

End of Term Review 2015 - 2019

Mid Ulster District Council

March 2019

www.midulstercouncil.org



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Mid Ulster District Council Shadow Council and First Term Chairs and Deputy Chairs

2014 - 2015

Presiding Councillor: Councillor Cáthal Mallaghan
Deputy Presiding Councillor: Councillor Kenneth Reid



2015 - 2016

Chair: Councillor Linda Dillon (interim Chair Councillor Cáthal Mallaghan from May 2016 to June 2016)
Deputy Chair: Councillor Kim Ashton



2016 - 2017

Chair: Councillor Trevor Wilson
Deputy Chair: Councillor Sharon McAleer



2017 - 2018

Chair: Councillor Kim Ashton
Deputy Chair: Councillor Mark Glasgow



2018 - 2019

Chair: Councillor Seán McPeake
Deputy Chair: Councillor Frances Burton



Chair's Foreword

From the beginning, Mid Ulster District Council's vision has been clearly articulated: to be at the heart of our community.

Our priorities have been as diverse and far-reaching as the district we serve, spanning the community, the economy, health and well-being, the environment, and of course unifying staff from 3 long-established councils and a central government department.

Our goal in the lead-up to 1 April 2015 when this Council became operational was to ensure a continuity of service to local people. That smooth transition was, in fact, our first major achievement.

In the four years which have followed, we have continued to manage considerable change, not just for our people, but in our policies, our processes and procedures, all with the aim of building a more efficient and effective organisation, better able to meet the needs of the people of Mid Ulster.

For most of us, the first term of the Council has gone by at some considerable speed. And as our focus is so often concentrated on the future, we often fail to take the time to pause, look back and consider what has gone before.

This review report does just that, documenting the highlights of the past 4 years, together with the breadth and the reach of the Council's work from 2015 - 2019.

It would be impossible to capture every achievement, every success, the outcome of every project, scheme or proposal – there are simply too many.

I take this opportunity, therefore, to pay tribute to each and every member of the Council and the Council's staff who demonstrate their commitment and contribution to achieving Mid Ulster's vision every single day, in every single service they deliver for our residents.



Councillor Seán McPeake
Chair
2018 - 2019

Finance

The Council's annual revenue budget amounts to more than £40M, requiring close scrutiny of expenditure and financial prudence, together with long-term financial planning which allows the Council to fund an ambitious programme of capital development to support its strategic objectives.

Setting the district rate each year is, therefore, a key decision: balancing a commitment to minimise any increase in the rates which local people pay, while continuing to provide and improve quality services and to plan for future investment in the region.

The challenge has been to do so in a difficult financial climate and increased budgetary pressures, many of which, from the apprentice levy and landfill tax rises to employer costs, are beyond the Council's control.

Despite the pressures, the Council has employed a combination of efficiencies, savings and income generation measures which have meant any increase in the rate has been held to below 2% in 3 of the last 4 financial years.

District Rate Increases*

2016 - 2017	1.94%
2017 - 2018	1.46%
2018 - 2019	2.98%
2019 - 2020	1.49%

Of financial significance, in September 2018, was the Council's successful appeal of a ruling relating to the calculation of the Rates Support Grant.

This grant is money distributed from central government to those councils which are less wealthy when compared to others with the potential to generate a higher level of rates income.

The Council's case had its basis in the view that the formula was incorrectly applied, resulting in the Council's wealth being overstated and the grant payable being less than it should have received.

While unprotected and therefore never guaranteed to be received in any one year, the appeal success represented additional funding for Mid Ulster and an opportunity to recoup monies which were payable from previous years.

** Note: rate-setting for the 2015-2016 financial year, moving from 3 councils to 1 required separate increases for each of the former council areas. When combined with the regional rate increase these resulted in an average domestic ratepayer in Cookstown paying 2.58% more on existing bills, an average ratepayer in Dungannon paying 5.64% more on existing bills and 5.46% more for an average ratepayer in Magherafelt.*



New Council New Powers

Along with merging the services and functions of 3 councils to form a new local authority, came the transfer of two powers from central to local government (planning and off-street parking) and responsibility for two new powers (community planning and the General Power of Competence).

Planning

Making decisions on local planning issues for the first time in over 4 decades was arguably the most visible and immediately impactful change from April 2015.

Mid Ulster quickly established itself as a high performing council in planning terms, processing among the highest number of applications per head of population and with one of the highest planning approval rates.

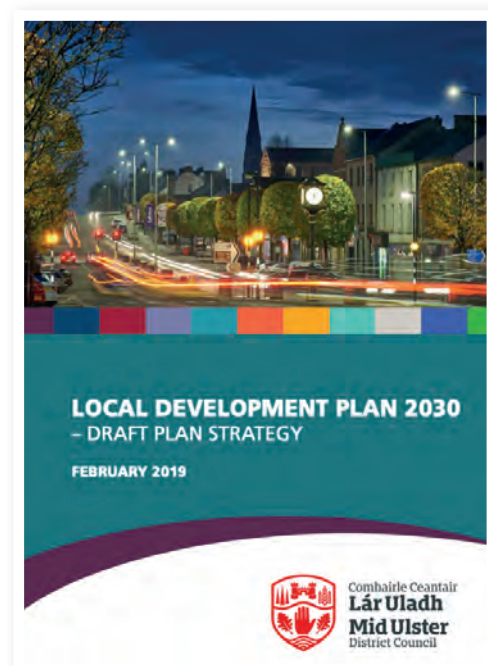
At the same time, the Council embraced the opportunity to begin work on a new Local Development Plan for Mid Ulster.

A hugely important strategic document which would set out the Council's vision for planning land use to 2030, the Local Development Plan would allow the Council to consider Mid Ulster's unique characteristics and create a planning framework tailored specifically to meet the region's needs.

In November 2016 the Council took the first step towards realising the plan with the publication for consultation of its 'Proposed Options Paper' (POP), which set out the intended approach to a range of issues, from housing in urban and rural locations and economic and tourism development to telecommunications and renewable energy.

Taking account of the public representations made in response to the POP, a draft Local Development Plan

was launched in February 2019, including a series of proposed objectives, spatial planning framework and planning policies.



A total of 17 separate objectives are detailed in the plan, aiming to support sustainable patterns of urban and rural development and growth, and spanning housing, infrastructure, transport, tourism, community and recreational facilities, and the protection of vulnerable landscapes.

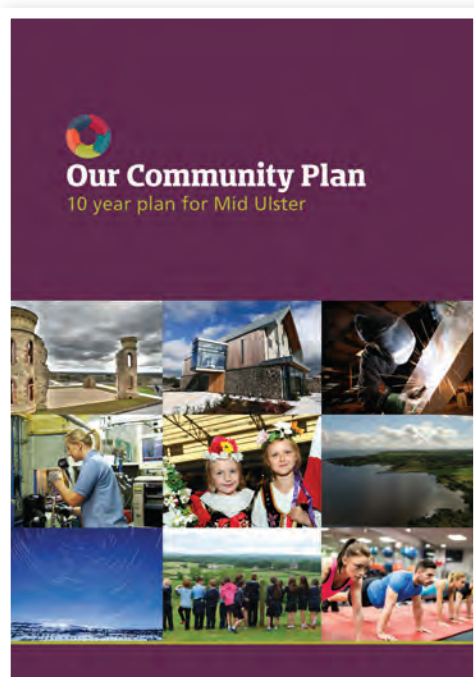
Some of the detail of the draft plan's proposals is interwoven into the 'enhancing our environment' and 'addressing rurality' sections of this report.

The final draft plan will be subjected to a public independent examination and be finalised for adoption by 2020 -2021. Following this, a local policies plan will be prepared and all settlements will be reviewed in terms of development limits, zonings and other policy designations.

New Council New Powers *(Cont'd)*

Community Planning

A new concept for local councils, and indeed, the wider public sector, community planning puts local people at the core of work to identify priorities and needs for their own areas – and brings together all those organisations which have a role to play in meeting those needs to deliver agreed outcomes.



In Mid Ulster, work to create a Community Plan began when the new Mid Ulster District Council was still in shadow form and after 2 years' of work, a draft plan was published for consultation in December 2016.

In May the following year, the Mid Ulster Community Planning Partnership reached a milestone with the launch of the region's new Community Plan.

The 10 year plan, for the first time formally brought together over 40 different organisations to work

collectively to make a real and tangible difference to the quality of local people's lives.

The plan set out a vision for the region in 5 themes, 15 outcomes and 76 strategic actions, encompassing everything from a healthy economy and healthy

people to a sustainable environment and a skilled, educated population.

Early successes have included the Mid Ulster Ageing Well Programme and the Mid Ulster Skills Forum.

Ageing Well supports older people to live independently at home and to reduce isolation and fear of crime. Since the programme launched, up to 400 people across Mid Ulster receive a 'good morning' phone call every week day and access to a 'handy van' service is also provided.

The creation of the Mid Ulster Skills Forum, an industry-led body which is seeking to address the skills gap and skills retention issues facing employers, has had a positive economic impact.

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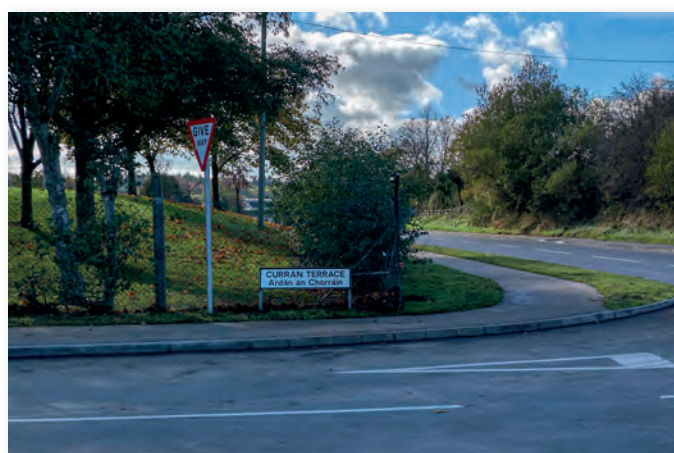
Established in 2017 by the Council, the Forum commissioned an in-depth scoping study to map the current skills base across businesses in 6 specific sectors (manufacturing and engineering; construction; food and agri-food; retail; hospitality; IT) and to identify areas for action to match education and skills provision to meet the critical workforce needs of local employers.

The resulting action plan is ambitious and intended to deliver a workforce with the necessary skills to drive economic growth and to protect and grow the area's key sectors while recognising the importance of emerging sectors – with the potential to create an additional 2,355 new jobs by 2021 in the Mid Ulster region.

General Power of Competence

Used rarely among local councils to date, Mid Ulster did avail of its new General Power of Competence to solve an exceptional road access issue at a housing development in Dungannon in 2018.

The power allows a local authority 'to do anything that individuals generally may do' which it considers to be for the benefit of the Council, district or residents.



> Curran Terrace: using the General Power of Competence to resolve a decades' old issue.

While it has no responsibility for roads, in this instance the Council used the scope provided by the power to deal with the issue which would normally fall outside of its remit.

Ownership of the road at Curran Terrace in Dungannon had never been established, meaning it had never been part of the public road network or been maintained by any roads authority.

The situation had left residents with no avenue to seek repairs to the road or footpaths at their homes.

The Council's intervention in these exceptional circumstances ensured that the road and footpaths at Curran Terrace could be brought to an acceptable standard for the first time in 40 years.

Off-Street Car Parking

Early in its first term, the Council began work on a new strategy for off-street car parking, having assumed responsibility for 25 off-street car parks, with 2,000 car parking spaces spread across 11 towns and villages in a mixture of paid-for and free spaces.

An evaluation of the existing car parks was undertaken, centring on usage, occupancy and existing operating models, and agreement came in 2018 to pilot a 'pay on foot' model.

The pilot scheme will see Central Car Park in Magherafelt move from 'pay and display' to 'pay on foot', where the first 2 hours of parking are free. After 2 hours, the standard tariff of 40p per hour, which has not risen in the last 6 years, applies.

The outworkings of the pilot will now inform the development of the Council's final off-street car parking strategy.

Enhancing Our Environment

From the overarching Community Plan to its specific Corporate Improvement Objectives, Mid Ulster has a clear commitment to the protection and enhancement of the environment.

A very clear emphasis on waste and the reduction of our dependency on landfill has meant Mid Ulster has not only been at the top of the Northern Ireland recycling table every year since 2015, but was also the first Council to meet the statutory 50% target for household waste recycling - 3 years ahead of the target date of 2020.

Mid Ulster Recycling Rates

2015 - 2016	49.65%
2016 - 2017	51.56%
2017 - 2018	54.28%
2018 - 2019	55.24% (based on the 3 quarters to December 2018)

Mid Ulster Landfill Rates

2015 - 2016	38.01%
2016 - 2017	36.11%
2017 - 2018	28.05%
2018 - 2019	22.31% (based on the 3 quarters to December 2018)

This strong performance in waste diversion is only possible with strategic investment in the infrastructure which supports waste collection and disposal. This area of the Council's work accounts for over 30% of its annual expenditure and the financial imperative to manage our waste as effectively as possible remains compelling.

Dungannon has been at the centre of this investment, both in terms of the public-facing recycling service and the Council's internal service arrangements.

In June 2015 Drumcoo Recycling Centre saw the start of a major refurbishment programme to improve

recycling facilities at the site, as well as to introduce a new traffic management system.



The £750K redevelopment works, with £500K funded by the Council and a further £250K from the Rethink Waste Capital Fund, completely changed the facility, making it easier, quicker and more convenient to use, increasing safety and minimising congestion when it re-opened to the public in July 2016.

This strong performance in waste diversion is only possible with strategic investment in the infrastructure which supports waste collection and disposal.

Two years later in September 2018, at the rear of the recycling centre, a new state of the art £1.8M waste transfer station opened, modernising how waste services are managed in Mid Ulster.

The facility now acts as a central point for refuse collection and street cleansing vehicles to deposit their waste before it is collected for onward transport to waste treatment and processing plants. The transfer station deals with each of the four main waste streams completely separately.

This significant investment in waste transfer followed the Council decision to minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill and provided a direct replacement facility for the now mothballed Tullyvar Landfill Site which had served the Dungannon, South Tyrone and Omagh areas for many years.

Its opening also followed a landmark moment in landfill the previous year when Magheraglass landfill site near Cookstown accepted its last lorry-load of waste, exactly 20 years to the day after a refuse collection vehicle first tipped waste into the site.

Its opening in 1997 coincided with the introduction of landfill tax, essentially a financial penalty to encourage more environmentally-friendly methods of waste disposal. Its closure after 2 decades is now contributing to Mid Ulster's drive to continue to reduce waste being needlessly buried.

The provision of enhanced facilities to enable increases in recycling and reduction in landfill has been supported with wide ranging education, awareness and communication campaigns to help ensure householders are aware of what they can recycle and how.



Mid Ulster District Council has also made significant investment in ensuring that householders have access to the collection of food waste through the kerbside brown bin collection service which is part of the district wide integrated 'three bin system'.

The Council also continues to make capital investment in maintaining an up-to-date refuse collection and street cleansing fleet with some £4.5M committed during the first four years.

Ultimately while the Council can provide the infrastructure to enable this success story it is the citizens of Mid Ulster who have made this possible through their attitudes and behaviours towards protecting our natural environment.

Enhancing the environment is, of course, about much more than waste, particularly for a region like Mid Ulster, which encompasses Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Scientific Interest, has international archaeological significance, is home to rare bog lands and bog plants, uncommon woodland, priority and threatened species, from curlews to otters, Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussel.

In September 2017, the first steps were taken towards the creation of a plan to manage the future development of the Sperrins.

More than 70 delegates, drawn from across the community, special interest groups, as well as the public and private sectors, participated in the

Enhancing Our Environment (Cont'd)

'Future Search' conference which was organised jointly by Mid Ulster and three other local councils whose districts also include parts of the mountain range - Causeway Coast & Glens, Derry City & Strabane, Fermanagh & Omagh.

The conference considered the history and heritage of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, together with current issues across a wide of range themes, from community and the environment to infrastructure and tourism, resulting in a 'statement of common ground' and the development of an action plan.

The sensitivities of the region have also been recognised in the Council's vision for planning land use, set out in its draft Local Development Plan to 2030.

That plan will undoubtedly dovetail with the work of the 'Heart of Ancient Ulster Landscape Partnership', which was established in 2017 with Heritage Lottery funding.

Having completed substantial community consultation, the Partnership has created a community-led conservation plan which aims to deliver a series of projects which will conserve and protect 144km² of outstanding prehistoric landscape of the Lower Sperrin plateau and reconnect the local community to its unique natural, built and cultural heritage. The sensitivities of the region have also been recognised in the Council's vision for planning land use, set out in its draft Local Development Plan to 2030.

In it, the Council has the opportunity for the first time to tailor its planning policy specifically for the Mid Ulster region and so it proposes 'Special Countryside Areas' with additional protections for the high Sperrins, Slieve Beagh and the Lough shore.



Similarly, 'Areas of Constraint' are also proposed for mineral development, renewable energy and telecommunications, and the draft plan also seeks to introduce restrictions and new policies in relation to matters such as peat extraction or surface lands above mines and shafts.

There is a balance to be achieved between the preservation of unique natural landscapes and sustainable development to support the rural economy and rural life, and addressing rurality has been a key theme of the Council's first four year term.



Addressing Rurality

Close to 70% of Mid Ulster's population live in a rural setting, a fact which has shaped and influenced the Council's approach to service delivery, to investment and to long-term planning.

The importance of meeting the needs of a rural region is a key principle of the draft Local Development Plan.

Flexibility for housing in the countryside is among the key suggested changes to existing planning policy, with proposals to allow a dwelling for a carer or in a farm cluster or for commercial fishermen to build a home within a designated area of the lough shore, all included.



A new concept of 'Rural Industrial Policy Areas' also features in the draft plan, reflecting the fact that much of Mid Ulster's industry, particularly engineering linked to quarrying, takes place in the countryside, while the needs of small rural enterprises are also acknowledged through plans to allow development of small workshops in rural areas.

While planning for the future, the Council has also been delivering in the present, with a programme of investment in rural life and rural businesses.

Critical to ensuring that our villages remain as hubs for rural communities has been the £10M rural development programme which was launched in 2016 and is managed locally by the Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (Local Action Group).

Close to 70% of Mid Ulster's population live in a rural setting, a fact which has shaped and influenced the Council's approach to service delivery, to investment and to long-term planning.

The partnership is responsible for delivering a range of development projects, from a business investment scheme to a £2M village renewal programme.

A total of 37 village renewal projects are being part funded under Priority 6 (LEADER) of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the European Union, with the Council's investment totalling £716K over 4 years.

Each project, whether a renovation of a community building or a new play area, has been developed by and for local communities who have worked together to identify priorities for work which will enhance local villages and village life.

From 2016, 21 projects have received support:

Ardboe
Renovations to enhance the accessibility of St.Patrick's Hall with works to the front entrance and the installation of a lift.
Investment: £240K

Augher

New play equipment at an existing play park.

Investment: £37K

Ballygawley

Transformation of a derelict pathway to allow pedestrian access to a play park, which also benefited from new equipment, landscaping, lighting, kerbing and seating.

Investment: £190K

Ballynakelly

An inclusive roundabout, a toddler multiplay unit with slide and a single bay swing enhance the existing play park.

Investment: £17K

Ballyronan

Creation of a community garden area at Ballyronan Wood.

Investment: £37K

Benburb

Carpark improvements at the Derryfubble Road playing fields including a new entrance upgrade to enhance accessibility and safety.

Investment: £37K

Castlecaulfield

Play park upgrade and the creation of a conservation trail through the area to provide educational and recreational opportunities.

Investment: £37K

Caledon

New play equipment at an existing play park

Investment: £37K

Clogher

An environmental improvement scheme to replace existing seating and bins, improve Clogher School House, and add new play equipment.

Investment: £37K

Fivemiletown

Play area upgrade, including new equipment, seating, and landscaping, with the Market Yard benefiting from re-surfacing, drainage and environmental works.

Investment: £260K

Gulladuff

Shared space improvements, including repaving and painting, the installation of seats, bins, railings, interpretation panels.

Investment: £37K

Glenone

New playpark including toddler multifunction unit, inclusive roundabout, safety surface and new fencing.

Investment: £37K

Granville

Installation of 2 pieces of play apparatus at existing play park.

Investment: £37K

Killyman

Additional play equipment tailored for older children with new benches and bins.

Investment: £37K

Addressing Rurality (Cont'd)

Maghera

Largantogher Walkway, connecting the Walled Garden to the Tobermore Road for the first time.

Investment: £250K

Newmills

Resurfacing and drainage work to a church car park, with a new landscaped area with picnic tables.

Investment: £37K

Orritor

A new wearing course on road infrastructure.

Investment: £16K

Swatragh

New play equipment has enhanced an existing play park.

Investment: £37K

The Loup

New kickabout area with synthetic grass pitch and fencing.

Investment: £37K

Tobermore

An existing play park has benefited from the addition of new play equipment.

Investment: £37K

Upperlands

Two projects have enhanced the village, with a refurbished Multi Use Games Area at Alexander Park and a new play park at the Linenhall Centre.

Investment: £250K

Improving the competitiveness and economic sustainability of our rural settlements has not been forgotten either, and a priority under the Council's regeneration work has been the enhancement of properties in local villages via a 'spruce-up' scheme.

Beginning in April 2017 and completing in September 2018, a total of 109 properties across 46 villages benefited from a funding opportunity, which grant-aided 75% of eligible costs up to a maximum of £5,000 per property.

Funding minor internal and external improvements including external windows, doors, guttering and redecoration and internal walls, ceilings, floors and redecoration, transformed properties, breathing new life into many and growing the vibrancy and vitality of each village.

The Council has also been at the forefront of rural tourism development, reflecting not only the area's unique geography and natural assets, but also its distinctive history and heritage.

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> **Village Spruce Up Scheme:** Aughnacloy, Bellaghy, Castledawson, Moy & Pomeroy.



Distinctive Tourism Development

Mid Ulster's three very distinct, unique, but interconnected, tourism elements have been defined in the Council's first tourism strategy.

Launched in May 2017, the strategy focuses on Mid Ulster's key strengths – our history and heritage, the great outdoors and our connections to one of our most celebrated writers, Seamus Heaney.

Seamus Heaney HomePlace, the arts and literary centre in Bellaghy, was officially opened by the Heaney family in September 2016.

Marie Heaney, together with children, Michael, Christopher and Catherine, were joined by almost 200 guests at the event to mark the completion of the £4.2M building which celebrates the life and literature of the poet and Nobel Laureate.



Poets, literary figures, extended family and friends, many of whom had travelled specially to be present and prominent politicians were among the attendees which also included acclaimed singer-songwriter, Paul Brady, who performed 'Slieve Gallion Braes' as part of the opening ceremony.

Since then, HomePlace has had countless memorable moments, from Seamus Heaney's 3 granddaughters launching the centre's education

programme to a visit by the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall in May 2017, followed almost a year later by the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins.

Close to 80,000 visitors have been welcomed to the exhibition, education and arts events, and HomePlace's reputation as an important cultural and literary centre has grown year on year with local, national and international audiences.

HomePlace remains a key strand of the Council's investment in the development of literary tourism and an exemplar for success in rural tourism.

The development of HomePlace has, however, had a much broader impact, estimated to generate more than £800K in visitor spend and bed nights in the area per annum.

The centre itself has created 20 jobs, with most of the staff coming from the immediate local area, and its wider positive economic impact has included the regeneration of the village of Bellaghy and surrounding district, increased visitors and visitor spend with local businesses, notably in the hospitality and tourism sector, and, through its retail outlet, it has provided an outlet for craft makers to showcase and sell their work.

HomePlace remains a key strand of the Council's investment in the development of literary tourism and an exemplar for success in rural tourism, helping to attract visitors beyond the boundaries of the traditional 'City and Causeway' offering.

The authenticity of the location is, of course, key. HomePlace is at the heart of the area which was always 'home' to Seamus Heaney and which was the inspiration for so much of his work.

That notion of authenticity extends equally to other aspects of our tourism offering, notably at Davagh Forest where construction of the new Dark Sky Observatory and Visitor Centre began in March 2019.

The area's 'dark sky' - a lack of light pollution which allows an unrivalled view of the night sky and makes the site ideal for star-gazing - is a defining attribute.

The centrepiece of the new centre will be a star-gazing telescope, opening up opportunities to view the night sky, while the exhibition will combine the latest tech from holographic installations to virtual reality headsets with colourful, accessible interpretation panels and hands-on activities, allowing visitors to explore our solar system, from our sun and moon to our stars and planets.

The significance of the stars to ancient life in this part of the world, to the seasons and to stone circles, will also form an integral part of the exhibition experience, linking the rich landscape and history of the Sperrins, including Beaghmore Stone Circles.



Artists Impression
Davagh Dark Sky Observatory

Representing an investment of £1.2M, the new attraction at Davagh has secured funding of £500K from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Rural Tourism Scheme under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, and a further £245k towards the project has come from the Landfill Tax Fund.

Mid Ulster's rich history is also reflected at The Hill of The O'Neill in Dungannon, where Ranfurly House is the gateway to this significant archaeological and heritage site.

The history of the Hill is linked inextricably to the history of Ireland and Europe - from the early 1300s when it was the seat of the ancient Gaelic Chieftains and powerful ruling clan, The O'Neills, to its choice as the ideal location for the grand gothic house of an 18th century banker, to the present day, as a destination for visitors from across the world.



Ranfurly House houses a multi-media exhibition which narrates the history of the site, which visitors can then experience first hand.

The appeal of the Hill was greatly enhanced in 2016 with the opening of a new event and conferencing space, complete with a viewing tour from which visitors can take in 7 of the 9 counties of Ulster (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Derry, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan).

The development was part of a wider £7M EU Peace III funded project which also created a new community building in Railway Park in the town, as well as a 6.9km path around Dungannon which links key recreational spaces.

Investing In Our Economy

Tourism is, of course, a key economic driver in Mid Ulster and is recognised as such in our strategy for economic growth.

Mid Ulster is, for all its rurality, the most entrepreneurial region here, a status which it held when the Council's £30M economic development strategy was launched in 2015.



And it was a status which Mid Ulster retained two years later when the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report was published, measuring the entrepreneurial activity of working age adults, providing data which allows comparisons and benchmarking between and within the participating 65 countries.

The Council's 5 year economic development strategy aims to create and sustain 3,000 jobs, support 1,500 businesses and provide employment and training opportunities for 4,000 people.

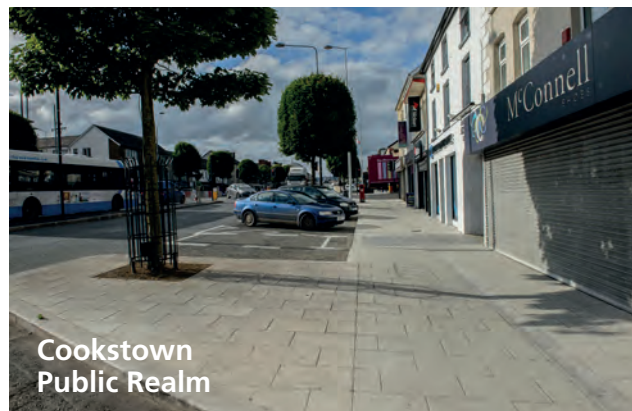
The success to date is impressive.

In its first full year of implementation (2016-2017), four of the strategy's business development programmes alone supported the growth of 74 businesses and social enterprises resulting in an economic impact of over £4M. This 40:1 investment return was also boosted by a particularly successful tender programme where nine businesses won new work of £2.5M.

A particular focus of the Council's work in its first term has been to enhance the vitality and vibrancy of local towns.

The following year (2017-2018), economic development investment of more than £3.4M was generated by the Council's activity.

Analysis showed that every £1 spent leveraged an additional £7 from external sources, demonstrating the wide-ranging nature of the Council's economic development work, as well as the impact on local businesses, skills and employability.



A particular focus of the Council's work in its first term has been to enhance the vitality and vibrancy of local towns.

Investment in town centres has taken multiple forms, from new branding and promotion, support for town centre forums and traders' associations to the exploration of the potential to introduce Business Improvement Districts to towns and the creation and delivery of appealing events which add another reason to visit and to shop local.

Some of these events have become core elements of the year-round event portfolio -from the ever-popular Cookstown continental market attracting 20,000 visitors every year, Dungannon's Magical Kingdom which sees 14,000 flock to the town centre at the start of the festive season or the unrivalled Magherafelt Christmas Market with its artisan stalls and music which sees thousands fill up the town centre.

Direct investment via an extensive shop improvement scheme began in 2015, completing in 2017, when more than 100 shops across Mid Ulster were able to enhance their premises inside and out through the £450K programme.



Eligible businesses in Coalisland, Cookstown, Dungannon, Maghera and Magherafelt benefited from up to £10K in grant aid to fund improvements to internal areas which are visible to the public, as well as building frontages.

The most substantial investment in the regeneration of town centres came, however, with 3 public realm schemes valued at over £10M.

Three major schemes were completed in Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt when funding from the Department for Communities and the Council transformed the look and feel of each centre with new paving, lighting, street furniture, signage and planting.



The success of the schemes was dependent on the co-operation, support and patience of local people, businesses and town centre bodies, and the outcomes have been broadly welcomed as making the town centres more visually appealing for retailers, businesses, shoppers and residents, and underpinning the importance of vibrant towns to the local economy.

Dungannon's Market Square also benefited from an additional £300K improvement scheme which was coordinated by the Council to address pedestrian safety, traffic flow and parking.

While not responsible for traffic management or roads issues, the Council stepped in to resolve problems which arose from the first phase of a public realm scheme in the town in 2012.

Investing In Our Economy *(Cont'd)*

With schemes completed in the 3 main towns, work got underway to progress similar investment in Coalisland and Maghera.

In February 2019, a funding package of £3.4M was confirmed for the Coalisland scheme, while the initial design concepts for Maghera improvements were presented to local people in March 2019.

Major development opportunities have also been explored and progressed in the Council's first term.

The release of the 4.12 acre site on Ann Street in Dungannon in March 2017 for development was a milestone in the Council's strategic economic ambitions.

Long considered a 'unique gateway site' because of its links to the premier retail core Market Square and Scotch Street via Irish Street, the land has been vacant for a number of years.

Proposals by the successful bidder, Moorefield Group, for a mixed-use scheme representing a £10 million investment in the area, are now in progress.

Similarly, land at the former Maghera High School was identified as an opportunity site, this time, for development of a business park, the first to be spearheaded by a local council here.

The proposal, intended to meet a demand for land to allow business growth and expansion, is to create up to 8 serviced sites, with qualifying businesses constructing their own purpose-built facilities ranging in size from 4,000sqft to 20,000sqft.

And signalling the Council's ambitions for Mid Ulster most strongly was the landmark announcement in October 2018 that, together with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, work was to begin towards a Growth Deal to boost economic growth and deliver a step change to the future prospects of the collective area.

The three councils - which together represent over 25% of Northern Ireland's population - wrote to the Chancellor stating a Growth Deal would address specific economic needs and was a once-in-a-generation opportunity, not just for the region, but for the whole of Northern Ireland.

The most substantial investment in the regeneration of town centres came, however, with 3 public realm schemes valued at over £10M.



> Cookstown's Continental Market which attracts 20,000 visitors to the town centre each year.

> **Shop Improvement Scheme:** Cookstown, Coalisland, Dungannon, Maghera, Magherafelt.



Investing To Grow Healthy Communities

While investing to grow a thriving economy, the Council has also been investing to grow vibrant, active and healthy communities in Mid Ulster.

Most visible in its programme of capital works, the Council has been steadily enhancing its leisure facilities across its first term, with allocated investment to date of over £3M:

- Drumcoo playing fields benefited from a £230K refurbishment and upgrade in 2016.
- New visitor facilities, including a café, showering and laundry facilities for the 200,000 visitors to the flagship Dungannon Park, were unveiled in 2016 following a £700K investment programme.
- In 2017, a new Disability Sports Hub was opened at the Mid Ulster Sports Arena in Cookstown. It provides a range of sports equipment including wheelchairs, inclusive bikes and inclusive sports equipment, to enable children and adults with disabilities to participate in at least 14 different sports and activities.
- In 2018, work was completed on improvements at Moneymore Recreation Centre, bringing two additional meeting rooms, one of which is large enough to act as a studio for leisure classes, and adding air extraction, as well as modernising the reception, kitchen and toilet areas. Over £270K was secured for the project from the Social Investment Fund under its Community Capacity Hubs Programme with the remaining £70K provided by the Council.
- Investment of close to £120K was also made in Maghera Leisure Centre, with the sports hall floor resurfaced, a new 3G surface installed at the existing synthetic pitch and new dug outs on the grass soccer pitch which are required for league matches.

- Late 2018 saw consultation begin on proposals for a multi-million pound development of the Gortgonis leisure complex in Coalisland. The plans include a new leisure centre, incorporating changing rooms, meeting rooms and a gym, with planned outdoor facilities to include a running track, 3G pitch, walkways, play park and car parking.
- Early 2019 brought the announcement of a £1.5M refurbishment programme for Dungannon Leisure Centre. The centre's swimming pools, fitness suite, changing facilities and reception area will all benefit from upgrades as a result of the work. Renovations to the pool will include new tiling, pool linings, surrounds, filters and structural work, while the gym will be fitted out with a completely new range of fitness equipment and the centre's squash court will also be revamped.



- Investment in outdoor recreation saw the first phase of the Lower Bann Blueway delivered in a partnership project between the Council, Waterways Ireland and angling stakeholders. A new multi-use public path along the riverbank at Portglenone was developed, accessing an additional 25 coarse angling stands installed as part of the phased works that complement the existing 89 angling stands and associated facilities already at the site. Phase two works will be completed in time for the 25th European Coarse Angling Championships to be held there.

- A programme of investment in Council-managed forest sites starting at the latter end of 2018 into 2019 saw areas such as Brantry Wood and Knockmany Forest receive enhancements that will make a marked difference to the recreational value of the forests, and have a positive knock-on effect on the health and well-being of those who use them.

Supporting the Council's overall improvement agenda for leisure, was the key decision to bring Greenvale Leisure Centre back under its operational control and the Magherafelt centre, which had been managed by Pulse Fitness since September 2012, successfully underwent a smooth transfer in September 2017.

The Council recognises equally that we contribute to our residents' well-being by opening up opportunities to participate in a broad range of physical, community, cultural and artistic activities.

However, improving opportunities for well-being goes beyond the infrastructure of providing quality, customer-focussed leisure facilities.

The Council recognises equally that we contribute to our residents' well-being by opening up opportunities to participate in a broad range of physical, community, cultural and artistic activities.

Our sports arenas, parks and open spaces have become increasingly important as venues for walking, park runs, Couch to 5K programmes, and for delivery of the Everybody Active2020 programme which encourages more physical activity among harder to reach groups.

Our theatres and arts centres – the Burnavon, Ranfurly House and Seamus Heaney HomePlace – not only act as important social spaces in the local community with their varied events programmes, but also offer a complete range of arts classes, from dance to drama, to suit all ages and abilities.

Our educational work includes an annual BeeSafe programme for primary school children which has seen more than 2,000 children engage in active learning about keeping safe whether they're on the street or on the internet. It also recognises the benefits of the natural resources in the area by including Forest School programmes at three sites across the district (Hill of the O'Neill and Ranfurly House, Dungannon Park and Ballyronan Marina), providing local children with the freedom and confidence to explore, and to use their multiple senses for encouraging creative, diverse and imaginative play.



Our well-being programmes promote healthier lifestyles, from smoking-cessation to cooking lessons for those who may be less likely to eat well.

Our annual grants programme supports athletes, sports clubs, arts groups, community groups, cultural groups, language groups and health groups, funding projects, programmes and events.

Investing To Grow Healthy Communities *(Cont'd)*

In its first 4 years, the Council has provided close to £2M in grant aid for the voluntary and community sector in Mid Ulster.

The £5M 'Connecting Pomeroy' project, to be funded under the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, will encourage greater levels of cross-community contact within the local area, with three core elements forming the focus of the project: enhancing the look and feel of the centre of the village, creating a suite of new community facilities, and boosting outdoor and tourism opportunities through the development of a 'magic forest'.

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In a wider context, the new PEACE IV programme for Mid Ulster, worth £2.8M in funding to the region until 2020, will be pivotal in developing shared spaces and services, generating contact across the community, particularly among children and young people, encouraging respect and understanding, and building positive relations.

> **Mid Ulster Leisure & Recreation Facilities**



Awards & Accolades



The first term of Mid Ulster District Council has been characterised by a series of awards and accolades, recognising achievement in everything from accessibility to sustainability.

May 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

Blue Flag Award, Ballyronan Marina

In 2018 the marina received a Blue Flag for an impressive 9th year in a row.

September 2015

Biodiversity Project of the Year, Sustainable Ireland Awards

A joint win with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council for a wetlands development project at Tullyvar Landfill Site.

November 2015

Burnavon, RNIB Model of Excellence Award

The Burnavon is recognised for ensuring accessibility to blind and visually impaired people across its services.

July 2016, 2017, 2018

Green Flag Awards For Dungannon Park and Maghera Walled Garden

A prestigious award for excellence in the management of parks and green spaces.

January 2017

Award for Excellence in Architectural Technology, Hill of the O'Neill & Ranfurly House

The new outdoor event space, conference facilities and viewing tower on The Hill of The O'Neill win a Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT) award for work undertaken by GM Design Associates Ltd.

June 2017

Excellence In Planning, Built Heritage, Seamus Heaney HomePlace

A UK-wide award from the Royal Town Planning Institute, celebrating exceptional examples of planning and the contribution planners make to society.

August 2017

Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Award, Hill of the O'Neill & Ranfurly House

A national badge of quality for the education programme delivered outside the classroom on the heritage site.

October 2017

Best Visitor and Interpretation Centre, Association of Heritage Interpretation Awards, Seamus Heaney HomePlace

Beginning an award-winning month for HomePlace, the AHI awards recognise excellence at a UK level.

October 2017

Best Local Authority Tourism Initiative, Northern Ireland Local Government Association Awards, Seamus Heaney HomePlace

Recognising the success of HomePlace after its first year of operation.

October 2017

Best NI Visitor Attraction 2017, Northern Ireland Travel and Tourism Awards, Seamus Heaney HomePlace

Completing the hat trick of awards for HomePlace in one month.



July 2018

Green Flag Award For The Hill of The O'Neill

The Hill joins Dungannon Park and Maghera Walled Garden, bringing a trio of Green Flags for Mid Ulster properties.

August 2018

100% In Tourism Assessment: Visitor Information Centres

Each of the Council's Visitor Information Centres receive the top score for customer services.

October 2018

Best Enterprise Initiative, Northern Ireland Local Government Association Awards, Mid Ulster Skills Forum

A well-deserved accolade for the industry-led forum, the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, seeking to address the skills gap in Mid Ulster.

October 2018

Best Community Planning Initiative, Northern Ireland Local Government Association Awards, Mid Ulster Ageing Well

Recognising early success of a community planning partnership project to support older people and reduce isolation.

October 2018

Member Development Charter, North West Employers

Accreditation and award recognising the Council's good practice in supporting the development of councillors to fulfil their vital community role.

November 2018

Highly Commended, Great British High Street Awards

Cookstown is highly commended in the Great British High Street Awards.

December 2018

William Keown Award, Moneymore Recreation Centre

The newly refurbished centre is recognised for the accessibility of its facilities.

February 2019

Davagh Forest Mountain Bike Trails, Mountain Bike NI Awards

The Stream Trail in Davagh Forest is named NI's Favourite Trail in a public vote.

March 2019

Health & Safety Ambassador Award, WISHNI

The Council is awarded Ambassador status by the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum in recognition of health and safety best practice in the waste industry.

March 2019

NI Public Sector Communications Awards

The Council's 'Recycling Hero' campaign wins 3rd place at the first ever public sector communications awards.

**Mid Ulster District Council
2015 - 2019**

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