

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sperrins Partnership Project 2. Sperrins Walking Festival 3. Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme 4. Consultation Response - Draft Investment Strategy NI 5. Covid Small Settlement Regeneration Programme 6. Sliabh Beagh Partnership – Request for Contribution Towards Scoping Study
Date of Meeting	6 April 2022
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	Background

<p>2.1</p> <p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p>	<p>Sperrins Partnership Project The Sperrins Future Search Conference entitled ‘The Sperrins – Reaching New Heights, Realising Our Potential’ was held in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on 27th – 29th September 2017.</p> <p>The event brought together a group of key stakeholders to draft and agree an action plan for the future development of the Sperrins and in particular the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).</p> <p>The Sperrins Partnership Project is a joint collaboration between four Councils across the Sperrin area: Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council.</p> <p>Each Council in 2018 committed to an equal financial contribution towards the project delivery and have funded the Sperrins Future Search initiative.</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Festival The Sperrins Partnership is a joint initiative involving the four Sperrins Councils, namely Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council. The Partnership deliver a number of agreed actions in a co-operative, co-ordinated manner under the themes of Tourism, Heritage, Infrastructure and Environment.</p> <p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Council previously received a letter of offer from the Department for Communities for £1,452,000 to deliver Tranche 1 & Tranche 2 Business Support Grants and Active Travel Scheme. Tranche 1 & 2 Business Support Grants has all been allocated and the Active Travel element is ongoing.</p> <p>Consultation Response- Draft Investment Strategy NI A public consultation on the draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland was launched in January 2022 and closes for responses on 20th April 2022.</p> <p>Covid Small Settlement Regeneration Programme At the March 2022 Development Committee members approved a revised Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Plan, which was submitted, to DfC on 11th March 2022.</p> <p>A contract for funding (CFF) approving the Regeneration Plan was received by Council from DfC on 18th March 2022 for acceptance and return by 25th March 2022.</p> <p>Sliabh Beagh Partnership – Request for Contribution Towards Scoping Study</p>
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2.6	<p>The Sliabh Beagh region stretches across 250 miles square, it spans from Monaghan in the south, across Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster in the north. Straddling the traditional County borders of Tyrone, Fermanagh and Monaghan. In Mid Ulster the region takes in the villages of Aughnacloy, Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown and the surrounding Clogher Valley countryside.</p> <p>The Sliabh Beagh landscape is comprised of blanket bog, windswept moors, deep woodlands, lakes and rolling pastures. Shaped by centuries of cultivation, peat extraction and forestry (significant parts in the ownership of Forest Service NI), the area is home to an abundance of flora and fauna.</p> <p>Sliabh Beagh is sparsely populated, consisting of a network of small villages and hamlets connected by narrow winding roads. This includes inner gateways (Cooneen, Knocks, Knocktallon) and outer gateways (Aughnacloy, Clogher, Fivemiletown Brookeborough, Maguiresbridge, Newtownbutler, Rosslea, Magheraveely, Clones, Scotstown, Monaghan and Emyvale). This area has been identified through the Sliabh Beagh Masterplan as having tourism potential but in need of significant investment.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Sperrins Partnership Project</p> <p>A Sperrins Partnership Project Officer and part time Administrative Support were appointed and took up their respective roles in October 2021. Work completed or progressing since mid-October 2021 includes the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval and sign off of the Sperrins Partnership Agreement between the partners councils; • A Governance Structure for the project drawn up and agreed at Board level; The formation of a Sperrins Partnership Board; • The development and launch of a new website dedicated to the project www.sperrinspartnershipproject.com; • An official Launch of the Sperrins Future Search Report and Actions Plans; • A review and update of the Brand and Tourism Action Plan; • The formation of the Brand and Tourism Thematic group; • Engagement with Statutory Agencies; • Support, assistance and promotion of collaborative projects including, the Sperrins Sculpture Trail and IAT (International Appalachian Trail) projects, Sperrins Walking Festival and review of Scenic Driving Route. <p>A request for continued financial assistance has been received from Sperrins Partnership for the 2022/23 financial year, seeking a contribution of £22,000 from Mid Ulster District Council (Appendix 1A).</p> <p>The priority projects that Sperrins Partnership outline will be progressed during the 2022/23 financial year are as follows;</p>

- Commencing work on the delivery of the short and long term actions contained within the Brand and Tourism Action Plan (Action Plan attached at **Appendix 1B**)
- Identifying funding opportunities and creating the respective business cases (HLF, RDP, Peace Plus etc.)
- Completing an audit of the tourism product of Sperrins Region
- Forming strong cross boundary partnerships
- Work has commenced to identify and deliver a Management Structure and associated Management Plans suitable for Sperrin AONB. Options to deliver this are currently being scoped out through active engagement with DAERA and the Sperrins Partnership Board. Consideration will be given to best practice delivery models in other AONB in NI. This piece of work will be a key focus for the Partnership over the coming months.
- The formation and development of the remaining Thematic Groups.
- Collaboration with partner councils on delivery of Sperrins Walking Festival and update and refresh exercise of the Sperrins Scenic Driving Routes.

3.2 **Sperrins Walking Festival**

The 4 Councils comprising the Sperrins Partnership Project wishes to develop a Sperrins Walking Festival during 2022/23 and seeks a financial contribution from each participating Council of £6,000.

This funding would allow suitably qualified professional guides / organisation to be procured to deliver a two-day Walking Festival that will develop and co-ordinate outdoor recreation participation programmes for the local community and visitors, resulting in increased participation and ultimately improve physical and mental health.

The successful organisation will consult with each Council's tourism team to develop the programme to showcase the local heritage and the walking/countryside experience, provide technical knowledge and applications, co-ordinate participation at each event, including health and safety, guide orientation, event monitoring and evaluation, marketing and promotion and overall delivery of the festival.

The successful organisation will be responsible to seek permissions from landowners, statutory agencies, local community buy-in and consideration of other activities being undertaken. When developing the programme the successful organisation must consider the landscape topography, sensitivity of the environment and its biodiversity.

It is anticipated that the two-day Sperrins Walking Festival will be spread over a number of weekends during the months of March/April 2022 and

September/October 2022 and will focus on various locations throughout the Sperrins region, one programme delivered in each council area. (Other dates can be considered in and around this period if there is a strategic reason to do so i.e. and existing community event).

Mid Ulster tourism team propose to hold their two-day Walking Festival on the weekend of the 24 -25 September 2022 consisting of easy, moderate and hard walks around Slieve Gallion.

Following review and evaluation of the 2022 Festival it is anticipated this will be an annual event with potential to develop.

It is recommended that Mid Ulster District Council provide £6,000 from its annual tourism budget in 2022/23 to contribute towards the Mid Ulster aspect of the Sperrins Walking Festival.

Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme

3.3

The Active Travel schemes are progressing well but more time is required for the Clogher footpath scheme. This is still at design stage and completion date is projected around Autumn 2022. This is subject to all approvals being provided and therefore a request was made by Council to DfC seeking an extension of time to end of the year to give some flexibility.

DfC has agreed to Council's request and furnished Council with a letter of variance granting an extension to the period of funding to 31 December 2022 as detailed on **Appendix 2**.

Consultation Response - Draft Investment Strategy NI

3.4

The Strategic Investment Board published a draft Investment Strategy for NI (**Appendix 3A**). The Framework has been developed to set out priority areas for investment in the years ahead attempting to help stakeholders in public, private and voluntary sector partners plan for the challenge of delivering the largest ever infrastructure programme for NI.

The new Investment Strategy for NI will set key objectives for infrastructure investment in the region for the next thirty years. The draft strategy sets out five key objectives for infrastructure investment over this period.

These five themes of the strategic framework are:

- Decarbonise our economy and society
- Strengthen our essential services
- Enhance our communities and places
- Build a strong, connected and competitive region
- Maximise the benefits from new technology and innovation

Council's draft consultation response to the *Draft Investment Strategy for NI* is attached on **Appendix 3B**.

The consultation period closes on 20th April 2022. If any Member wishes for additional comments to be submitted these should be forwarded to the Assistant

Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes by 13th April 2022 to allow time for the document to be finalised and submitted before the closing date for receipt of consultation responses.

3.5

COVID Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

The projects approved within Council's Covid Small Settlements Regeneration plan as submitted are listed below:

- Castlecaulfield Recreation Area
- Castledawson (Riverside)
- Manor Park, Moneymore
- Coalisland Canal
- Bellaghy - walking trail and recreational area
- Clady recreational area landscaping and drainage of existing green space at Beechland Park for community use
- Moy 4G multi use floodlight pitch

The funding award received is for 90% of the Regeneration Plan costs equal to £2,781,000 comprised of £2,590,000 for capital delivery and £191,000 for resource costs. Match funding of 10% by Council brings the overall level of investment within the Regeneration Plan to £3,090,000.

Delegated approval was granted by the Committee in March 2022 for the Chief Executive to accept the Contract for Funding within the acceptance timescales of 25th March 2022. A signed accepted contract was submitted to DfC on 22nd March 2022 (**see Appendix 4**).

The programme of works must be completed by 23 March 2023. To assist in the capital delivery of this programme, Council officers have been working with the Strategic Investment Board to develop a partnership arrangement and identify an experienced capital project manager from their Council Support Unit (CSU) to assist the Council to deliver this programme within the tight timescales identified. The resource would be an employee of SIB but would be located in the Council team to prepare briefs, procure and manage consultants / contractors, and organise and manage teams of multi-disciplinary staff and consultants. They would also assist with Growth Deal/Levelling Up Funds projects totalling over £30million.

Without additional resources, there is a significant risk that the Council will not be able to deliver the programme within the stated timescales. The resource from SIB will be available within one month of approval and will have the experience and expertise, as well as access to SIB consultancy frameworks to ensure that projects are delivered as required by the funding.

3.6

Sliabh Beagh Partnership – Request for Contribution Towards Scoping Study

Sliabh Beagh Partnership is seeking a contribution of £5,000 from each of the respective Councils to progress a scoping study to identify priority recreational projects and associated infrastructure. This study would support the

	<p>identification and development of funding opportunities. There would be potential, within this study, to identify proposals for associated signage and interpretative art provision in conjunction with community and business partners from the area. If Members approve funding, representatives from Council's Outdoor Recreation and Tourism sections would engage with the Sliabh Beagh Partnership to ensure Mid Ulster's input is fed into the Scoping Study.</p> <p>The letter requesting a financial contribution of £5,000 from Mid Ulster District Council emanates from Monaghan County Council on behalf of Sliabh Beagh Partnership – see Appendix 5.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	<p>Financial:</p> <p>Sperrin Partnership Project The Sperrins Partnership Project is presently funded by 4 Councils at total annual cost of £88,000. Going forward it is anticipated that the annual operating cost will remain the same. Officers are currently looking at options to secure additional funding from external sources for relevant projects. Each Council committed c. £22,000 for the current financial year 2021-2022. Sperrins Partnership has made a request to Council for a contribution, which will include salary and running costs for £22,000 for financial year 2022 - 2023.</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Festival 2022 Recommended that Mid Ulster Council contribute up to £6,000 from it's annual tourism budget in 2022/23 towards the Mid Ulster aspect of the Sperrins Walking Festival 2022. The remaining 3 participant Sperrins Councils to contribute an equal financial contribution.</p> <p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Funding from DfC of £1,452,000 to be spent by March 2022. Letter of variance attached on Appendix 2 providing an extension to allow the Clogher footpath scheme to be completed by December 2022.</p> <p>COVID Small Settlements Regeneration Programme 10% match funding from Council on an overall allocation of £2,781,000 (capital and resource) was approved by the P&R Committee on 3rd March 2022 subject to ratification at full Council on 24th March 2022.</p> <p>Project Management – The proposed support commissioned from SIB represents a 6% cost for the overall Small Settlement Programme. The support would be commissioned on a minimum 2 year basis, with an option to extend for 3 years.</p> <p>Sliabh Beagh Partnership – Request for Contribution Towards Scoping Study Funding of £5,000 could be provided from the Tourism budget towards a scoping study which will inform project development in relation to recreational provision and associated infrastructure, i.e., paths, wayfinding, signage/art. This</p>

	<p>will support the development of applications for external funding support, which could include provision of interpretative public art. A potential funding source could be a future TRPSI application. (Each participating Council requested to provide £5,000).</p>
	<p>Human:</p> <p>Sperrin Partnership Project: Support by Council officers to manage and deliver the project</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Festival 2022 Officers time to input and co-ordinate.</p> <p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Officers time managing projects that are funded.</p> <p>COVID Small Settlements Regeneration Programme Officer time to implement and monitor delivery of the Regeneration Plan conjunction with the DfC. Additional resource is required to successfully deliver the programme within the tight timescales.</p> <p>Sliabh Beagh Partnership – Request for Contribution Towards Scoping Study The Sliabh Beagh Partnership is supported by the Tourism Manager and the Business Engagement Officer. Fermanagh & Omagh District Council and Monaghan County Council provide a similar level of Officer Support.</p>
	<p>Risk Management:</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Festival 2022 Council policies and procedures will be adhered to in the roll out of this scheme.</p> <p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Due to legal issues, one aspect of the Active Travel scheme (Clogher footpath) requires an extension of time to December 2022. DfC has issued Council with a letter of variance to accommodate this request.</p> <p>COVID Small Settlements Regeneration Programme Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures. If additional resources are not put in place, there is a risk that the programme will not be delivered within the timescale and funding requirements.</p>
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Festival 2022 Mid Ulster Council is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all its activities with a focus on all citizens living within the Mid Ulster.</p>

	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members:
5.1	<p>Sperrins Partnership Project</p> <p>5.1.1 Approve a continued financial contribution to Sperrins Partnership of up to £22,000 for the 2022/23 financial year towards salaries and running costs to enable delivery of the initiatives as outlined within the report, and further referenced within Appendices 1A and 1B.</p> <p>5.1.2 Approve that Council prepare and issue an SLA (once approved by Council's legal team) to Sperrins Partnership, and subject to their acceptance and return of the signed SLA, Council's recommended financial contribution of up to £22,000 be released.</p>
5.2	<p>Sperrins Walking Festival 2022 Approve Council's participation in the 2022 Sperrins Walking Festival and contribute a maximum budget of up to £6,000 towards the Mid Ulster leg of the event.</p>
5.3	<p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Approve authority for Chief Executive to sign the Covid-19 Recovery Programme Letter of Variance on Appendix 2, dated 22 March 2022 which grants an extension to the period of funding to 31 December 2022. Approval also required to return the signed letter of variance to DfC immediately following the Development Committee in order to meet DfC's response timeframe.</p>
5.4	<p>Consultation Response – Draft Investment Strategy NI Approve Council's consultation response to the draft Investment Strategy for NI and submit the response before the consultation deadline closes on 20th April 2022. Should any Member wish to add further comments, these can be forwarded to the Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes no later than 13th April 2022, to allow time for Council's response to be finalised and submitted in a timely manner.</p>
5.5	<p>COVID Small Settlements Regeneration Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note Council's acceptance of the Contract for Funding received from DfC under the Covid Small Settlements Regeneration Programme for £2,781,000. • Approve the partnership arrangement with SIB, through the use of Project Management assistance from their Council Support Unit for a minimum of two years with an option to extend for 3 years.

5.6	<p>Sliabh Beagh Partnership – Request for Contribution Towards Scoping Study</p> <p>Approve a financial contribution of £5,000 from Council’s tourism budget in 2022/23, towards Sliabh Beagh Partnership to assist the Partnership undertake a scoping exercise of potential outdoor recreation projects, subject to confirmation of similar commitments on the part of Monaghan County Council and Fermanagh & Omagh District Council.</p>
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Appendix 1A – Letter re Sperrins Partnership Project – 24.2.22</p> <p>Appendix 1B - Sperrins Partnership Draft Brand and Tourism Action Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Covid-19 Recovery Programme – Letter of Variance - March 2022</p> <p>Appendix 3A - Draft Investment Strategy for NI</p> <p>Appendix 3B – MUDC Response to Draft Investment Strategy for NI</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Covid Small Settlements Scheme Contract for Funding</p> <p>Appendix 5 - Letter from Monaghan County Council re Sliabh Beagh Scoping Study</p>