

Report on	Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group Request
Date of Meeting	7th December 2022
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
Contact Officer	Mark Edgar, Biodiversity Officer Anne 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 bring to Members attention a request from the Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group and to seek Member's opinion as to whether to grant permissions for FSNI and Woodland Trust to enter into licence agreements with Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group for the management of red squirrels and the control of grey squirrels within Derrynoyd, Moydamlaght, Iniscarn, Davagh, Knockmany, Brantry, Glenone, Pomeroy, Drumcairne and Cabin Wood.
2.0	Background
2.1	There are currently fourteen active Red Squirrel Groups within NI all working to seek to protect red squirrels through supplementary feeding, raising awareness of their plight, and removing invasive non-native grey squirrels.
2.2	Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group is an independent group formed in December 2021. The group was formed with the aim to bring together people to help raise awareness and education in support of the red squirrel population of NI.
2.3	Initially the group seeks to focus on providing direct support to native red squirrels via adult volunteering opportunities, However it further aims to establish an educational focus, either via on-site 'safaris' or via printed and online learning materials / guides that augment roadshow visits to schools, and community groups.
2.4	Charity status for the Mid-Ulster Red Squirrel group was awarded in June 2022.
2.5	The Mid Ulster Red Squirrel group are currently working with DAERA, Ulster Wildlife, Northern Ireland Red Squirrel Forum, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Forest Service NI and Causeway Coast and Glens Council.
2.6	Three Group members holds the LANTRA official grey squirrel removal accreditation. This qualification is proof of ability in the humane dispatch of invasive grey squirrels, as set out by local and national regulatory bodies.
2.7	Council currently has a Forest Service NI licence for the management of trails and associated recreation facilities within the following sites: Derrynoyd, Moydamlaght, Iniscarn, Davagh, Knockmany, Brantry, Glenone, Pomeroy and are currently in discussions regarding a further licence agreement at Drumcairne following council approval in May 2022 (Minute Reference: D082/22).

3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Council as a landowner has a responsibility under The Invasive Alien Species (Enhancement & Permitting) Order (NI) 2019. The main thrust of this legislation puts a requirement on a landowner to carry out the following measures with regards to present and future listed species:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prevention 2. Early detection and rapid eradication of new invasions 3. Management of invasions that are already widely spread
3.2	<p>The Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group has approached Council officers and have submitted a proposal with a plan to carry out the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas where red squirrels are present: • Identify areas with recent or past records of red squirrels (CEDaR records, local knowledge, etc.) • Select a number of suitable sites to undertake standard red squirrel surveys • Develop appropriate areas to ensure red squirrels remain • Introduce supplementary feeding (can be vital to squirrel survival when natural food sources are limited). • Control of grey squirrels (to both protect food sources for reds, and to prevent spread of squirrel pox virus) <p>Grey squirrels are opportunistic feeders, and although their diet consists of mostly nuts and seeds, they will eat fruits, berries, flower buds, bulbs and corms, fungi, birds eggs and invertebrates. Grey squirrels can eat seeds and nuts that are not ripe enough for red squirrels to digest so in areas where both species are present, the greys get the food first.</p> <p>Grey squirrels carry a disease called the squirrel pox virus. While greys are immune to the disease, they transmit it to reds, for whom it is fatal. It presents in red squirrels with a mange, scab or myxomatosis - like symptoms, leading to rapid loss of body condition and subsequently death. In circumstances where the presence of squirrel pox is confirmed, the extinction rate of red squirrels can be 20 to 25 times faster than that in pox free areas.</p> <p>Also the Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group has proposed to enhance appropriate areas and/or expand suitable habitat to encourage increase in red squirrel population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue with supplementary feeding in areas where it is still deemed as beneficial. ○ Continue with grey squirrel control with ultimate aim of grey squirrels eradicated from the area, and 'grey free' buffer zone maintained around the site. ○ Investigate potential and develop wildlife corridors linking areas of suitable habitat to enable red squirrels to move naturally across the landscape.
3.3	<p>The provision of the license to manage red squirrels and control grey squirrels rests within DAERA Forests rests with FSNI. However, as Council have a recreational license on the sites (listed in section 2.7 above) Council are seen as a consultee to this agreement being granted.</p>
3.4	<p>Additionally, the Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group have requested to manage red squirrels and control grey squirrels within Cabin Wood. This site is currently under lease agreement to Woodland Trust and they hold the right:</p> <p><i>To use the lands only for amenity woodland forestry and or open space for the benefit of wildlife and the general public</i></p>

3.5	Council Officers have consulted with both FSNI and Woodland Trust. Council opinion is sought as to whether to grant permissions for FSNI and Woodland Trust to enter into licence agreements with Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group for the management of red squirrels and the control of grey squirrels within the aforementioned sites.
	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: There are no financial costs required from Mid Ulster District Council towards the delivery of this request from the Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group.
	Human: There are no Council human resources implications or requirement from Mid Ulster District Council towards the delivery of this request from the Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group.
	Risk Management: Considered in line with relevant policies and procedures.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.
	Rural Needs Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the request from the Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group and to grant permissions for FSNI and Woodland Trust to enter into licence agreements with Mid Ulster Red Squirrel Group for the management of red squirrels and the control of grey squirrels within Derrynoyd, Moydamlaght, Iniscarn, Davagh, Knockmany, Brantry, Glenone, Pomeroy, Drumcairne and Cabin Wood.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix A – NIEA Letter, The Invasive Species (Enforcement & Permitting) Order (NI) 2019, Invasive Alien Species: Frequently Asked Questions,
6.2	Appendix B: Management Measures for Widely Spread Species (WSS) in NI: Grey Squirrel.