

MID ULSTER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Tuesday 13 March 2018 at 10.00am in Ranfurly House, Dungannon

Attendees:

Chair Cllr S Clarke – MUDC
N Bell - Lissan House
M McGeehan – J&K Coaches
T McCrory – Heraldic Craft
A Irwin – Tourism NI

Apologies:

Cllr M Kearney – MUDC
N Somerville – Horses Welcome
A M McFerron – The Old Thatch Inn
R Mullholland – Ballyscullion Park
A McCreesh - Director of Business & Communities
M McKeown – Tourism Manager

Officers:

M Browne – Head of Tourism
M McGee - Business Engagement
M Beattie – Tourism
G Bell – Tourism Officer
C Bell- Tourism Officer
G Major – Tourist Information Supervisor
J Robinson – Manager HOTO/RH
A O’Keefe – Business Support

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 9 January 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2018 were circulated in advance and taken as read and correct.

Proposed: T McRory

Seconded: N Bell

2. Matters Arising - None

3. Preview of Tourism Hub/Digital Strategy – G Major

M Browne gave a brief background of the Tourism Hub concept:

- To inform industry and exchange information
- Share information from the industry
- Provide feedback to Council

A resource pack will be available to support industry and staff can provide assistance over the phone. M Browne stressed that in order for the hub to be useful it will require resource and urged industry to engage.

4. Tourism Ireland Presentation – Aubrey Irwin

A Irwin, Head of NI at Tourism Ireland (TIL) provided a presentation on Growing International Markets, taking in the following topics:

- Visitor Statistics
- Experiential Tourism
- Industry Opportunities
- Ireland.com/Community Hub

- New Development/Themes in the Marketplace

He spoke of the changes in collating stats from bed nights to expenditure as this gives an indication of real financial value of visitors to the region, rather than VFR (family and friends). M Browne informed the meeting of how MU collate stats and the issues involved. A Irwin encouraged tourism businesses to avail of all TIL platforms and stated that if a business has identified a real opportunity and wishes to target a particular market the NI Co-Operative Programme will provide funding to assist with this. He spoke of the importance of being digitally ready, sharing experiential offers, stories and good images, allowing 6 to 8 weeks in advance of events.

The Chair thanked A Irwin for attending and welcomed B Murphy, TNI, who will be attending each meeting.

5. Cluster Reports

Officers read each Cluster report, circulated in advance of the meeting

6. Brown Signage Update

G Bell updated members that an application had been forwarded to a self-catering property for completion, one hotel had been refused due to location on an A class road and a number of signs have been revamped around the US Grants Visitor attraction.

7. Mid Ulster Tourism Strategy

Head of Tourism gave a brief synopsis on achievements in the last year since the launch of the Tourism Strategy, which included funding applications to HLF to develop Home Ground trails in Bellaghy, the new Visitor Centre associated with the Dark Skies Project at Davagh and the Heart of Ancient Ulster projects. He also discussed the new Mid Ulster Digital Hub and collaborating with TNI to maximise distribution across platforms. Higher-level national online presence being considered by TNI and MUDC will await the outcome of this proposal. This could be innovative and potentially create one NI online solution.

8. Industry Update

8.1 Lissan House

N Bell informed that coaches now have access to drop off at the front of the house and spoke of events scheduled for Mothers Day and St Patricks Day, as well as several coach tour bookings.

8.2 Hill of the O'Neill & Ranfurly House

J Robinson outlined upcoming events, new interpretative signage on Hill of the O'Neill, participating in the Customer Learning Journey and awaiting the outcome of TNI grading scheme.

8.3 Heraldic Craft

Craft producer enquired as to whether a similar template to the Magherafelt craft group will be available in Dungannon and Cookstown. Head of Tourism responded that following a meeting with Head of Arts & Culture it was decided to invite quality craft producers with the opportunity to sell in the Bridewell VIC.

He hopes to bring a similar template to Dungannon in the future. He informed that Council now purchase corporate gift clocks from the local producer.

8.4 J & K Coaches

M McGeehan informed that there was an increase in Chinese visitors to Ireland and now was the time to plan tours and feed into London based tour operators. He hoped to have 2 days stop included for the Mid Ulster area.

Two members raised the issue of no assigned coach parking in the three main town centres of mid ulster, stating that this was detrimental to not only day groups visiting but also the night-time economy.

9. District Wide Monitoring Results

Tourist Information Supervisor outlined the Visitor Information Stats from January – February 2017 and district wide Monitoring Results 2017, circulated in advance of the meeting. He informed that no comparisons could be made until figures for the same quarter in 2018 were released. He advised that all staff in Council VIC's are now trained to use the same method in collating statistics.

10. TDG & Cluster Review

Business Engagement Officer circulated and read the Mid Ulster TDG & Clusters Workshop and Survey Report prepared by Community Places dated February 18. Head of Tourism gave a brief background to the purpose of the report, to look at what has been successful or not and to make recommendations moving forward.

Head of Tourism raised the idea of a Mid Ulster tourism brand to the meeting as it was raised during the workshop. He stated that he felt that a brand was in contradiction of the Tourism Strategy and the three themes. Following discussions, it was agreed to procure a branding expert.

B Murphy noted that TNI are looking at branding the whole of N Ireland and advised that mid Ulster would have greater positioning within a NI brand.

11. Any Other Business

Chair requested that reappointment of the position of Chair/Vice-chair be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

Meeting ended at 12.10pm.

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 8 May 2018 at 10.00am Mid Ulster Council Offices, Magherafelt