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| Report on | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International Women’s Day Events – March 2024 2. Rural Regeneration and Business Support Funding 3. Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes – 21.2.24 4. Maghera Town Centre Forum Minutes – 25.9.23 5. Tourism Development Group Minutes – 10.1.24 6. N2/A5 Cross Border Committee Minutes – 30.11.23 |
| Date of Meeting | Thursday 16 th May 2024 |
| Reporting Officer | Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes |

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| 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"/> |

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| 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>International Women’s Day Events – March 2024</p> <p>Mid Ulster District Council organised two events to celebrate International Women’s Day 2024. The events took place on Wednesday 6 March 2024 at the Royal Hotel, Cookstown and Wednesday 13 March 2024 at Ryandale Inn, Moy.</p> |
| 2.2 | <p>Rural Regeneration and Business Support</p> <p>At the Development Committee in April 2024, Members requested further research be carried out on regeneration and businesses support funding for rural areas. Officers have engaged with a Department for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), Department for Communities (DFC) and Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN).</p> <p>Previously funding for the regeneration of rural settlements had been funded via the former Rural Development Programme, funded by DAERA. Since the Rural</p> |

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| | <p>Development Programme ended, this has resulted in more limited funding opportunities being made available to support rural areas.</p> |
| 2.3 | <p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes – 21 February 2024</p> <p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum was established in 2018 to develop a partnership approach for the development and delivery of key town centre initiatives. The Forum meets at regular intervals throughout the year.</p> |
| 2.4 | <p>Maghera Town Centre Forum Minutes – 25 September 2023</p> <p>Maghera Town Centre Forum was established in 2018 to develop a partnership approach for the development and delivery of key town centre initiatives. The Forum meets at regular intervals throughout the year.</p> |
| 2.5 | <p>Tourism Development Group Minutes – 10 January 2024</p> <p>The Tourism Development Group (TDG) was established to create a working forum between Council and private sector businesses. The TDG will assist with policy development and support the implementation of Council’s Tourism Strategy and associated work in order to create economic growth, increase visitor numbers and create employment. The group meet on a bi-monthly basis and as per the agreed Terms of Reference all business will be reported to Council through the Development Committee.</p> |
| 2.6 | <p>A5/N2/TEN-T Cross Border Committee Minutes – 30 November 2023</p> <p>The A5/N2/TEN-T Cross Border Committee was established in 2019 to lobby for the delivery of infrastructure improvements and upgrades to the N2/A5/TEN-T route from Dublin to the Northwest and serving the border region and Northern Ireland, with a particular emphasis on projects on the N2/A5/TEN-T corridor in the border region and Northern Ireland.</p> <p>There are 5 Councils represented - Derry City and Strabane District Council, Donegal County Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Mid Ulster District Council and Monaghan County Council – each Council nominates up to 4 Members to the Committee.</p> |
| 3.0 | <p>Main Report</p> |
| 3.1 | <p>International Women’s Day Events – March 2024</p> <p>Two successful events to celebrate International Women’s Day 2024, took place on Wednesday 6 March 2024 at the Royal Hotel, Cookstown and Wednesday 13 March 2024, in the Ryandale Inn, Moy. All funds raised was donated to the Chair’s chosen charity for the event; ‘Causeway and Mid Ulster Women’s Aid’.</p> |

Over 265 women attended over the two evenings. The events celebrating International Women's Day 2024 supported this year's theme, 'Inspire Inclusion'.

The Chair, Councillor Dominic Molloy and Deputy Chair, Councillor Meta Graham welcomed guests to both events and thanked attendees for their support.

At the first event on Wednesday 6 March 2024 in The Royal Hotel, Cookstown, Lynda Bryans (Journalist and Director of Belfast Metropolitan College) and Jade Bradley (Burnout Recovery Specialist, Nutritionist & Health Coach) took to the stage, with Carol Doey acting as MC.

The second event was held on Wednesday 13 March 2024 at the Ryandale Inn, Moy. Vivian McKinnon, Award-Winning Public Speaker and Post Traumatic Growth Specialist and Tara Grimes, Nutritionist and accredited Personal Trainer were the main speakers, with Carol Doey acting as MC again.

A representative from 'Causeway and Mid Ulster Women's Aid' also spoke at each event and highlighted the significant challenges facing the charity with growing numbers of women coming forward for help.

The total proceeds raised via ticket sales over the two nights was £892.69.

3.2 Rural Regeneration and Business Support Funding

The following funding calls are currently open to rural villages and businesses at present.

1. Village Catalyst Scheme

The Village Catalyst grant scheme is a partnership initiative between the Department for Communities (DfC), the Department for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF), and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

Funding is open to charities, social enterprises and other not-for-profit groups in rural villages with a population under 5,000 people, who want to tackle rural poverty and social isolation in their area, by developing a sustainable use for a disused historic building in their area.

Support is available for communities to:

- carry out viability work (up to £10k), (Expression of Interest at [The Architectural Heritage Fund\(external link opens in a new window / tab\)](#))
- develop their plans (up to £20k), (Expression of Interest at [The Architectural Heritage Fund\(external link opens in a new window / tab\)](#))
- deliver their project (up to £200k).

Please note: Council is not eligible to apply to this scheme.

2. Peace Plus: Measure 4.2 Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion Programme

- Current call is open until 5pm on 23 May 2024

Objective of call – Create a more cohesive society, through an increased provision of shared space and services in rural areas.

Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion is identified as;

- Community Development Resource
- Family Support Hubs
- Social Enterprise
- Green Infrastructure
- Social Farming

Key criteria of the fund will require applications to demonstrate cross – community/cross border collaboration leading to increased integration and show cohesive community.

It is anticipated that the funding for infrastructure work, will be kept to a minimum.

Jointly developed solutions/projects implies the involvement of organisations from at least two participating jurisdictions during the drafting and design process.

Following discussions with our cross-border funding partner, ICBAN, they have advised Council that they do not have the available staff resources to commit to developing an application on behalf of interested Member Councils (north and south) during this current open call.

Some early conversations, prior to the call opening, suggested there may be a desire to consider 'mobile hubs' being located within rural areas across the ICBAN region, thereby, it was noted that further feasibility work would be required prior to the submission of a project application.

It is important to note that these cross-border programmes, take a lead in time of approximately six months, including finding suitable cross-border partners, and preparing comprehensive bids, prior to submission.

3. Digital Transformation Flexible Fund

The Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) is delivered by all local authorities in Northern Ireland under the Full Fibre Northern Ireland Consortium (FFNI) and supported by Invest NI. The project is part funded by the NI Executive, UK Government, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and all local authorities in Northern Ireland.

The DTFF offers eligible businesses and social enterprises support to fund a digital transformation project.

The programme provides grants between £5,000 to £20,000 and are designed to help small and micro business accelerate their digital transformation ambitions.

If eligible, the grant will fund up to 70% of the cost of a project, with 30% match funding from the applicant.

The DTFF programme is a competitive process where proposals are compared to each other to determine those that offer the biggest potential for business growth and digital transformation.

- Funding Call 1 - the scheme awarded funding to 12 businesses.
- Funding Call 2 - 29 expressions of interest were received and are currently being screened and if eligible, will be invited to apply.
- Funding Call 3 - expressions of interest will open on 3 June 2024.

4. Go Succeed Business Growth Support Programme

Go Succeed is the new go-to source for expert business advice, led by the eleven Councils in NI.

Whether you're a budding entrepreneur thinking of starting out; are looking to grow your business; or are planning to scale up; a team of advisors will provide tailored support and guidance to help you achieve your business goals.

Go Succeed – Start Up

You have a great idea but you're not sure how to turn it into a business, or you have already started out in business and require mentorship on your next steps. Our Go Succeed Start experts will help you to create a business plan, seek funding and put all the foundations in place to get your business up and running

Go Succeed – Grow Your Business

Your business is already established and is now ready to expand, but growth is slow and you're not sure how to progress. Our Go Succeed Grow experts have seen it all before in just about every sector, so they'll provide tailored support to help shorten the journey to business growth.

Go Succeed – Scale

Your business is ready to go to the next level locally and internationally, but you need guidance, support or resources to achieve your ambitions. Our Go Succeed Scale industry experts will help tailor your plans to penetrate new markets, identify investment opportunities and scale up your operations.

To apply visit: [Go Succeed](#) or call 0800 027 0639.

5. Future DAERA Programmes - Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework

At present DAERA is developing a Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme Action Plan for 2024/2025.

Programmes below are subject to Ministerial Approval from DAERA, and being granted a budget by the NI Executive budget.

- **Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme** and;
- **Rural Business Development Grant Scheme** (delivered by Councils).

Subject also to the necessary permissions being granted above, DAERA has also advised that through their TRPSI Programme, it is their intention to continue to support the Rural Community Development infrastructure through funding for the **Rural Support Networks**, whilst also supporting the work the **Rural Support Charity** to assist farmers and farm families who are experiencing farm business or emotional stress.

DAERA will also continue to deliver the **Village Catalyst Programme** in conjunction with colleagues in DfC as noted earlier in the report.

Also in conjunction with DfC, DfI, and DAERA will continue to **monitor the delivery of the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Scheme** which is being delivered by Councils.

Further to this delivery work, DAERA's Rural Affairs Division will continue to work on **developing a future Rural Policy for NI**, to strengthen the rural position across government in advocating for rural, as well as monitoring compliance with the Rural Needs Act.

6. Covid Small Settlements Revitalisation Programme

In December 2022, funding was secured by Government Departments DFI/DFC/DAERA under Covid Small Settlement Regeneration Project, to deliver capital interventions across small settlements where the population is between 1,000 – 4,999.

A number of projects are currently being delivered in the Mid Ulster District, these include; *Capital works at Castlecaufield Recreation area and Allotments, Manor Park Moneymore, Coalisland Canal, Bellaghy Walking Trail & Recreation area, Clady Recreation Area and Moy 4G.*

Currently, no additional funding has been earmarked to continue schemes of this nature.

In summary, to warrant further discussion on future funding for rural and urban areas, representatives from DAERA and DFC will attend the meeting which Members requested be convened to discuss dereliction / vacancy levels. This virtual meeting will be inclusive of all 40 Members and is scheduled to take place on 20 May 2024. It will provide Members with a direct opportunity to engage with DAERA and DFC officials and lobby for greater levels of regeneration funding to be made available.

On a separate business matter, the Council Chairman, Councillor Dominic Molloy, is **Launching a number of new Mid Ulster Business Programmes** on behalf of Council, in the Burnavon Theatre, Cookstown on **Friday 17 May 2024 from 11am** (registration opens 10:45am) to 12noon with lunch and an opportunity to network afterwards with a wide range of business support agencies including; Invest NI, InterTradeIreland, Go Succeed, Digital Transformation Flexible Fund, Fast Followers, Mid Ulster Enterprise Agencies, Social Enterprise NI, South West College and Northern Regional College.

Invitations have been issued to all Members and a cross-section of Mid Ulster's business community. If Members have not yet responded, we would be grateful if you could let us know your availability by emailing Emma Hughes emma.hughes@midulstercouncil.org to advise of your plans.

- 3.3 Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes – 21 February 2024**
Present minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum meeting held on 21 February 2024 (**Appendix 1**).
- 3.4 Maghera Town Centre Forum Minutes – 25 September 2023**
Present minutes of Maghera Town Centre Forum meeting held on 25 September 2023 (**Appendix 2**).
- 3.5 Tourism Development Group Minutes – 10 January 2024**
Present minutes of the Tourism Development Group meeting held on 10 January 2024 (**Appendix 3**).
- 3.6 A5/N2/TEN-T Cross Border Committee Minutes – 30 November 2023**
The above Committee meets quarterly, and the role of Chair is rotated annually, with the Chair's Council providing the secretariat. Councillor Gael Gildernew from Mid Ulster District Council undertook the role of Chair for 2024. Present minutes of the A5/N2/TEN-T Cross Border Committee meeting held on 30 November 2023 (**Appendix 4**).

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| 4.0 | Other Considerations |
| 4.1 | Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications |
| 4.2 | Financial: |
| | Human: Officer time. |
| | Risk Management: N/A |
| 4.2 | Screening & Impact Assessments |
| | Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A |
| | Rural Needs Implications: N/A |
| 5.0 | Recommendation(s) |
| | It is recommended that Members; |
| 5.1 | International Women’s Day Events – March 2024 Note update on Council’s International Women’s Day Events in March 2024. |
| 5.2 | Rural Regeneration and Business Support Funding Note update on a range of rural regeneration and business support funding opportunities. |
| 5.3 | Coalisland Town Centre Forum - 21 February 2024 Note Coalisland Town Centre Forum minutes held on 21 February 2024 |
| 5.4 | Maghera Town Centre Forum - 25 September 2023 Note Maghera Town Centre Forum minutes held on 25 September 2023 |
| 5.5 | Tourism Development Group Minutes – 10 January 2024 Note Mid Ulster Tourism Development Group minutes held on 10 January 2024. |
| 5.6 | A5/N2/TEN-T Cross Border Committee Minutes – 30 November 2023 Note N2/A5 Cross Border Committee minutes held on 30 November 2023. |
| 6.0 | Documents Attached & References |
| | Appendix 1 – Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 21.2.24 |

Appendix 2 – Maghera Town Centre Forum Minutes - 25.9.23

Appendix 3 – Mid Ulster Tourism Development Group Minutes - 10.1.24

Appendix 4 – N2/A5 Cross Border Committee Minutes - 30.11.23