

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

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To present Minutes of Tourism Development Group meeting held on 8 May and ratified at Tourism Development meeting held on 11 September 2018.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>Tourism Development Group (TDG) was established to create a working forum between Council and private sector businesses. The TDG will assist with policy development and support the implementation of Council's Tourism Strategy and associated work in order to create economic growth, increase visitor numbers and create employment.</p> <p>The group meet on a bi-monthly basis and as per the agreed Terms of Reference all business will be reported to Council through the Development Committee.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The ratified minutes of the most recent meeting of the Tourism Development Group dated 8 May 2018 are attached as Appendix 1.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u> Financial: NA Human: NA
4.2	<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u> NA
4.3	<u>Risk Management Implications</u> NA

5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	NA
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix A – Minutes of Tourism Development Group Meeting dated 8 May 2018.

MID ULSTER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GROUP**Tuesday 8 May 2018 at 10.00am in Conference Room, Magherafelt Council Office****Attendees:**

Chair Cllr S Clarke – MUDC
 Cllr N Doris – MUDC
 Cllr M Kearney – MUDC
 N Bell - Lissan House
 M McGeehan – J&K Coaches
 T McCrory – Heraldic Craft
 A M McFerron – Old Thatch Inn
 H McCloy – Jungle NI
 C O’Neill – Walsh’s Hotel
 R Mullholland – Ballyscullion Park
 S Wiggins – SWC arrived at 10.35am

Officers:

M Browne – Head of Tourism
 M McKeown – Tourism Manager
 M McGee - Business Engagement
 S Arbuthnot – Events Officer
 G Bell – Tourism Officer
 G Major – Tourist Information Supervisor
 J Robinson – Manager HOTO/RH
 A O’Keefe – Business Support
 T McCance – Head of Arts & Culture
 B McCormick – HomePlace Manager

Apologies:

C Lowry – Blessingbourne, N Somerville – Horses Welcome, L Neill - NRC,
 G Mullholland – SWC, A McCreesh – Director of Business & Communities,
 C Bell- Tourism Officer, M Beattie – Tourism

Meeting commenced 10.08am.

1. Election of chair and Vice Chair

Chair opened proceedings by welcoming everyone in attendance, agreeing that it had been a productive first year for the group and thanked both members and staff for their continued commitment. Before M Browne, Head of Tourism, took over proceedings to elect both positions of Chair and Vice-Chair, he thanked Cllr S Clarke and H McCloy for the work they had carried out within their roles.

M Browne sought nominations for the position of Chair.

Proposed by: A M McFerran

Seconded by: H McCloy

N Bell elected Chair

M Browne sought nominations for the position of Vice-Chair

Proposed by: Cllr N Doris

Seconded by: Cllr M Kearney

Cllr S Clarke elected Vice-Chair

M Browne congratulated both N Bell and Cllr S Clarke on their new roles before handing proceedings over to the Chair. Chair paid tribute to Cllr Clarke as outgoing Chair and to the tourism staff for their continued efforts.

2. Minutes of Meeting held on 13 March 2018

S Arbuthnot, Events Officer, requested that the minutes are amended to reflect her attendance at the meeting held on 13 March 2018.

Proposed: A M McFerron

Seconded: T McCory

3. Matters Arising - None

4. Dark Skies Presentation – M McKeown

Tourism Manager provided members with an overview of the Dark Skies project, stating this was a legacy project, started in 2013, from Cookstown Council as part of a consortium between Mountain Bike Trails and Dark Skies. She discussed the project would attract both local, regional and national visitors.

M McKeown, Tourism Manager, stated that the site would be south facing to show the majority of activity, however, there would also be an opportunity to see the Northern Lights. She continued to discuss onsite facilities and interpretation for the observatory and visitor centre building, adding that it would be named ‘O’ – a play of words to represent Beaghmore Stone Circle, wheels and planets. Tandem have been appointed to design the interpretation, which will keep with existing themes, be interactive, digitally engaging, creative, educational, immersive AV experience, ever changing and will offer something for all sectors both day and night. She went on to say that, the site would open summer 2019 and should generate around £286,528 of income. Members were informed that the total cost of the project was £1.2m, with £500K coming from DAERA, £250K from Landfill and the remaining from Council.

M McKeown, Tourism Manager, informed that a scoping study is currently taking place to submit a Phase 2 application for £500K funding from DAERA to provide a digital outdoor experience that would include an immersive light show and viewing area for events. If Phase 2 is successful, a Phase 3 application will be made to develop a 2.5-mile solar walk. She added that a local landowner is developing 5 glamping pods in the area, which will complement the project.

Vice Chair Cllr S Clarke commended the project in its uniqueness and stated that Council will receive a return on its investment within 5 years, therefore assuring no cost to rate payer. M Browne, Head of Tourism, reiterated that the project cannot be replicated anywhere else and has up to 96 scheduled heritage sites within a 5-mile radius of the site, adding that the project will also create employment for 3 seasonal staff.

Head of Tourism provided an overview of the HLF the Heart of Ancient Ulster working project, which is the largest HLF scheme in the country, was successful in stage 1 first submission. He informed that Stage 2 of the project would be submitted before the deadline in November 2018. A Board of members has been set up comprising community and voluntary sectors with representatives from both MUDC and F&ODC. The Board will assess Expressions of Interests from community/voluntary groups on what projects they wish to develop and include in stage 2 application. He hoped that all projects would be delivered by 2023 and would see a total investment of over £4m in the Sperrins. In response to a query of Council developing glamping pods at Davagh, M Browne stated that council would rather see a private sector enterprise progress with this.

5. Cluster Reports

A brief report of each cluster group was circulated at the meeting and the officer responsible read through.

M Browne, Head of Tourism, updated the committee on advice received from Department of Infrastructure on an amendment to the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order

1997 relating to road closures at events. He stated that an application must now be made to the local council's environment department 12 weeks prior to the event and include a fee of approximately £400. Providing there are no objections, approval will be sought from both PSNI and Transport NI to grant the road closure order. Organisations must also include a traffic management plan, which may cost up to £700, as there are a limited number of companies offering this service across N Ireland.

Members discussed their concern for smaller community/voluntary groups that would struggle to afford such fees. M Browne noted that PSNI officer costs might also be included if required at a road junction. He advised that no clear instructions have been provided, however, the PSNI and Transport NI continue working with Council on this matter.

Vice Chair questioned who introduced the legislation in the absence of a Transport Minister and who would have the authority to enforce. Cllr Kearney referred to the cost of £120,000 that will be incurred to host Belfast Marathon and urged those making decisions to act responsibly.

6. Brown Signage Update

G Bell informed members that she had received an application from Lissan House, Cookstown. Tourism Officer added that a number of issues have been logged with the department and will be dealt with accordingly, however were not seen as a priority.

Vice Chair raised that there was a deficit of signage for Beaghmore/Davagh from Fermanagh & Omagh Council area. Tourism Manager agreed to raise this with F&O tourism officer.

7. Mid Ulster Tourism Strategy

Head of Tourism noted that tourism department were on schedule to meet targets set out in Corporate Objectives. In light of the new Torrent project, Council will include Coalisland in training businesses to achieve World Host & Customer Service status. Following a query, he responded he had received an update from the consultant and the contract has been signed and fee paid to bring one of the World Superbikes 2019 races to Coalisland.

8. Industry Update

M McGee, Business Engagement Officer, informed that NRC and SWC, in partnership with MUDC will hold Skills Training Clinics in Burnavon 12 June 2018. Mid Ulster, tourism and hospitality trade will be invited to avail of a 30 min slot to discuss their business' particular needs as well as programmes and funding opportunities available through the colleges. S Wiggins, SWC, gave a brief description of existing training programme currently being delivered.

M McKeown, Tourism Manager, announced 5 new Chinese flights into Ireland, and reported that VIC staff alongside HomePlace staff participated in training provided by TNI. Members discussed the Chinese market are interested in very high end products. S Wiggins informed that SWC could assist with translation of tourism literature into Chinese/Mandarin.

Chair invited members to provide an update on their business.

8.1 The Old Thatch Inn

M Browne Head of Tourism, agreed to speak to contractor to place temporary road signs around Toome communicating road closures and diversions.

8.2 Seamus Heaney HomePlace

B McCormick, Manager outlined preparations to launch a new Tourism Ireland (TIL) initiative promoting Seamus Heaney HomePlace to the GB market. The Chief Executive Officer, Anthony Tohill, R Mullholland (Chair of Cluster) and Brian himself will attend this event on 14 May 2018 in London. The event will also launch a new TIL video narrated by Liam Neeson to be promoted through all their marketing channels worldwide.

B McCormick informed the meeting that a HomePlace staff member will be attending the Jaipur Literature Festival, India through funding from the British Arts Council. He spoke of discussions taking place between the Arts Council and Queens University, Belfast to hold a satellite event at HomePlace, as there is currently only 3 other venues worldwide hosting such events.

HomePlace Manager discussed developing links with Yeats Society, Sligo's International Summer School and Literary Festival and the possibility of a 10 day Summer Arts programme, funded up to £15,000 in partnership with Sligo County Council.

He announced that Seamus Heaney HomePlace had been shortlisted for Authentic Experience category in the TNI Awards being held on 25 May 2018.

8.3 Walsh's Hotel

C O'Neill reported that the coffee shop and restaurant refurbishments are now complete. She stated that they have received a number of group booking from Meet the Buyer and have a very busy summer season scheduled that included Chinese groups.

8.4 J & K Coaches

M McGeehan also spoke of great success from Tourism NI's Meet the Buyer event. He stated an increase in Chinese, German and Scandinavian tours booked over the next 2 years. By assisting in the planning of more itineraries, he managed to secure tours to Seamus Heaney HomePlace on the return journey from North Coast, which he commented was a major achievement.

8.5 Jungle NI

H MCloy spoke of the success of this year's Rampage event. He spoke of future developments for the business held due to planning issues and stated that he no longer felt in a position to work with Council, however, would continue to work with Mid Ulster businesses. Vice Chair provided an explanation for the Planning Committee decision as a councillor sitting on this committee. Interjecting, the Chair stated that whilst he understood the difficulty of the situation the meeting must move on.

8.5 Heraldic Craft

T McCrory announced that he was pleased to have provided corporate gifts for the US Consulate visit to US Grants. He informed that the Mid Ulster Council work with Magherafelt craft producers was taking momentum with the first craft fair taking place at the Bridewell at Easter and another 3 planned throughout the year. He suggested developing

the group similar to the Omagh model with a pop-up shop and hoped to see same replicated in Dungannon.

8.6 Ballyscullion

R Mullholland commented on the success of attending Tourism NI's Meet the Buyer event that resulted in-group bookings. He spoke of greater interest from the Chinese market in the house and have 60 bookings over the coming months.

8.7 South West College

S Wiggins explained that open days have taken place over the 3 campuses, however intake numbers will not be known until registration takes place following exam results in late summer.

8.8 Lissan House

Chair reported that entrance to the House has been made more accessible to coaches. He spoke of plans to work collaboratively with Killymoon Castle and Springhill House to offer packages.

9. District Wide Monitoring Results

G Major, Tourist Information Supervisor, circulated District Wide Monitoring Results 2018 showing the first quarter figures. He noted that some monitors at Davagh and Dunamore are not working properly resulting in lower figures. He reported that new monitors are ordered for Lissan House and US Grants. T McCance, Head of Arts and Culture requested the Visitor Information Centre Stats for January – February 2018, circulated at the meeting, show the breakdown of figures between Tourism and Box Office.

10. Any Other Business

M Browne notified members of the untimely passing of Mark Alexander, M Alexander Consulting, who had worked previously with Tourism NI and Seamus Heaney Cluster.

The Business Engagement Officer informed that a number of Mid Ulster businesses who had applied to the Tourism NI Awards had been short-listed which reflected on the quality of product in the District.

Meeting ended at 11.45am.

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 11 September 2018 at 10.00am in Arts Studio, Burnavon, Cookstown.