

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. River Blackwater Feasibility Study 2. UK Tentative List Process of World Heritage Sites 3. Annual Funding Request from Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) for 2022-2023 4. Funding Request from MEGA Network for 2022-2025 5. Data Sharing Agreement with Invest NI 6. Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) 7. Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan 2022/23 8. Sperrins Partnership (2022-2023) – Draft Service Level Agreement
Date of Meeting	12 May 2022
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>River Blackwater Feasibility Study</p> <p>The River Blackwater has its source to the north of Fivemiletown, and divides the Counties of Armagh, Tyrone and Monaghan, entering Lough Neagh at Maghery.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Blackwater Community Barge Project made a request to Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council and Mid Ulster District Council to carry out a study that would</p>

present short term and long-term solutions for the Blackwater, address issues raised and realise the economic tourism potential of the river. A Report was brought to Council in September 2021 and approval attained to commission a River Blackwater Feasibility Study.

2.2 UK Tentative List Process of World Heritage Sites

The Department for Communities contacted Mid Ulster District Council via letter dated 28th March 2022 (**see Appendix 2**) to make Council aware that the UK Government has launched an exercise to review and renew the UK Tentative List of World Heritage sites. This list is reviewed every ten years.

2.3 Annual Funding Request from Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) for 2022-2023

Over the past number of years, a group of 8 Councils from north and south (as listed below) have provided a financial contribution towards ICBAN to support their work; these are Mid Ulster District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan County Councils.

2.4 Funding Request from MEGA Network for 2022-2025

MEGA (Mid Ulster Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement) is an award-winning collaborative growth network formed in 2017 with the support of Mid Ulster District Council and Invest NI 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 of businesses who are working together towards a common goal. Its main aim is to tackle skills and labour issues in Mid Ulster and create and implement ways to attract and retain talent in the engineering and manufacturing industry.

2.5 Data Sharing Agreement with Invest NI

Invest NI have developed a portal that will allow Councils to access Invest NI's CRM system. This will allow business referrals from Councils to Invest NI and vice versa to be captured and will ensure the customer is signposted and receives the appropriate advice. Invest NI have also provided Council officers with training on the CRM.

Councils have now received with a Data Sharing Agreement from Invest NI to agree and sign.

2.6 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP)

Council previously agreed to participate in the development and delivery of a Local Labour Market Partnership (LMP) under the Employability NI Programme led by the Department for Communities. The aim of LMPs is to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions locally by working through coordinated, collaborative, multiagency partnerships. It is the Council's intention that the Mid

<p>2.7</p> <p>2.8</p>	<p>Ulster LMP will be industry-led; developing and delivering activities relating to skills development, training and employability programmes in the local area.</p> <p>Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan 2022/23 A fresh Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan has been prepared for 2022/2023 which highlights a variety of key activities to support our businesses, towns and villages. It also includes reference to a large volume of work on Mid Ulster’s Mid South West Growth Deal projects.</p> <p>Service Level Agreement – Sperrins Partnership At the previous Development Committee Meeting on 6 April 2022, Members approved a financial contribution to Sperrins Partnership of up to £22,000 for the 2022-2023 financial year.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>River Blackwater Feasibility Study In October 2021, Council commissioned a Feasibility Study for the River Blackwater; the study looked at the economic and tourism potential along the river. The Draft Study has been completed and contains a series of recommendations and indicative costs (refer to Appendix 1).</p> <p>The main points covered within the study include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of river boundary on relevant maps. • Identification of any special environmental and landscape features, character and designations associated with the River Blackwater. • Identification of the main legal responsibilities for the river in terms of planning, boating, tourism development, navigation, water quality, flooding, dredging, waste disposal, and funding. • Context of previous River Blackwater studies and recommendations. • Details of current tourism and community activity along the River Blackwater • Consultation and feedback received from all relevant tourism stakeholders. • Stakeholder consultation and identification of technical requirements and cost estimates for dredging the mouth of the river and repeat maintenance costs. Requirements for Planning, NIEA, HED and dredged waste disposal permissions identified. • Assessment of connectivity between River Blackwater and Ulster Canal, Lough Neagh main towns that run along the river and Lough Neagh itself. • Provide recommendations for potential development projects along the river.

- Identification of potential funding sources and lobbying opportunities for all potential river project work.

3.2 **UK Tentative List Process of World Heritage Sites**

Each country is required by UNESCO to maintain a 'Tentative List' of potential world heritage sites and to review this list every ten years. As part of the process, an expert panel will review applications to the UK list. Councils and site management organisations are free to nominate a cultural or natural site that they feel might meet the 'Outstanding Universal Value' test for addition to the World List. Further details are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/unesco-world-heritage-sites-uk-tentative-list-review>

The application process includes mandatory attendance at an online seminar where the process will be explained, including the significant costs involved and the constraints that apply if a site were to be inscribed.

To apply to be considered for the UK's Tentative List applicants must firstly submit an expression of Interest form by Friday 6th May 2022, with the final application submitted on 15th July 2022.

In accordance with recent practice, the UK will continue to nominate only one new site to UNESCO every other year. A rigorous tentative list process is therefore needed to avoid nugatory and expensive work by sites keen to progress. Please take this into account when considering an application.

The suggested location for the MUDC area to be submitted is the OM Dark Sky Park area around Davagh Forest and Broughderg previously known as the Heart of Ancient Ulster located in an Area of Outstanding Nature Beauty.

In order to meet the Expression of Interest deadline of 6th May 2022, an expression of interest has been lodged to signify our interest.

3.3 **Annual Funding Request from Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) for 2022-2023**

ICBAN submitted a request to Mid Ulster District Council for a contribution of £15,000 for the financial year 2022/23 (**see Appendix 3A**) outlining priorities going forward, with the focus on the 'Framework of Regional Priorities for the Central Border Region' and also work continuing on some of the initiatives detailed in their Report on activities undertaken in 2021/22 (**see Appendix 3B**). The delivery focus continues to be on areas to benefit member Councils. If Members are minded to approve the funding sought, it is recommended that from April 2022, Council will provide this financial contribution to ICBAN via a Service Level Agreement arrangement, which is currently being finalised with Legal Services (**see Appendix 3C**).

3.4

Funding Request from MEGA Network for 2022-2025

MEGA (Mid Ulster Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement) Network have submitted a request to Mid Ulster District Council for a financial contribution of £15,000 per annum for the 3 year period (Apr 2022- March 2025) to support the delivery of their new 3 year Strategic Action Plan (**see Appendix 4A**).

MEGA has developed a 3-year strategic goal to: *“Support Mid Ulster manufacturing and engineering post-pandemic recovery by working with our partners to attract, develop and retain talent who are equipped with the skills to embrace a new era of manufacturing.”*

This goal will be achieved through the delivery of 31 strategic actions organised under five thematic work streams, namely:

- **Focus on People** - Address the current deficit in human resources available to the manufacturing and engineering sector in Mid Ulster.
- **Skills for the future** - Adapt the provision of education and skills development to meet the changing needs of the sector over time.
- **Collaborate to win** - Build strong working relationships with key delivery partners and leverage third party resources and budget to the best advantage of MEGA members.
- **Develop our membership** - Transition towards a sustainable membership organisation with fee paying members by 2025, and
- **Govern with integrity** - Ensure effective governance and control of MEGA.

The Council’s financial contribution for the 3 year period (2019-2022) ended in March 2022, and the MEGA Network have now requested a continued contribution of £45k for the 2022/2025 term, ie, £15k per financial year. This further financial contribution will allow the work of MEGA Network to be extended and continue the project’s momentum building on early success and allow for effective forward planning and project management. Council’s financial contribution will enable MEGA to deliver against the first 3 Work Streams of their Strategic Action Plan.

If Members are minded to approve the financial request, it is recommended that from April 2022, Council will provide this financial contribution over a 3 year period (Apr 2022-March 2025) to MEGA via a Service Level Agreement arrangement, which is currently being finalised with Legal Services (**see Appendix 4B**).

3.5

Data Sharing Agreement with Invest NI

The Data Sharing Agreement (**Appendix 5**) has been reviewed by Council’s legal services department and can now be signed and returned to Invest NI.

3.6

Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP)

In February 2022, Council approved the draft Interim Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2022-23 for submission to the Department for Communities (DfC). Following some minor adjustments (which did not affect the proposed programme and initiatives), the Regional LMP has now approved the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2022-23. A copy of the final and approved Action Plan is included in **Appendix 6**.

The Council has received correspondence from DfC (dated 29th March 2022) in relation to the LMP budget for the period 2022-23 (**at Appendix 7**). In the absence of the NI Executive, a Budget cannot be agreed and the Department of Finance led consultation on the Draft 2022-25 Budget has been paused. Therefore, DfC is unable at this juncture to issue a letter of offer to Council in respect of the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2022-23. However, the letter provides an assurance that DfC is committed to the LMP model and although there is uncertainty around the department's budget allocation, LMPs will be treated as a priority funding area in the 2022-23 financial year. DfC had been working on the basis of a £7m budget, however the letter confirms that as a minimum the Department will operate with an indicative LMP Budget of £5.5m in 2022-23. Members will be aware that Mid Ulster's LMP budget allocation for 2022-23 is £468,375.

It is important to highlight that the Mid Ulster Action Plan 2022-23 is an ambitious programme of work, which must be delivered in the current financial year. Thus, in view of the letter of assurance provided by DfC it is recommended that Council agree to proceed at risk to tender for the range of programmes and initiatives included in the Action Plan on the expectation of an official letter of offer from the Department.

3.7

Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan 2022/23

The Action Plan on **Appendix 8** aims to prioritise the development of a comprehensive range of activities, projects, programmes and support across Mid Ulster during the 2022/23 financial year.

3.8

Service Level Agreement – Sperrins Partnership

At the Development Committee Meeting on 6 April 2022, Members recommended that Sperrins Partnership be provided with a financial contribution of up to £22,000 for the 2022-2023 financial year, and this was subsequently ratified by Council.

The funding offer was conditional on Council preparing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to issue to Sperrins Partnership. The SLA is attached on **Appendix 9**.

	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	<p>Financial:</p> <p>Annual Funding Request from Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) for 2022-2023 Provision has been made in the 2022/23 economic development budget for £15,000.</p> <p>Funding Request from MEGA Network for 2022-2025 MEGA is seeking a financial contribution of £15,000 per annum (£45,000) over 3 years (Apr 2022-March 2025) from Council. Provision has been made in the 2022/23 economic development budget for the first tranche of £15,000.</p> <p>MEGA has also bid to Invest NI for financial assistance to support the delivery of their 3 year Strategic Action Plan 2022-2025. This would complement any funding from Council.</p> <p>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) LMP activity is 100% funded by the Department for Communities (DfC). In the absence of an expected letter of offer for the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2022-23, DfC has issued a letter of assurance to Council. On this basis, it is planned to tender for programmes and initiatives and subsequently hold appointments of delivery organisations until Council is in receipt of an official letter of offer from DfC.</p> <p>Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan 2022/23 Funding provision has been made for projects within the 2022/23 Economic Development & Tourism Budgets.</p> <p>Service Level Agreement – Sperrins Partnership (2022/23) Provision has been made in the 2022/23 Tourism development budget for £22,000.</p>
	<p>Human: Officer Time</p> <p>River Blackwater Feasibility Study Officers time to manage and deliver outputs/recommendations of the study (when approved by Council)</p> <p>UK Tentative List Process of World Heritage Sites Officers time to complete application and attend the online webinar</p> <p>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Officer time.</p> <p>Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan 2022/23 Officers' time</p>
	Risk Management:

	<p>Council being furnished with the necessary information in a timely manner.</p> <p>(ii) Approve Mid Ulster District Council’s Service Level Agreement with MEGA for the period April 2022-March 2025 (subject to final review by Legal Services).</p>
5.5	<p>Data Sharing Agreement with Invest NI Approve the Data Sharing Agreement with Invest NI, dated 16 March 2022.</p>
5.6	<p>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP)</p> <p>(i) Note update report.</p> <p>(ii) Approve to proceed at risk to tender for programmes and initiatives included within the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2022-23, and to hold-off on appointing delivery organisations until Council is in receipt of an official letter of offer from the Department for Communities.</p>
5.7	<p>Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan 2022/23 Approve projects and indicative costings within the Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Projects Action Plan 2022/23</p>
5.8	<p>Service Level Agreement – Sperrins Partnership Approve Mid Ulster District Council’s Service Level Agreement with Sperrins Partnership for the financial year 2022-2023 (subject to final review by Legal Services) and release the full payment of £22,000 subject to Council being provided with the requisite documentation as detailed within the SLA.</p>
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Appendix 1 – River Blackwater Feasibility Study</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Letter from Dept for Communities re UK Tentative List Process of World Heritage Sites</p> <p>Appendix 3A – Letter from ICBAN requesting Annual Contribution 2022-2023</p> <p>Appendix 3B – ICBAN Annual Report (April 2021-March 2022)</p> <p>Appendix 3C – Draft Service Level Agreement to ICBAN (April 2022–March 2023)</p> <p>Appendix 4A – Letter from MEGA requesting financial support (2022-2025)</p> <p>Appendix 4B - Draft Service Level Agreement to MEGA (April 2022-March 2025)</p>

Appendix 5 – Data Sharing Agreement with Invest NI (March 2022)

Appendix 6 – Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2022-2023

Appendix 7 – Letter from Dept for Communities re LMP Budget 2022-2023

Appendix 8 - Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes
Action Plan (2022/2023)

Appendix 9 – Draft Service Level Agreement to Sperrins Partnership
(April 2022–March 2023)