

MID ULSTER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT GROUP
Thursday 3rd February 2022 at 10:00am via Zoom

Present

Hugh McCloy	Tourism Services (Vice Chair)
Cllr Niamh Doris	Mid Ulster District Council
Cllr Martin Kearney	Mid Ulster District Council
Cllr Sean Clarke	Mid Ulster District Council
Simon Wiggins	Education & Skills SWC
Norman Bell	Visitor Attractions
Claire Murray	Hospitality
Richard Mulholland	Mid Ulster Cluster
Terry McCrory	Crafts
Dermot Friel/Cathy O'Neill	Hospitality
Martin Graham	Tourism NI
Mary McKeown	Mid Ulster District Council
Mary McGee	Mid Ulster District Council
Martha Beattie	Mid Ulster District Council
Charmain Bell	Mid Ulster District Council
Genevieve Bell	Mid Ulster District Council
Allison O'Keefe	Mid Ulster District Council
Grace Booth	Mid Ulster District Council

	DISCUSSION	ACTIONS
	<p>Apologies Fiona McKeown, Mid Ulster District Council Cllr F Burton, Mid Ulster District Council Tony McCance, Mid Ulster District Council Shauna McElhone, J&K Coaches Tanya Purvis, SWC</p>	
1.	<p>Minutes of Meeting held on 25th November 2021 Circulated in advance of the meeting</p> <p><i>Proposed: Richard Mulholland Seconded: Cllr Sean Clarke</i></p>	
2.	<p>Matters Arising – Lumfords Glen M McKeown discussed the Sliabh Beagh Partnership. Council had meetings with Monaghan and Fermanagh & Omagh District Council. M McKeown stated she and Cllr F</p>	

Burton had met and discussed funding for the scoping study. Cllr F Burton had requested that Lumfords Glen be included in this.

3. Industry Update – TDG Members

Embrace Tours

Increase in tour operators, with provisional dates booked from operators across NI and southern counties.

Ballyscullion Park

Wedding bookings have increased in Ballyscullion Park, with 75 weddings booked for this year 2022. Richard has welcomed some new business and held 60 lunches this year.

Friels Bar & Restaurant

Friel's has seen a recent increase in April bookings from Tour Operators for FAM trips. Friel's have appointed a new chef and had many bookings in the restaurant in January.

M McKeown advised that the Tourism department are available if anyone needed assistance with visitor experiences.

Deli on the Green

C Murray commented that the Deli had a great Christmas in terms of table bookings, however it was not what it would have been pre-covid. There is a lack of night time trade due to customers still being worried about the virus and that the requirement for covid certs had kept customers away.

C Murray also commented on rising costs of utility bills which has had an impact on the industry.

In response to M McKeown's question C Murray asked could she speak to a councillor about the rising VAT prices and that in spite of this they felt optimistic for the future as they were trying to figure out how best to cut costs. M Graham advised contacting NI Tourism Alliance as they are constantly pushing this item on their agenda.

Tourism NI

- 12 applications for the TNI Capital Scheme from the MUDC area received. Letters of offer to be sent out soon.
- Web development programme progressing with letters of offer to be sent out.

Cllr N Doris to send C Murray's query to Finance Minister C Murphy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched the HATs Skills and Recruitment programme • Developed a range of innovative social media projects through recognising gaps in the market. • Emphasis on a 'Sustainable Tourism Strategy' and promotion of scenery and outstanding beauty around the Mid Ulster area. M Graham commented on the 5-10% budget cuts and the importance of lobbying for financial support. • Tourism Ireland Green Button Campaign launched <p><u>South West College</u> S Wiggins discussed the launch of a new chef boot camp across the Dungannon and Enniskillen campuses. Encouraging people with little or no experience in the industry to join. The boot camp starts at the end of Feb for 4 weeks.</p> <p>There is also an open day in Dungannon on 22nd & 23rd February for students.</p> <p><u>Killymoon Castle</u> N Bell addressed Covid & thanked MUDC for all their help with the publicity grant. Tommys Kitchen is to re-open at Easter, tours of the castle are picking up with small group bookings more popular now than large coach parties. People are also not booking anything too far in advance.</p> <p>N Bell commented on how hotels in Cookstown can greatly benefit from the Cookstown 100 in April, which will boost visitor numbers to the area.</p> <p>M McKeown agreed and mentioned the late opening hours in the Burnavon around the time of the Cookstown 100 and how the Burnavon would promote the event.</p> <p>Additional comments: H McCloy commented on the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and how people are more conscious of their travel and the importance of businesses promoting their green credentials. M Graham outlined Tourism NI's programmes of education and that in the future they would be able to certify businesses as 'green' if they met a certain criteria. TNI are working with Conscious Travel to promote sustainable tourism.</p> <p>M McGee briefly discussed the funding from Invest NI on the collaborative growth scheme – SHHP Cluster.</p>	<p>Tourism officers to promote the boot camp among their hospitality businesses</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Business Engagement Programme</p>	

M McGee acknowledged support for the industry received by Tourism NI. In addition discussed the new portal on the TNI website to register vacancies and a webinar to be held on 4th February.

M McGee then discussed cluster meetings and the Market Access Programme IMAP which covers America & Europe which comes with 80% funding. M McGee also stated that The Invest NI Innovation 5k voucher scheme had a deadline of 11th Feb and applications across all sectors were welcome. There was also an emphasis on pushing promotions and offers through e-zines.

Black Water/Lough Neagh Dredging

4.1

Cllr N Doris highlighted that Cllr K Buchanan and Cllr S O'Dowd had raised the issue of the ownership of Lough Neagh and stressed the importance of cross party support for this and the dredging of the lough. Cllr N Doris mentioned that there could be potential funding available for the dredging through bidding for support through N Mallon.

M McKeown commented on MUDC's work with G Darby and the proposal of the feasibility study. MUDC have spoken to stakeholders i.e. restaurants such as Tomneys Bar & The Ryandale and local fisherman on the matter. MUDC are working collaboratively with ABC Council to address the challenges of dredging the BW or looking at option b) dredging the Maghery side of the lough. M McKeown stated that MUDC could potentially secure funding for the project from DFI. The cost of waste disposal was also to be discussed at the meetings.

M McKeown mentioned the vast impact the dredging of the lough could have on the visitor experience as the boat tour could potentially start in Scotland and travel through Lough Neagh into the Blackwater river and onwards.

C Murray asked how the council can protect the ecology of the Lough Neagh as industry waste is damaging the lough. Cllr N Doris highlighted the concern of taking public ownership of the bed of the river and the soil and how this may help take control of the issue.

Cllr S Clarke mentioned the debate on land use and the importance of an integrated approach. In addition it was noted that river pollution has become a major issue over time.

<p>5.</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p> <p>5.3</p> <p>5.4</p>	<p>M McKeown stated that MUDC had the support of Lough Neagh Partnership and that W Burke & G Darby were experts in the field and had extensive knowledge on the biodiversity of the lough.</p> <p>Cluster Reports In addition to the Officers reports circulated in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>H McCloy briefly outlined each report and invited each officer to make any further comments.</p> <p><u>SHHP Cluster</u> H McCloy mentioned a Norwegian FAM Trip (Katrina Wiig, Unikereiser).</p> <p><u>Archaeological, History & Heritage Cluster</u> Cllr N Doris asked about the Hugh O'Neill Trail, M McKeown commented there were no more updates.</p> <p><u>Outdoor & Events Cluster</u> M Graham thanked Council for funding and mentioned the enhancement of the displays at OM. M McKeown discussed the walking festival and emphasized a focus on the Sperrins Walk and the importance of getting people to sign up to the Sperrins Walk.</p> <p><u>Hoteliers Cluster</u> C Murray acknowledged that engagement in the industry is hard and commented on resource issues such as staffing & time in order to participate council events such as the 2 day workshop (Taste Mid Ulster Programme). D Friel agreed and that his staff are down to a 5 day week due to lack of resources.</p> <p>M McGee mentioned the Market Led Programme and the Council's budget deadline of the end of March. M McGee acknowledged C Murrays point regarding businesses facing resource constraints.</p> <p><u>District Wide Monitoring Results</u> M McKeown read through the report.</p> <p>N Bell asked about the fault at Lissan House, M McKeown advised to speak to the Parks department on the monitors in the parks.</p> <p>M Graham commented on the increase in interest of glamping pods and how this could boost tourism/fishing in</p>	<p>M McKeown follow up with W Burke & G Darby to attend a future TDG meeting to do a presentation on Lough Neagh</p>
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<p>6.</p>	<p>the area. D Friel agreed that glamping would boost tourism in the area.</p> <p>H McCloy commented on the difficult parking at Beaghmore and that people should be encouraged to enter the solar walk from the car park at the Observatory. Cllr S Clarke agreed with these points and that parking should be encouraged at Davagh carpark. Cllr S Clarke also said that cycle routes should be provided in Davagh and that bikes aren't permitted on the solar walk.</p> <p>R Mulholland thanked the council for their hard work in the SHHP cluster and C O'Neill extended thanks to Kate Taylor for script writing.</p> <p>TNI Market Led Product Development Programme M McKeown highlighted the food and drink offering and mentioned update on Taste Mid Ulster. M McGee commented on the success of the cookery demo held before Christmas, with B Duffin in Magherafelt, Sean Owens in Cookstown and Norah Brown In Dungannon.</p> <p>M McGee outlined Tourism's current market led programme and the digital food trail. Tourism are recruiting 20 restaurants to participate, with 10 restaurants recruited so far. Restaurants are also encouraged to produce their signature dish using local suppliers. They will partake in a mystery shopper experience with Spotcheck NI. M McGee outlined the mystery shopping experience and benefits.</p> <p>M McGee said that a specification for photography had went out and the company would be appointed next week. Also as part of the Taste Mid Ulster programme a Banquet event was being organised for 6th April. The deadline for the specification on the Banquet is 30th March.</p> <p><u>Living History</u> G Bell said that Emma Hetherington is doing the script writing for the Banquet, to be completed by the end of Feb and to include drama and comedy. G Bell highlighted the important of the costume spec corresponding with the script writing to represent the different eras.</p> <p>M McKeown mentioned the 2 outdoor shows for OM, 1 which was held before Christmas and the 2nd show 'To the Moon and Back' which would involve a storyboard. This is to be launched with funding from Tourism NI.</p>	<p>Invitations to be sent to media and travel industry</p>
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8.	<p>M McKeown commented on the progress made on the new visit Mid Ulster website and on the funding from TNI. M McKeown also said there was a key focus on TV and cinema advertisements, with outdoor adverts for Southern counties. There is a focus on entering new markets and border counties, with the use of digital platforms and local radio for promotions.</p> <p>M McKeown added that all tourism social media platforms will be used to advertise and that they will also be using influencers.</p>	
9.	<p>Capital Projects</p> <p>M McKeown shared images of the capital projects and spoke about the OM tour bookings adding that smaller group sizes were more popular due to Covid. There was a brief discussion on OM tours and the success of the OM Odyssey light show held in October.</p> <p>Projects currently underway from March onwards, include the solar walk and archeological walk with the Sperrins sculpture trail to be completed by May.</p>	
10.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>M McGee mentioned plans to restructure the TDG, this will roll out over the coming months.</p> <p>D Friel raised issue of damage to Tirkane. M McKeown advised Dermot to contact M Gormley.</p> <p>R Mullholland raise issue of brown signs pointing in wrong direction via Ballyscullion Road.</p>	
11.	<p>Date of next meeting: Tuesday 12th April at 11.30am via Teams</p>	<p>G Bell to speak to DFI Roads on brown signage issue.</p>

Mid Ulster Council Tourism Development Group Officers Cluster Report – 3rd February 2022

1. SEAMUS HEANEY CLUSTER – M MCGEE/C BELL

The group met on 14th December online.

The group are preparing to interview applicants to deliver their Phase 2 Collaborative Growth programme. Cathy O’Neill gave the group an update on applicants to date. Scoring of tenders is planned for 21st December at Ballyscullion Park with interviews scheduled for 13th January 2022.

This programme funded by Invest NI will allow the group to appoint a facilitator to work with them for the next 30 months and deliver on four key work streams namely:

Work stream One - Commercialisation/Product

Work stream Two - Communication

Work stream Three – Skills

Work stream Four – Governance

The NI Tour Guides are planning a fam trip to Mid Ulster with 20-30 guides, provisional date for this is late February 2022. This FAM will try to cover as many businesses as possible across the region.

Norwegian Company Unike Reiser have a FAM trip planned for early in the New Year and members agreed to host representatives from this company.

Members outlined their business updates with the continuing prevalence of Covid and associated restrictions playing havoc with bookings both short and long term.

The group specifically thanked Michael Browne for all the work he has done supporting the individual businesses and the cluster over the year

2. ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY & HERITAGE CLUSTER – G BELL/M MCKEOWN

The cluster group met virtually on Thursday 20th January 2022.

DEARA Collaborative Experiential Programme – Rural Tourism, Heritage

Kate Taylor is nearing an end of her work with the businesses who were successful in Phase 1. The feedback is very positive. TNI are in the process of auditing the existing experiences, assessing them and giving recommendations. Six are currently being worked on in the Heritage side with two ready to go to TNI, hopefully to be brand aligned. Pilots for these experiences will run from February to the end of March. An invitation will be forwarded to those interested in taking part in the pilot.

Tourism NI, Delivery of Market Led Product Development Programme 2021- 22TNI

The Living history and script writing element under this Programme is developing well and Emma Heatherington is working up scripts for approximately 15 heritage sites and locations. All scripts should be completed by mid to end of February.

To complement the script writing element under this Programme a costume specification is currently being prepared and will be completed by the end of March 2022.

Update from Cluster Members

Interaction in the group continues to be positive and most cluster members are continuing to improve on their product and experience.

A number of businesses have indicated that bookings are beginning to come in for the Spring-Summer season.

3. OUTDOOR & EVENTS CLUSTER – G MAJOR/S ARBUTHNOT

Mid Ulster are working with Sperrins Partnership and partner councils, Derry City and Strabane DC, Causeway Coast and Glens and Fermanagh and Omagh DC, to look at options to develop a Sperrins Hill Walking Festival taking across the four regions. A Sperrins Walking Festival Working Group has been set up to progress this initiative and options are being scoped out for delivery. It is anticipated that the festival will take place in 2022/23. Mid Ulster, along with Derry City and Strabane DC, have proposed running the festival in September 22, however, options are still to be confirmed. Fermanagh and Omagh had budget to host their annual walking event at the end of March and sought permission to continue with this event under the umbrella of the Sperrins Partnership, with the auspice of a three council event in 2022/23 financial year.

A Quotation exercise is also being carried out by the Tourism Manager to develop a suite of hill walking photography stills and videos, including drones, which will be used to highlight and promote Hillwalking in the Sperrins through marketing campaigns and will also strengthen mid Ulster's section when marketing the Hill Walking Festival.

4. HOTELIERS CLUSTER – CBELL/M MCGEE

The Covid restrictions have continued to create turmoil particularly for the hospitality industry and they have been hugely affected by closure and restrictions.

Council have secured funding as part of the Market led Programme to roll out a Mid Ulster Food & Drink Programme across the region, this will cover the following:

- Food & Drink Programme
- Food Experience Development
- Taste Mid Ulster Food Trail
- Banquet on Hill Of The O'Neill

Recruitment of 20 restaurants to feature in the Food Trail is well underway and it is planned that these businesses will join with the hoteliers and form the nucleus of a revised Food & Drink Cluster as per this programme.

3. MINUTES OF TOWN CENTRE FORUM MEETING 30 NOVEMBER 2021

It was proposed by U Marshall and seconded by Cllr McNamee to ADOPT the minutes of the Town Centre Forum Meeting held on 30 November 2021.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. UPDATE ON TOWN CENTRE RECOVERY PLAN/MID ULSTER TOWN CENTRE PROJECTS

The Town Centre Managers Progress Report had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. M McCullagh provided an update on Mid Ulster Town Centre Projects as follows:

a) Marketing & Promotion

The marketing and promotion which took place for the Christmas period 2021 included:

- Promotion of Mid Ulster Gift Card through local press, billboards, social channels and radio campaign. Leaflets were also printed and delivered to local businesses encouraging them to sign up.
- Christmas shopping campaign was conducted and included local press adverts, billboards, social media, radio and a tv advert promoting shopping in Mid Ulster. Small Business Saturday was also promoted.
- A virtual Christmas lights switch on took place on Friday 26 November 2021.
- Additional Christmas activities included promotion of activities taking place in the town centre on 4, 11 & 18 December 2021 from 12 Noon – 3pm which included Town Centre Music, Street Theatre in Shop Window (Poundstretcher window on William Street) from the Bardic Theatre & Showstoppers; and a Cookery Demonstration on 4 December.

U Marshall noted that we are moving towards recovery mode and asked if the Cookstown Continental Market will take place this year. Cllr McNamee advised that this was discussed at the January Development Committee. A report is being prepared and will be brought to the February Development Committee for decision.

M McCullagh advised members that Michael Browne has retired from Mid Ulster District Council. Kieran Gordon is the Assistant Director Health, Leisure and Wellbeing who will be responsible for Council events. The provisional date for the Continental Market at present is Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th May 2022.

b) Business Support

(i) Mid Ulster Gift Card Scheme

Miconex have been employed to develop and deliver the Mid Ulster District Council's Gift Card Scheme for a minimum term contract of 3 years.

To date 176 businesses/venues have signed up to the Scheme and Council continue to liaise with local businesses encouraging them to sign up and advising on the free participation whilst locking in spend to the local economy.

Cards can be purchased online or blank cards are available from Council venues – namely Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre, Cookstown; Ranfurly House, Dungannon; and Bridewell, Magherafelt. Money must be uploaded to the cards online. The cards are for single use and cannot be topped up – if looking for additional value then a new card must be purchased.

Members requested that a value for spend in Cookstown is sought to update at next meeting.

(ii) Mid Ulster Business Marketing Scheme

M McCullagh advised that the small grants 'Mid Ulster Business Marketing Scheme' closed for applications on Monday 10 January 2021 at 4pm.

Businesses were able to apply for revenue grants of up to £300, on a first come, first served basis until the funding was fully allocated. The Scheme aimed to assist businesses with their marketing efforts as they recover from the effects of the pandemic and includes support towards developing improved online presence, click and collect services, promotional activity, merchandising and window displays, use of influencers/vloggers/bloggers etc.

To date 610 Letters of Offer have been issued at a value of £181,946. Monies have to be spent and claimed within the next 6 weeks.

c) Physical Regeneration/Improving Infrastructure

(i) Rural Regeneration Projects

Under the Rural Development Programme a total of 37 villages accessed funding to develop and deliver projects identified through their respective village plans. To date projects have been identified through the village planning process and consultation with the local community groups to determine projects that can access grant aid through the Programme.

A professional led design consultancy team was appointed to commence design schemes for the various projects identified in the villages. A cross council working

group has been established for the lifetime of the project. Economic Development Officers are working alongside Technical Services to deliver the schemes.

36 villages works have been completed. Assistance has been provided to 10 of the 11 villages in the former Cookstown District Council area. Projects have been completed in Ardboe, Ballyronan, Orritor, Lissan, Drumullan, Coagh, Rock, Sandholes, Moortown and Pomeroy. Broughderg is the only outstanding village at present and works have commenced.

(ii) Mid Ulster Town and Village Spruce Up Scheme

Mid Ulster Town and Village Spruce Up Scheme offers discretionary grants of up to 75% eligible costs, capped at £5,000 per property for external and/or internal improvements. Knox and Clayton were appointed to assist in the delivery i.e. assessment of applications and management and monitoring of the successful projects.

The Scheme is now in year 3, Phase 3. Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects are now complete. In April 2021, 73 Letters of Offer were issued to businesses under Phase 3 to a total value of £250,000. To date 36 have been completed to the value of £120,071.

Approval has been sought at Council meeting to deliver the final phase, Phase 4. A specification has been prepared to appoint an Architect as the previous contract period has come to an end. Once appointed, Council will contact the outstanding businesses on Phase 4 with total value of £150,000 to ascertain if they wish to avail of the funding provided no works as per their application has been completed.

(iii) Cookstown Saturday Market

A quotation has been prepared seeking to appoint a Consultant(s)/Company to conduct a Scoping Study and to develop an Action Plan for Cookstown Saturday Market. The closing date for responses is Friday 28 January 2022.

The Forum will be a consultee as part of the consultation process. Members will be update in advance of this.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) NI High Street Voucher Scheme

M McCullagh provided a brief synopsis of the £100 High Street Voucher Scheme in Cookstown. Businesses within the retail core had reported spend in their respective businesses.

G Breen stated that there was a lot of spend in Tesco. He advised families were availing of the voucher to buy groceries. He stated that if feedback is requested, it should be noted that Government should encourage shopping in local, small independent retailers/town centres rather than large retailers.

U Marshall also stated that a lot of vouchers were spent with oil companies.

(ii) Cookstown Town Centre Forum Membership

M McCullagh advised that she contacted all members of the Forum who have not been in attendance at the last number of meetings. Responses included that due to them being virtual and timing of meetings. Professional sector is currently vacant. Cllr Wilson proposed that the membership of the independent retailers should be extended, this was seconded by Cllr McNamee. Business names were listed and it was agreed M McCullagh liaised with the potential businesses and will provide an update at the next meeting.

(iii) Street Cleaning

M McCullagh advised that there will be a deep cleanse of the paved public realm areas of the town centre which is anticipated to take place before the end of March 2022.

(iv) Other Business

U Marshall requested that the Burnavon is contacted to raise the issue of cars parking in the scene doc entrance as they are blocking the access to the dropped kerbs, which is providing difficulties.

Cllr McNamee requested that M McCullagh raise these concerns with the Burnavon staff.

7. DATE & TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Cllr McNamee thanked members for attending. The next meeting is due to take place on 23 March 2022 – it is anticipated that Council will be in a better position in relation to restrictions and if possible meeting can be held in Council venue.

M McCullagh advised that there may be a requirement for a meeting prior to this to take part in the consultation process in relation to the scoping study and action plan for the Cookstown Saturday Market. Members will be notified in advance.

The meeting ended at 1.10pm

APPENDIX 3

PROCEEDS RAISED FROM MID ULSTER COUNCIL'S EVENTS TO CELEBRATE THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN HANDED OVER TO AIR AMBULANCE NI



Councillor McLean, Council Chairman, presents cheque to Air Ambulance NI for £1,820. This money was raised from the proceeds of Council's two events in March 2022 to Celebrate the Achievements of Women.