

Report on	UNESCO World Heritage Site – Davagh & Beaghmore Stone Circles
Date of Meeting	15 th October 2020
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Charmain Bell

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 inform council about the progress of the notion to motion at the development meeting on the 23 rd July 2020 - "That Mid Ulster District Council resolves to explore the necessary steps to have Davagh Dark Sky Park officially designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site"
2.0	Background
2.1	After several years of recording sky brightness, Davagh Forest and the area around Beaghmore Stone Circles was awarded IDA recognition for its unique dark skies in February 2020. The first Dark Sky Park in Northern Ireland.
2.2	With the development of the OM Darky Sky Observatory and Visitor Centre at Davagh, along with the IDA status, this is the first Dark Sky Observatory on the island of Ireland, which combines the uniqueness of the sky with the uniqueness of the surrounding archaeology. The archaeological significance of the region has been recognised by the Historic Environment Division in its designation as an Area of Significant Archaeological Interest (ASAI).
2.3	OM Dark Sky Observatory is also part of Tourism NI's Embrace A Giant Spirit Campaign for their 'Stars and Stones' visitor experience launched at World Travel Market, London in November 2019.
2.4	As a new and unique attraction in Northern Ireland, OM is receiving a new level of interest locally, nationally and internationally.
2.5	As mentioned by Cllr Clarke at the Council meeting on the 23 rd July, "The Davagh Dark Skies Park is remarkable for much more than its Dark Skies. The park contains a number of elements of significance which meet the criteria for designation of a World Heritage Site. Astrology, Archaeology, Geology and Ecology are all key elements within the Davagh Dark Sky Park."

3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p data-bbox="225 253 1423 331">The Purpose of World Heritage Sites</p> <p data-bbox="225 331 1423 696">The cultural heritage and the natural heritage are among the priceless and irreplaceable possessions, not only of each nation, but also for mankind as a whole. The loss, through deterioration or disappearance, of any of these most prized possessions constitutes and impoverishment of the heritage of all peoples in the world. Parts of that heritage, because of their exceptional qualities, can be considered to be of outstanding universal value and as such worthy of special protection against the dangers, which increasingly threaten them. The purpose is to identify the sites worth of the status of World Heritage Sites and then ensure their protection.</p>
3.2	<p data-bbox="225 696 1423 1010">To be considered of universal interest a site must meet one of the selection criteria produced by UNESCO. The State Party of that country compiles a tentative list of sites to be considered for inscription. They are then evaluated by either ICOMOS (<i>International Council of Monuments and Sites</i>) and/or IUCN (<i>International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources</i>). The sites are then presented to the World Heritage Committee who make a final decision.</p>
3.3	<p data-bbox="225 1010 1423 1234">Council Officers, with the assistance of Dr William Burke and Dr Liam Campbell of Lough Neagh Partnership (<i>both of which have previous experience of the Derry City Walls UNESCO application</i>) have written the attached scoping paper exploring the necessary steps to have Davagh Dark Sky Park officially designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.</p>
3.4	<p data-bbox="225 1234 1423 1503">Dark Sky Parks are not recognised by the World Heritage Committee as a specific type or category of World Heritage. However, while dark sky places cannot, in themselves, be recognised as specific types or categories of World Heritage, “dark sky values can nonetheless enhance either the natural or cultural value of a place, or both, and in this sense contribute to potential Outstand Universal Value.</p>
3.5	<p data-bbox="225 1503 1423 1727">After reviewing a range of case studies, pertinent literature and assessing the wider landscape heritage assets of the Davagh region, it is viable to develop a framework that can incorporate the cultural narrative of astronomy, archaeology, biodiversity, settlement and place into a story of landscape evolution in line with sub-terrestrial, terrestrial and celestial connected ‘spacetime’.</p>
3.6	<p data-bbox="225 1727 1423 2049">Subsequently, it is feasible for us to consider the Dark Sky Park at a landscape scale, and include the archaeology of Davagh, Beaghmore and Broughderg as being creative acts, a response to a sense of place and balance between earth and sky. The creation of this prehistoric landscape has provided a focus and an index of human continuity and community since prehistoric times. There is a lived richness of place-names, ecology, archaeology, astronomy and cultural history and they cannot be separated here. Combining this with the geological and geomorphological importance of the region, and alongside the global importance of</p>

	<p>the extensive peatland setting, it can be argued that the site meets the WHS selection criteria as outlined in the attached report.</p>
3.7	<p>As an alternative to the competitive and challenging WHS designation it may also be possible to consider the Davagh area as a Biosphere Reserve which focus on improving the relationship between people and their local environment, globally. They are sites created by UNESCO that find creative ways for people and nature to thrive together. They act as extraordinary testing grounds to put into practice a revolutionary approach to managing our ecosystems sustainably for future generations. The UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status would apply to the wider landscape concentrating on the peatlands and water systems with the establishment of core protected areas, buffer zones and a transition or co-operation area.</p>
3.8	<p>The Davagh Dark Sky Park as a wider “in combination” bid incorporating archaeology and peatland at a landscape scale would allow for progression to the Tentative List. In doing so, it is feasible to consider the Dark Sky Park as a palimpsest of attributes that include the archaeology of Davagh, Beaghmore and Broughderg as being creative acts and a response to a sense of place and balance between earth and sky.</p>
3.9	<p>The process is technically complex, time consuming and will require dedicated human resources. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) acts on behalf of the UK as a state party to the World Heritage Convention and is responsible for nominating new sites for inscription by the World Heritage Committee. Each state party may only nominate a maximum of one new site per year. Most recently, the Jodrell Bank Observatory was inscribed as the UK’s 32nd World Heritage Site in 2019.</p>
3.10	<p>The tentative list is periodically reviewed by the government, typically every 10 years. When the next review of the tentative list is initiated, guidelines will be published with further information for prospective sites. As yet, the scope of this review and timeframes for its completion have not been set. DCMS will keep us informed with any updates.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: A designated annual budget and salary costs of Heritage Officer/consultants
	Human: Employment of a Heritage Officer or appointment of consultants to complete the process.
	Risk Management:
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:

5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To proceed and work towards seeking UNESCO World Heritage accreditation.
5.2	To establish a working group including all stakeholders.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1. Scoping Paper Attached Appendix 2. Response letter from Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport