Meeting: To be confirmed.</p>	

CLUSTER REPORTS

LOUGHINSHOLIN CLUSTER

The cluster met virtually on 23 February 2023 facilitated by L Goodhall and continue through the work streams as identified in their Phase 2 Invest NI Collaborative Growth Programme.

Governance

Redraft of Memorandum of Understanding was submitted, reflecting group feedback from the meeting in December 2022. This document was agreed and signed off by the members.

Marketing and Communications

A working communications strategy for the cluster has been developed and shared to cluster members to review and feedback. Current focus is on developing the website with member profiles to be completed prior to Meet the Buyer on 23 March. Work is underway in devising stories and content for social media channels with plans to schedule a photographer/videographer to develop a bank of imagery. L Goodhall is representing the Loughinsholin Cluster at Meet the Buyer. Several cluster members are also attending.

Business Development

J&K coaches launched their new tour company “Croga Tours” in January. They have been working collaboratively with other cluster members and have established a tour called “Untapped Mid Ulster”. The tour is live on the website and is being widely promoted at Holiday World, Dublin, Coach Tour Association Conference, Belfast and BIM, London.

The media launch commenced on 3 March and a FAM trip is scheduled for 30 March to test the tour, which will include cluster members, stakeholders and media / influencers. Croga has also placed a month long series of adverts in the Irish News during February and March.

The cluster continue to develop a series of FAMs / Sales Visits. EI FAM visit took place on 23-24 Feb, visiting Seamus Heaney HomePlace, Friels, Glenavon House Hotel, Glenshane Country Farm and Walsh’s Hotel. Working in collaboration with MUDC Tourism Team the FAM was extended to include OM Dark Sky Park, Beaghmore Stone Circles, US Grant Homestead and Blessingbourne Estate.

Skills Development

Forthcoming training includes – Industry Insights Session delivered by Brack Tours, and iPhone Photography with Mal McCann, dates to be confirmed.

Events

The sub-group are planning to design and run a series of Taster events to test the collaborative approach. Proposed taster sessions would be June 2023. Template designed to help the members scope their ideas to be included within the sessions. The date of the next cluster meeting is 30 March, which will be combined with the Croga Tour FAM.

OUTDOOR CLUSTER REPORT

Spring Marketing Campaign

A number of the Outdoor businesses have featured in the #ValueYourTime Spring campaign – Jungle NI, Blessingbourne Mountain Bike Trails, Railway Karting and Emigrants Walk. They will be included in the TV campaign, radio campaign and short videos for social media platforms targeting segment markets.

Sperrins Hill Walking Programme

Officers from each of the four Councils within the Sperrins met with Sperrins Partnership to discuss running another joint Sperrins Hillwalking Programme. Each Council stated that they have included this activity in their 23/34 budgets, however, could not fully commit until budgets have been approved by Council. It was agreed to reconvene in April/May when budgets should be finalised.

Embrace a Giant Spirit Walks (EAGS)

Tourism NI appointed Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI) to develop a framework (Phase 1) for key strategic walking routes for inclusion in an EAGS brand aligned series. The Outdoor Framework will develop a vision and partnership proposition with 4 strategic pillars, goals and activities:

- Leadership and Partnership
- Destination Development
- Product and Visitor Experience Development
- Advocacy and Communications

The vision for EAGS Walks are world class walk experiences that meet the needs and demands of the market, align to EAGS and stand out, generate demand. EAGS Walk Framework has been developed with a 3 stage approach in order to achieve the vision of world class walking experiences under the EAGS brand. The Walk experience must meet the needs of the consumer by ensuring ease of access, amenities, a physical trail, sustainable and navigation all in place.

Phase 2 - TNI with ORNI will activate the recommendations of the EAGS Walking Framework by selecting 2 'pilot walks' to assess against the essential criteria. TNI and ORNI will then develop an Action Plan for the successful walks and any future development would depend on identification of suitable funding.

Mid Ulster Tourism have proposed Davagh Forest, including Solar Walk, and Seamus Heaney Open Ground, as they meet the essential criteria of having physical trails in place, trail management, amenities, such as, toilets, café hubs, and create a rich visitor experience with AR, board walks and Giant Sculpture. The walks are also inclusive and accessible to all and include Changing Place facilities. TNI have informed us that the pilot walks are currently being selected by ORNI and one of the key selection criteria is alignment to sustainable destination planning. It is anticipated that one will be based on Causeway Coast and the other accessible from Belfast. ORNI have advised that Councils can propose their walks for future assessments and potential next phase EAGS assessment, for which Davagh is already on the list.

Other imminent project outcomes which can support the development of walking trails and signature walks include the Trail Management Template, Brand & Interpretation Guidelines which we will look into.

Wild Adventure Weekend

It is proposed to redevelop the Wild Adventure Weekend under the new Unwinding Time brand. The event, previously held in Spring will possibly run in Autumn following the Sperrin Walking Programme. The weekend brought the outdoor organisations together to develop a schedule of activities and created joint marketing opportunities and promotion through ORNI, TNI, Tourism Ireland, Council destination website and social channels, and by the tourism businesses themselves. The initiative will raise awareness of Mid Ulster as a major outdoor

recreation hub and increase visitor numbers during a quieter period whilst bringing associated economic and social benefits. Subject to Year 23/24 budget allocations and Council approval.

CLOGHER VALLEY CLUSTER REPORT

The Clogher Valley Cluster group is coming to the end of Phase 1. The six-month programme included intense facilitation that focused on four key cornerstones of communications/branding, product development, sustainability, commercial strategies and skills. For each of these cornerstones, further research was undertaken by cluster members (supported by facilitation) with the outcomes presented in February 2023. These outcomes provide the roadmap to proceed with clarity and purpose to raise the profile for Clogher Valley as a tourism destination, thereby generating the associated economic and social benefits.

Overall, phase one has been deemed a success. It has now been agreed that the cluster group will put a proposal together to InvestNI to try to secure funding for Phase 2.

ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY AND HERITAGE CLUSTER REPORT

Hidden Heritage Tours 2023

Three Hidden Heritage Tours will be delivered in June and July with the first tour taking place Saturday 3 June visiting Maghera Heritage Centre, St Lurach's Church and the Walled Garden along with other points of interest within the town.

The second tour will take place on the evening of the Summer Solstice, 21 June, at Beaghmore Stone Circles and OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory.

The final tour on Saturday 8 July will feature the Clogher Valley looking at William Carleton and his connections, visiting Clogher Cathedral, The Forth Chapel and Carleton Cottage.

The cost per person per tour is £25. The bus will leave from the Burnavon, Cookstown and booking via the Bridewell, Magherafelt and Council's social media platforms.

Industry update

The trade members have reported that bookings are looking really positive for April and May. A number of the cluster businesses are also attending Meet the Buyer in Belfast.