



10 January 2024

Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Development Committee to be held in The Chamber, Cookstown and by virtual means at Burn Road, Cookstown BT80 8DT on Wednesday, 10 January 2024 at 19:00 to transact the business noted below.

A link to join the meeting through the Council's remote meeting platform will follow.

Yours faithfully

Adrian McCreesh
Chief Executive

AGENDA

OPEN BUSINESS

1. Notice of Recording
This meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast on the Council's You Tube site [Live Broadcast Link](#)
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
Members should declare any financial and non-financial interests they have in the items of business for consideration, identifying the relevant agenda item and the nature of their interest.
4. Chair's Business
5. Deputation: Volunteer Now

Matters for Decision

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 6. | Development Report | 3 - 36 |
| 7. | Extension to the Partnership Liaison Officer post shared between Councils and HSENI | 37 - 38 |
| 8. | Economic Development Report - OBFD | 39 - 138 |

Matters for Information

- | | | |
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| 9. | Minutes of Development Committee held on 6 December 2023 | 139 - 150 |
| 10. | Environmental Health Service Update | 151 - 154 |

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| 11. | Centre for Ageing Better UK Annual Conference | 155 - 174 |
| 12. | Update on Concept for lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera | 175 - 266 |
| 13. | Economic Development Report - OBF | 267 - 300 |

Items restricted in accordance with Section 42, Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. The public will be asked to withdraw from the meeting at this point.

Matters for Decision

Matters for Information

14. Confidential Minutes of Development Committee held on 6 December 2023
15. Economic Development Report - CBF
16. Mid South West Growth Deal Update

Report on	Development Report
Date of Meeting	10 th January 2024
Reporting Officer	Philip Clarke, Neighbourhood Development Manager
Contact Officers	Michael McCrory - PCSP Manager, Catherine Fox - Arts & Facilities Development Manager, Brian McCormick - Seamus Heaney Home Place Manager.

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1	Purpose of Report						
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to update members and seek approval for the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolling Community Grants • Community Grants Review and Policy 2023 – 2024 • Pitches Strategy new Grant Programmes • New Foodbank/Hardship Resourcing Process (Social Supermarket Proposal) • Development Department Update 						
2	Key Issues						
2.1	<p>Community Grants - Rolling Grants Programme 2023 – 2024</p> <p>Members are advised that the grants assessment panel are making the following recommendations to award grants under the Good Relations funds.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Grant</th> <th>No. of groups awarded</th> <th>Value of Grant Awards</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Good Relations Grant</td> <td>1</td> <td>£637.00</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Please see attached in Appendix 1 grant award recommendations</p>	Grant	No. of groups awarded	Value of Grant Awards	Good Relations Grant	1	£637.00
Grant	No. of groups awarded	Value of Grant Awards					
Good Relations Grant	1	£637.00					
2.2	<p>Community Grant Aid Policy Review</p> <p>Following an internal review of the current Community Grant Aid Policy there are some proposed change recommendations for consideration as set out below:</p> <p>Registered Charities with a current valid registration number will no longer be required to submit their annual governance documentation with any application submission as assurance is confirmed via annual returns they will have to make to the Charities Commission under regulatory compliance. Checks on this will be carried out by staff to authenticate registration.</p>						

All grant claims must now be claimed within 3mths of the end of the financial year it was awarded (by the 30th June deadline) claims received after this time will not be considered for payment.

Replace the current Rolling Grants (with the exception of the Sports Representative Individual & Team Grant) process to 3 timebound windows with opening and closing deadlines as below (**all subject to available budgets**):

Grant	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
All Grants	Open 1 st February 2024 Closes 12 Noon, 8 th March 2024		
Good Relations & Local Festivals	Open 1 st February 2024 Closes 12 Noon, 8 th March 2024	Open 6 th June 2024 Closes 12 Noon, 5 th July 2024	Open 3 rd October 2024 Closes 12 Noon, 1 st November 2024

*Grant activity period: 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025

Virtual Information Sessions will be arranged the week commencing **Monday 5th February** which will be recorded and hosted on the Council website. In addition 3 face to face session in each of the 3 main towns will also be provided to offer in person support for new grant applicants. One to one support for groups will be available on request.

See attached amended Grants Policy 2023 – 2024 in **Appendix 2 (details outline individual grant budget provisions subject to the final rates estimates process)**.

In early 2024 it is proposed to develop a new Community Development Strategy for Council, designed to integrate a range of programme initiatives within one new strategic plan. Development of this plan will be on a co-design basis with key stakeholders, including the Community/Voluntary Sector, and will include a review of our current grants policy.

2.3

Pitches Strategy new Grant Programmes

In February 2023, Council approved its 5-year Pitches Strategy. Included within the costed strategic recommendations was the decision to implement two new grants to support the specific sporting codes that were the focus of the Pitches Strategy (Association Football, Gaelic Games, Rugby, Hockey and Lawn Bowls).

The Pitches & Recreational Strategy Infrastructure Development Grant will offer a **maximum grant award of £50,000** with a match funding requirement of £100,000 to deliver schemes of a minimum £150,000 value. It aims to support clubs in their aspirations for improved facilities that will enhance community outcomes for the 5

identified sporting codes. The annual available budget will be £150,000 per year for the duration of the 5 year Pitches Strategy.

The Pitches & Recreational Strategy Feasibility Development Grant will offer a grant of up to 50% of eligible costs with a *maximum grant award of £10,000*. It aims to support technical assistance costs for clubs in the preparation of future capital funding applications that require Economic Appraisals/Business Cases, Feasibility Studies/Professional Design/Planning Consultant fees that will assist in the delivery of a Clubs Development Plan.

For successful grant applicants, clubs will have up to 18 months from the date of the letter of offer to complete their projects, applicable to both grants.

To ensure a consistent approach for capital grant funding, it is also proposed to bring the Capital Discretionary Grant in line with the Pitches & Recreational Strategy Infrastructure Development Grant in terms of the match funding requirement. This will see the match funding requirement for the Capital Discretionary Grant reduce from a requirement of £250,000 to £100,000 ensuring parity for both grants. Groups will only be eligible for one grant award in any 3 year period from either of the two large capital grants.

2.4 **Foodbanks/Hardship Funds Process (including Social Supermarket Funding)**

Following an internal review of Councils allocations of resources to assist Foodbank/Hardship support organisations it is proposed to have a process that will have an open call for groups to make submissions to Council for financial assistance to support the delivery of their services. At the moment there is no commitment of resourcing from central government on hardship support, however should this become available a new open approach is being recommended as outlined within **Appendix 3**.

Officers have been in discussion with DfC to seek additional resources for the provision of a Coordinator to underpin the Social Supermarket model. Approval is sought to begin a process to identify and secure a lead partner, should monies become available from DfC. A key component of this work would include inter connection with organisations who avail of the Foodbank/Hardship resource fund, requiring them to refer all service users to the Social Supermarket programme as condition of support. This would provide a greater joined up approach to deliver a progressive support wrap around service from crisis intervention (immediate help with food/fuel) to referral programme of support (help for support with budgeting, addiction, housing, debt, employment training & skills etc). The proposed approach is detailed at **Appendix 4**

2.5 **Forest Schools Project 2023 -2025**

The Forest Schools programme is an environmental awareness initiative, facilitated by personnel from the Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA), which encourages pupils in Mid Ulster schools to visit and take on an ownership of a Council Park. It has been operating successfully at Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park since April 2017 as part of the facilities education programme.

As part of the NIFSA programme, pupils and teachers identify an area within the local Council Park (Hill of The O'Neill Heritage Park) that they can develop as their own Forest School site. Here they undertake exciting and innovative activities to help them understand the importance of our natural environment and local heritage. Activities can include making a map of the Council Park using only natural resources, den building, as well as the use of trees to help children better understand maths.

The teachers involved undertake a Forest School Leader qualification (OCN Level 3). This gives them the confidence to continue visiting the Council Park year after year and developing more outdoor activities and these will complement classroom-led lessons. This qualification also ensures sustainability as Forest School activities will continue within the school, and environmental learning will become embedded within the school curriculum.

Interest has been shown in NIFSA by a large number of schools and community groups in the Mid Ulster District Council area: these have all registered expressions of interest on the Mid Ulster District Council section of the NIFSA website. The Parks & Countryside Development Officer and the Education Officer (Hill of The O'Neill & Ranfurly House) have examined ways in which this demand for environmental activities across the Mid Ulster District Council area can be met.

The programme costs £6,000 per annum, subject to available funding being approved in 2023/24 and 2024/25 Parks and Arts & Culture budget. Programme costs are shared equally between Parks and Arts & Culture Services.

2.6

Development Update

Community Development

Council officers are currently supporting groups with projects and events and seeking to maximise funding for their community.

Strategic Development

The delivery of the Test and Learn model for Community Wealth Building is continuing. The next meeting of the working group is scheduled for January 2024.

The engagement on social housing for Mid Ulster is continuing, alongside the delivery of the poverty plan.

Good Relations & Peace

The Good Relations Plan continues to be delivered across the District.

TEO has issued correspondence to Council to commence the development of the Councils Good Relations Action Plan for the 2024-25 year. Staff will be working on this for competition to return to them and presentation to the February committee.

Council have received feedback from SEUPB on the recently submitted Peace Plus Action Plan requiring some additional information on the co-design process, more

detail about the development of thematic areas and community buy-in. These will be worked up over the coming weeks with a revised updated Action Plan re-submitted for further consideration.

Connecting Pomeroy

The project is nearing completion with the public realm, Church of Ireland Hall, GAC building and MUGA all complete before the LOO end date of 31/12/2023.

There has been a construction delay on the Forest building with a current estimated completion date of the end of March 24. Once the buildings are operational, the remaining targets associated with Community Engagement plan will be progressed via a new Development Officer post.

Burnavon Arts Centre

The Winter/Spring programme has been launched covering performances and activities from November 2023 to March 2024. Tickets sales are selling well for the upcoming season.

Seamus Heaney Homeplace

The Winter/Spring programme has been released and sales are positive. In December there has been school visits from across NI and also from Donegal, Monaghan and Louth.

Hill of The O'Neill and Ranfurly House

The new action plan continues to be delivered with a range of new events, craft activities and educational programmes are currently being rolled out.

Regional and Minority Language

The programme is continuing to roll out across the District.

PCSP

The Partnership signed of minutes for September are attached at **Appendix 5**.

4.1

Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications

Financial:

Good Relations Grants £637.00

Community Grants Policy 2024 – 2025, (subject to the final rates estimates process).

Human:
NA

Risk Management:
NA

<p>4.2</p>	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: NA</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: NA</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Recommendations</p>
<p>5.1</p>	<p>Members are recommended to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Approve the assessment panel recommendations under the Good Relations grants. (ii) Approve the Community Grant Aid Policy 2024 - 2025. (iii) Approve the approach for the 2 new grant programmes under the Pitches & Recreational Strategy (iv) Approved the revised approaches for the <i>Foodbanks/Hardship Funds Process</i> (including Social Supermarket Funding) – Subject to funding (v) Approve the Council participation in the Forest Schools Programme 2023-2025 (vi) Note the update from the Development Update.
<p>6</p>	<p>List of Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 Community Rolling Grant Awards Appendix 2 Grants Policy 2024 – 2025 Appendix 3 Foodbank/Hardship Resource Allocation Process 2024 Appendix 4 Social Supermarket Support Process Appendix 5 Policing & Community Safety Partnership September Minutes</p>

Appendix 1

Good Relations Grants – January 2024 (Maximum £1,500)

No	Organisation Name	Aim	Title Of Event/project	Band	Requested	Awarded
	Kilnaslee Community Development Group	Community	Christmas at Kilnaslee	4	£910.00	£637.00
				Total		£637.00

Bands	Score	%
7	30-39	40%
6	40-49	50%
5	50-59	60%
4	60-69	70%
3	70-79	80%
2	80-89	90%
1	90+	100%



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

GRANT AID POLICY 2024

Previous Rolling Grants process will now change to 3 timebound windows with opening and closing deadlines as below (**all subject to available budgets**):

First round call will be for all grants with following 2nd and 3rd rounds for Community Local Festivals, Good Relations and

Round 1: We will be open for Call 1 2024/25 from Thursday 1st February 2024 at 9am until Friday 8th March 2024 at 12 noon - The project period will be from 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

Round 2: We will open for Call 2 Thursday 6th June 2024 at 9am until Friday 5th July 2024 at 12 noon. Only applicable for Community Local Festivals, Good Relations.

Round 3: We will open for Call 3 Thursday 3rd October 2024 at 9am until Friday 1st November 2024 at 12 noon. Only applicable for Community Local Festivals, Good Relations.

Sports Representative Individual & Teams will remain as a Rolling Grant

Grants Policy 2024– 2025 (details outline individual grant budget provisions subject to the final rates estimates process).

Category 1 One Grant in Category Applications with * can submitted on a 2 year basis subject to outcomes review & Council annual budget	Category 2 One Grant in Category Applications with an * submitted on a 2 year basis subject to outcomes review & Council annual budget	Miscellaneous Grants Contact relevant officers regarding each of the grants
<p>Small Development Grant (Community, Arts, Culture, Heritage, Environment, Sport) Maximum £1,500 Budget proposed £160,000</p> <p>*Community Venue/Facilities Grant Maximum £3,500 Budget £200,000 Greater than 10 hrs weekly activity</p> <p>*Strategic Arts & Culture Grant Maximum £20,000 Budget £85,000 (arts & culture dedicated performance space)</p> <p>*Strategic Sports Development Grant Maximum £15,000, Budget £75,000 (Governing Bodies only)</p> <p>*Strategic Community Development Grant Maximum £8,000 Budget £45,000</p>	<p>*Strategic Events Grant Maximum £8,000 Minimum 1000 people attending Budget £75,000 (£10,000 GR TBC annually)</p> <p>Good Relations Grant Maximum £1500 Budget £35,000 3 Public Calls</p> <p>Community Local Festival Grant Maximum £1500 Budget £90,000 3 Public Calls</p>	<p>Sports Representative Grant Individual & Team Maximum £250-£500 Budget £15,000 Selected by their governing body to participate in a representative team or individual sport at provincial, national, all Ireland or international level (outside of NI) Rolling Programme</p> <p>Capital Discretionary Grant Up to £50,000 as funder of last resort Budget £150,000</p> <p>Festive Lights Allocation as per settlement Budget £105,000</p> <p>Schools Sports Access Grant Maximum £4500 Schools providing sports facilities to minority sports with no facilities Budget £10,000</p>

Groups can only apply to one grant per year to Categories 1 and 2. Miscellaneous Category grants are targeted at specific outcomes.

Grants Process

1. Application and criteria set through Committee and Council.
2. Public Advertisement for all grants.
3. Applications will be online via the Mid Ulster Council website.
4. There will be points of contact for queries on each grant area.
5. All eligible grant applications will be assessed by relevant to officer teams.
6. Grants will be presented to Committee for consideration and approval, all declarations of interest are monitored.
7. Grants will be presented to Council for ratification.
8. Letters of Offer (standard template) will be issued to all groups successful applicants, while unsuccessful application will receive written notification.
9. On receipt of signed Form of Acceptance of the Letter of Offer, payment of 50% of the award will be paid in advance (some grant exclusion may apply on certain awards)
10. The remaining grant balance will be paid on receipt of online claim with supporting invoices, proof of payments and completed monitoring returns that also evidences acknowledgement of Council funding support.
11. Report to Council on investment of grant funding and groups supported.

Grant Eligibility Conditions

1. Groups applying for a grant must be a not for profit constituted community or voluntary organisation with an annual AGM, individuals can apply to the sports representative grant only.
2. Funding cannot be allocated for a project or venue where an existing SLA exists with Council for a project, building or facility.
3. Groups will only be able to apply for a grant as per the categories, this is to maximise the funding allocation to as many groups as possible.
4. The same project cannot be split across different grant categories.
5. Statutory and 'for profit' organisations, activities and recipients (incl. activities that receive statutory core provision are not eligible for grant, note exception schools facilities in the community grant).
6. Regional groups/organisations are not eligible to apply with the exception of Strategic Events Grant.

7. Applications that are not completed accurately and in full will not be considered.
8. Religious or political activity cannot be funded under any grant.
9. All applicants must present a project that will take place within the MUDC area (except Sports Representative Grant as detailed within this section).
10. Applicants must present a project that will be delivered between 1st April - 31st March
11. Evidence of good governance; including annual AGM, Group bank account, financial management practice, insurances, etc. will be required. These must all be in place and uploaded with your application.
12. Registered Charities with a current valid registration number will no longer be required to submit their annual governance documentation with any application submission as assurance is confirmed via annual returns made to the Charities Commission under regulatory compliance.
13. Group recipients should not have a membership charge for its users accessing its community provision greater than £250.
14. Group recipients should have no element of profit gain to any member or individual of its Committee. Community Interest Companies will need to confirm Directors are not in receipt of any remuneration.

The following items are not eligible for funding:

Hospitality greater than 20% of the grant threshold	Bad debt, loans, bank charges, deficits or arrears in payments of any organisation, reclaimable VAT	Flags or bunting Alcohol	Groups or activities that discriminate against any section of the community
Celebrity appearances Or gifts and donations	Salaries are eligible only for a contribution to strategic grants (not more than 50%)	Retrospective or duplicate funding applications	Residential courses or training greater than 20% of funding sought

**Grant Criteria: Category 1
Strategic Arts & Culture Grant**

To support strategic arts and culture organisations that play a key role across the Mid Ulster District Council area in the development and delivery of arts & culture activity through the delivery of their own programmes utilising their own dedicated arts & culture performance spaces. The service must:

1. Provide the structured delivery of an annual arts and culture programme within the organisations own performance space/theatre.
2. Provide accessible arts and culture development opportunities of a strategic nature that is providing for a large number of people across Mid Ulster.
3. Provide 100% dedicated arts & culture activity & be delivered by a dedicated arts & culture group.
4. Provide at least bi weekly arts and culture activities.

Strategic Sports Development Grant

To support Governing Bodies that play a key strategic role across the MUDC area in developing their affiliated Clubs. It aims to provide Grant Aid to those Governing Bodies that provide direct support to Clubs across the area in increasing participation rates and improving playing standards through the employment of a Sports Coach. The service must:

1. Provide the structured delivery of an annual sports development programme of a main sport.
2. Be delivered through a recognised NI Sports organisation; through or in partnership with a sporting governing body; with no duplication of coverage within the same area or targeting of the same groups.
3. Provide accessible sports development opportunities of a strategic nature that is providing for a large number of people across Mid Ulster.
4. Provide the programme through a partnership approach with local clubs and groups.
5. Provide a minimum of 50% dedicated sports officer to the area of coverage in Mid Ulster. Funding for salary development only.
6. Provide match funding of a minimum 50% to the sports development programme targeted within the Mid Ulster District.

Liaison with Mid Ulster District Council Leisure Department will be required.

Strategic Community Development Grant

To support strategic community development organisations that provide for the Mid Ulster area. Groups delivering to the same area should submit a partner application to avoid duplication.

1. Level of Community Support Activity
2. Level of benefit – number of beneficiaries
3. Targeting of deprivation and social need
4. Quality and level of provision
5. Level of geographic coverage
6. Value for Money

Small Development Grant

(Arts, Culture, Heritage, Community, Sport, Environment)

To support local communities deliver a range of local community, arts, culture, heritage, environment, sports projects for their local area.

1. Community, Arts, Cultural, Heritage, Environment, Sports activity and participation
2. Contribution to community, arts, culture, heritage, environment, sports development in the area
3. Increase and widen participation, addressing social inclusion and diversity
4. Contribution to volunteering and volunteer development

Community/Sport Venue & Facilities Grant

To support local communities with community venues, sports community facilities etc. Venues & facilities must be located and provide for the community of Mid Ulster District Council. The facilities must be in community ownership and used for community development activity including community sports.

1. Beneficiaries (number of beneficiaries and groups)
2. Level of usage per week at venue/facility/ and programme activity
3. Level of provision – number of rooms and size etc.
4. Social Need/Social Inclusion – targeting those most vulnerable & targeting those not currently active in sports & to support lifelong participation in sport.
5. Sustainability – supporting the long term sustainability of facilities & groups.

The venue / facility must be open greater than 10 hours per week and the grant is flexible for use.

Grant Criteria: Category 2

Strategic Events Grant

To support a number of strategic events that are providing for the whole of Mid Ulster District and are of a significant nature to bring people to the area and to promote the area at a regional level.

1. Social, Regeneration and Economic Return
2. Event Development
3. Promotion of Mid Ulster & Council
4. Event Management Experience
5. Level of promotion of good relations and Inclusion
6. Value for Money

Note events with a target audience under 1000 people or events that are not receiving regional tourism attendance and coverage would be a local community festival.

Community Local Festival Grant

To support local communities deliver a local festival in their area bringing people from across the area together.

1. Level of Community Benefit and Participation (number of days, activities)
2. Number of beneficiaries (local and neighbouring areas)
3. Promotion of Good Relations and Social Inclusion
4. Festival Development

Good Relations Grant

To support local communities deliver on good relations in line with the Government Together Building United Communities Strategy.

1. Contribution to the Good Relations TBUC themes : Our Shared Community, Safe Community, Cultural Expression through increased use of shared spaces and services
2. Contribution to Core Good Relations, addressing sectarianism, racism and prejudice through provision of increased shared space
3. Level of Community Benefit and Participation in existing shared space through increased activity
4. Targeting of Social Inclusion and deprivation through access to shared space and improved access to activities/events.
- 5.

Grant Criteria: Miscellaneous Category

Sports Representative Individual and Team Competitive Grant

To support Individuals who have been selected by their governing body to participate in a representative team or individual sport at provincial, national, all Ireland or international level, with eligible costs (accommodation, travel, food), to a maximum of a £250 grant may be available. Applicants must be resident within the Mid Ulster District Council area for a period of 6 months prior to the period of the grant application.

To assist recognised Sports NI sports clubs (affiliated to their governing body of sport) who are travelling to compete in a recognised (by Governing body) representative (of District/County) sporting competition. A grant for eligible costs (travel, accommodation, food) to a maximum of £500 may be available. The team must have qualified in a recognised competition by the governing body of this sport, and must be representing the District / County. For both grants the event/competition must take place outside of NI.

Capital Discretionary Grant

To recognise that there are times when a modest amount of capital investment in our community can create the potential for a much larger project to happen. In such circumstances Council could potentially be a discretionary funder of last resort to allow projects to happen and maximise investment to our areas and communities. Any contribution would be a percentage towards a much larger project.

Criteria:

Capital funding – Council will consider providing financial support for capital projects, which are defined as projects which will provide benefit to the community for a period in excess of five years, examples of which may include a new building or refurbishment/renovation of an existing building. It will not provide support for acquisition of land, buildings or other assets such as equipment other than fixed plant for example permanently installed elevators/lifts.

- a. The project funded must be in community ownership (satisfactory evidence of legal title or an appropriate long term lease will be required).
- b. Not for Profit - Funding will only be considered for not for profit constituted community and voluntary groups which are involved in progressing a major community capital project which will provide significant benefit to the community within the Mid Ulster District Council area -Groups/organisations must be able to demonstrate that the majority of project beneficiaries (>80%) live within the Mid Ulster District Council area.
- c. Community Benefit – A Project Plan must be in place to show community need and benefit and to avoid any potential issues of duplication.
- d. Funder of Last Resort - The majority of funding at least 60%+ should be in place and that all funding avenues have been exhausted. Evidence of this will be required.
- e. Statutory Requirements - The project must be at a state of readiness 6 months after letter of offer; with planning permission, land acquisition or lease agreement (if required), and other statutory permissions in place along with accurate costings.
- f. Mid Ulster District Council Corporate Aims – The project must clearly demonstrate how it is achieving on Council corporate aims and objectives.
- g. The project is a minimum value of £150,000, with Council funding to a maximum contribution of £50,000.
- h. The Project must complete within 18 months of letter of offer; phased delivery and invoicing of expenditure can be accommodated.

A Group can only submit one call per project for this Capital Discretionary funding Support and a submission will only be considered by a Group once every 3 years. Groups/Organisations would be required to formally present to a Special Development Committee of Council.

Festive Lights Fund (award as per village settlement population - Area Plan)

Direct provision of festive lighting will be provided in the main towns of Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coalisland and Maghera.

A grant programme (revenue and capital funding) will be delivered across the remaining settlements under the following criteria -

- I. The grant will be revenue (small items of capital applicable) and will support the supply, installations, maintenance, running cost of providing festive lights and any associated switch-on/launch event. The lights will be in a predominant village location visible to the wider community.
- II. The village settlements and populations will be as per the Mid Ulster Development Plan 2020 - 2030. The grant allocation will be based on village settlement size and range from £1,250 - £3,000:
 Up to £3,000 settlements greater than 1000
 Up to £2,000 settlements greater than 500
 Up to £1,500 all other listed village settlements
 Up to £1,250 all other listed smaller settlements
- III. Technical support will be available to groups and communities from Council Technical Unit.
- IV. The grant can only be issued to one group per area and the main overall development/regeneration/Chamber group will be given priority.
- V. All grant aid will be paid retrospectively to those successful applicants who submit appropriate paid invoices to Council as vouched expenditure.
- VI. Provision, installation and insurance, liability of lighting and any activity will be the responsibility of the Group applying.
- VII. Small settlements listed in the Area Plan that are not classified as villages will be considered for inclusion within the fund; if they have previously provided festive lights in their area.
- VII. Letters will be issued to the main Development Group within the designated settlement with an offer of funding.

School Sports Access Grant (Threshold £5,000.00)

Mid Ulster District Council recognises the importance of participation in physical activity and sport and the need to maximise access to facilities which encourage and support this. Council recognises that a few underrepresented sports may be constrained due to lack of access to suitable facilities, yet these may exist in local schools.

Specifically targeted at clubs using / planning to use a schools synthetic pitch or schools wanting to offer access to their synthetic pitch outside curriculum times. To increase access for sports clubs to an under-utilized school synthetic pitch.

To contribute to the cost to schools of opening up and maintaining schools synthetic pitch.

To enhance access to team sports activities which are under-resourced or underrepresented.

The maximum amount available to access a school synthetic pitch is £5,00.00 – 1 application per school / club and where 2 or more clubs apply to use the same school synthetic pitch the grant offered will be on a pro rata basis ie 2 clubs up to 50%, 3 clubs up to 33.3% and 4 clubs up to 25%, etc

Eligibility

Be a sports club using or planning to use a school owned synthetic pitch or be a school which plans to provide access to a school owned synthetic pitch by sports clubs.

Incur actual documented costs in accessing / providing a schools synthetic pitch or provide documentary evidence of voluntary work or maintenance costs involved in maintaining a school synthetic pitch.

Not have benefited from Council's: Sports Strategic Development Grant or Sports Capital Grant.

The programme is primarily aimed at team sports.

Council may consider applications by schools on behalf of, and supported by evidence of agreement with, a constituted sports club.

In addition for sports clubs:

Be a constituted and not for profit sports club participating in a sport recognised by Sport NI, located in the Mid Ulster District Council area or a minimum of 80% of members must be resident in the Mid Ulster District Council area.

Sports club should evidence a letter of support/commitment from School Principal that includes agreed hire charges.

In addition for schools: Be located in the Mid Ulster District Council area.

Appeals Process

An appeals process will be available for unsuccessful applicants. There will be no right of appeal in relation to the level of funding granted however appeals can be made on the basis of:

- That the stated process has not been followed.

- That the application has been rejected on the basis of eligibility criteria which had been applied incorrectly.
- That the scoring against the criteria for the programme has not been undertaken correctly.

Appeals can be undertaken in two stages if required:

Stage 1—an appeal must be lodged in writing within 10 working days of the date of receipt of a rejection letter. In the first instance the appeal should be submitted to the Grants Unit who will take responsibility for allocating this to the relevant senior officer. In all cases the appeal will be reviewed by the senior officer and a determination reached within one week of receipt of the appeal. If the appeal is upheld the project will be reassessed and an appropriate letter of offer issued. If the appeal is not successful the applicant will be informed and given the right to take the appeal to Stage 2 if required.

Stage 2 – if the applicant is still not satisfied he or she can request a review by the Chief Executive who will review the process and application and present their recommendation.

Grant Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation seek to ensure that funding delivers the required outcomes, that it is used as agreed and to provide a feedback mechanism to improve decision making.

Monitoring should seek to ensure that;

Value for money is achieved.

The predicted outcomes are delivered.

Council has received adequate communication/promotion

Procurement has been met

Where instances arise where outcomes are not being met, the officer will support the Group to address any issues.

Monitoring will include completion of an evaluation and monitoring form. A visit by an officer will be undertaken to 10% of projects that receive funding over £1,500 threshold. This will complement the verification visit and will include the same random selection of groups.

Grants applicable – Strategic grants: Culture, Arts and Sports, Strategic Community Development, Strategic Events, and Venues.

10% of small grants will have a project evaluation upon random sample. This will be undertaken by an officer of the Community Development Team, led by the Grants & Capacity Manager.

Capital projects; up to £5,000 will have to issue evidence (e.g. photographs) of the capital and equipment investment alongside their expenditure return. A 20% monitoring visit will be undertaken on site to view expenditure items.

Discretionary Capital Grants will all be vouched on site for delivery of the capital development.

Grant Verification

Reference DFP Guidance on Grants and Reducing Bureaucracy in funding the community and voluntary sector - The Code applies to revenue grant funding only. A 50% advance will be issued to groups with final verification of all invoices before the balance of the grant is paid.

Small grants £1,500 - £10,000 financial verification will take place based on valid receipts being checked against agreed project expenditure.

Verification will include completion of a claim form, signed by relevant people within the organisation, along with valid receipts/invoices and corresponding bank statements.

Cash payments will not be considered in any grant claim returns.

All grant claims must now be claimed within 3mths of the end of the financial year it was awarded (by the 30th June deadline) claims received after this time will not be considered for payment.

Appendix 3

Foodbank/Hardship Resource Allocation Process 2024

AIMS

The Foodbank/Hardship Fund has been established in response to the cost of living crisis and evidence that many foodbanks/hardship support organisations are facing the combined challenges of increasing need, escalating running costs, and food donations failing to keep up with demand.

To ensure that these are able to support people through this crisis, the Department for Communities (DfC), through Mid Ulster District Council, have made funds available through a Hardship Fund.

Funding is intended to cover costs such as purchase of food items/food vouchers and/or the purchase of home heating oil/vouchers, for distribution to people in need.

The definition of a foodbank/hardship support organisations for the purposes of this Fund is a venue/location/organisation which gives out emergency food parcels/vouchers and/or home heating oil support on a weekly basis and has been running for six months or more.

STEP 1 – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Interested foodbanks/hardship support organisations are invited to complete an Expression of Interest form confirming eligibility of the following criteria:

1. A legally constituted not-for-profit organisation, including registered charities, exempted charities, or other forms such as a company with social purpose (if not a charity, you must be able to provide evidence of your not-for-profit status, e.g. constitution with a relevant clause).
2. The organisation is based in and operates in Mid Ulster.
3. The organisation runs a regular foodbank/hardship support (as defined above)
4. The organisation is an established service which has been running for at least 6 months.
5. The organisation is open to all Section 75 groups, based on need.
6. The organisation running the service has a current set of accounts available to submit with EoI.

STEP 2 – APPLICATION ASSESSMENT

Applications that meet the eligibility criteria and have submitted all requested information, will be assessed against the following:

Impact: how many people you help, whether you provide additional support.

Value for money: fundraising costs, how you make use of volunteers (ratio of volunteers to staff) and other income generation/donations that the organisation delivers.

Quality assurance: we will look for some form of independent quality assurance. A letter of endorsement is required from a person independent of your organisation in support of your work. Organisations should be affiliated to the Trussell Trust, FairShare or other overseeing body. (see How to Apply section below).

Location: priority may be given to foodbanks in areas of high deprivation or for other geographic considerations (e.g. to ensure a balance of funding across the district).

Wrap around support: applicants should be in a position to deliver a progressive support wrap around service from crisis intervention (immediate help with food/fuel) to referral programme of support (referral help for support with budgeting, addiction, housing, debt, employment training & skills).

GRANT AMOUNT AND PAYMENT

We ask you within the application to tell us how much funding you think you need for eligible costs (evidence on previous provision and projected demand). The minimum request is £XX and the maximum is £XX

Successful applicants may not receive the full amount requested. The grant amount will be determined by how well the assessment criteria have been met, the relative need identified and what available resources Council may have available at any given time.

Funding decisions will be taken on an ongoing basis once the Resourcing Process has opened.

GRANT CONDITIONS AND REPORTING

Successful applicants will need to sign and return a short grant agreement which sets out the terms of the funding.

Receipt of grant funding will be on the condition that the organisation agrees to join the Mid Ulster Foodbank/Hardship Network in the district. This will involve working with other foodbank/hardship support organisations and the Mid Ulster Advice Services (MIDAS), sharing best practice, sharing referrals to and from other network members where necessary, to meet the individual's needs, and working closely with MIDAS to ensure clients receive full benefits check and other support mechanisms available to them.

Details will also be required how you will deal with requests for support from residents outside of your geographical area that you cover.

A brief report will be required by the end of **XX** 2024, summarising how the funds were used, the difference they made and number of people/households supported over the funding period. A simple reporting template will be provided in order to make reporting as easy as possible.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications should be submitted via the Online Application Form on the Council's website.

Once you have registered on the system, you will be able to view all the questions that need to be completed in the online form. You can save and return to your application as many times as needed before completing and submitting it.

As part of the application, you will be asked to attach supporting documents as set out below. (Registered Charities with a current valid registration number will not be required to submit their annual governance documentation with any application submission as assurance is confirmed via annual returns, they will have made to the Charities Commission under regulatory compliance.)

All applicants must submit:

Safeguarding policy (PDF or DOC files): You will need to attach your current Safeguarding Policy.

Evidence of bank account (PDF or DOC files): You will need to attach a paying in slip or bank statement from the last three months to evidence your organisation's bank account details. (If a bank statement is provided the account name, number and sort code should be clear, as well as the date. You may redact other sensitive information).

Accounts (PDF or DOC files): If your organisation's accounts are not available via the Charity Commission or Companies House website, you will need to attach your most recent set of accounts.

Constitution (PDF or DOC files): If your organisation is not a charity, you will need to attach your organisation's constitution/founding document showing its not-for-profit status.

Letter of endorsement (max. 1 A4 page; PDF or DOC files): This is an opportunity to provide an independent quality assurance mark. You need only do this if you cannot satisfy this in some other way (see Assessment section, above). The letter should be dated within the last six months from a person independent of your organisation who has some public position or is a member of a relevant professional body, in support of your work. It should be on headed paper where possible. This could also include confirmation from the Trussell Trust, FairShare or other overseeing/governing body.

Appendix 4

Social Supermarket Model for Mid Ulster Council Area

Aim of the Project

To provide a coordinated structured programme in partnership with a range of delivery partners to support households at risk of food poverty by addressing the underlying issues of food insecurity as well as the immediate need.

It is important from the outset to note that not all people in food insecurity are suitable for Social Supermarket model, therefore criteria on who is best is eligible for this support needs to be agreed.

This could include the following.

- Households currently on benefits but want to move into employment
- Households requiring support to sustain tenancies and homes.
- Households moving to Universal Credit where there is no other income and they will have either 5/3 week wait for payment.
- Households with change of circumstances – job loss, loss of benefit, sanction, sickness, bereavement, new baby.
- Households impacted by two-child limit and on limited benefits (no disability benefits)
- Households requiring debt advice and engaging with Debt Advisor for debt solution.

Delivery Model

Delivery Options based on Service Users Needs and Circumstances.

1. Service User receives support by the form of food and toiletries
2. Service User receives support by form of vouchers
3. Service User receives initial support by form of food and toiletries progressing to vouchers.

The delivery option will be decided after full assessment of service user. All service users will receive a benefit check and money guidance one to one session.

Alongside the practical support of food/vouchers will be several planned supports from a range of services designed to meet their needs.

Social Supermarket will provide families with up 8 weeks of support, this will include a range of services based on household needs.

- Full Benefit Check
- Budgeting and Money Management
- Debt Advice
- Family Support
- Housing Support

- Employability and Training
- Mental Health and Well Being

Each participant will be provided with a tailored programme of support, that they need to attend and complete to be provided with vouchers/food.

Once the programme has been completed the participant will be signed off the programme and be provided with information pack on all the help and support available in Mid Ulster.

Given the number of programmes delivered across the Mid Ulster area, the co-ordinator's role will be to identify and discuss with the participant the programmes available, the need for attending and completing, the benefits of the programme and the positive outcomes for participant in addressing food insecurity and providing long term solutions to poverty.

Lead Partner

The lead partner will provide a coordination of referrals both inbound and outbound.

Inbound – receive referrals from a range of agencies identifying households as requiring support, meet with the client, provide a tailored programme of support.

The coordinator will assess each household and identify the best course to action, this may include one off advice, referral to other services or placed on the social supermarket project.

Outbound – the coordinator will refer the client to range of services, this includes other social supermarket partners providing food insecurity support, as well as other crisis interventions support that people can have access to such as Save the Children, Children in Need, etc.

Social Supermarket Partners

Given the geographical spread of Mid Ulster it is proposed to use a number of delivery partners to provide support with the food insecurity element of the project.

This will include organisations within the existing Mid Ulster Network.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The lead partner will host monthly meetings for all social supermarkets partners to ensure the smooth and efficient working of the programme, monitor progress and outcomes, agree referrals process and guidance.

Aim of the Project

- To help individuals and families escape food insecurity/poverty.

- To build service users awareness and confidence in accessing a range of support services and resources.
- To provide all service users with income maximisation and with budgeting/money management skills.
- To embed long term solutions to financial insecurity such as savings and embedding cost saving measures.
- To build trusted relationships with service users that build confidence and improves health and wellbeing.
- To establish effective referral pathways and partnership working with range of support services that can provide long-term solutions out of hardship/poverty.

Impact Measures with Service Users

- Service Users more confident in themselves
- Service Users more confident in managing money/income
- Service Users have access to tools and skills the need to achieve their life goals
- Service Users have improved health and wellbeing

Other Indicators

- Referrals/Engagement with other Services
- Income Maximisation

Minutes of Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership meeting held on 6 September 2023 in Council Chamber, Dungannon and via MS Teams at 3.30pm

Present: Councillor Sean McPeake (Chair), Councillor Eva Cahoon, Councillor Clement Cuthbertson, Councillor Anne Forde, Councillor Cathal Mallaghan, Councillor Brian McGuigan, Councillor John McNamee, Councillor Deirdre Varsani

Alexandra Black (Vice Chair), Sue Chada, Grace Meerbeek, Ciaran McElhone, Pearse McFlynn, Julie McKeown, Hayley Wilson

Sharon Crooks (NIHE), Sinead Dolan (YJA), Ryan McGee (EA), Chief Inspector Daniel McPhillips (PSNI)

Apologies: Michelle Grant (PBNI), Councillor Denise Johnston, Shauna McCloskey (PCSP Officer)

In Attendance: Michael McCrory (PCSP Manager), Annette McGahan (PCSP Officer), Martina McCullagh (PCSP Assistant)

The Meeting commenced at 3.30pm.

PCSP276/23 WELCOME

The Chair, Councillor McPeake welcomed all to the meeting.

PCSP277/23 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members were reminded of their obligation in relation to declarations of interest.

PCSP278/23 MINUTES OF MID ULSTER POLICING & COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 26 JUNE 2023

The Minutes of Mid Ulster Policing and Community Safety Partnership meeting held on Monday 26 June 2023 were approved by Members.

Proposed by: Councillor Eimear Carney

Seconded by: Councillor Brian McGuigan

PCSP279/23 MATTERS ARISING

Meeting Attendance

Ryan McGee requested that the attendance of Leo Quinn at the PCSP meeting held on the 26 June 2023 be checked and amended if necessary.

Councillor Mallaghan requested that all Meetings are sent as invites for Members calendar for ease of access and reference purposes.

PCSP/27023 - MATTERS ARISING – Public Spaces CCTV Report

In response to a question from Councillor Cuthbertson in relation to the procurement of CCTV cameras for Moy, the PCSP Manager advised that Council has temporarily paused the CCTV Tender process to carry out a 'scoping' exercise of existing CCTV provision to include areas, venues and facilities across the district which do not currently have CCTV provision but may

require the introduction of CCTV cameras. A specification has been completed and the process to recruit suitably qualified people to conduct the 'scoping' exercise will close on the 13 September 2023 and will be completed by December 2023, allowing a new tender process to commence in January 2024. The funding provided by PSNI for cameras in Moy is secure and will be included in the new process, PSNI have been kept informed regarding the delay.

PCSP271/23 - FUNDING

In response to a question from Sue Chada seeking clarification on the payment of Members Meeting Allowances, the PCSP Manager reminded Members that this budget has been reduced by £5,500 for 2023/2024 and to allow Members the opportunity to attend PCSP events, both PCSP and Policing Committee meetings are being held on the same afternoon back-to-back. Members will receive one meeting attendance allowance for attending these meetings.

PCSP280/23 RAPID BIN IN COALISLAND

The PCSP Manager sought approval from Members to re-locate a RAPID bin from Spring Island Supermarket in Coalisland to Newell Stores in Coalisland. No drugs have been deposited in the RAPID bin since it was installed, and it is hoped the re-location may improve its usage. Members were advised there would be a minimal cost to re-locate the RAPID bin. Members agreed to re-locate the RAPID bin to Newell Stores in Coalisland.

PCSP281/23 ROAD SAFETY QUIZ

The PCSP Manager sought approval to provide support, approximately £500 to Road Safety NI towards venue and refreshments costs for heats in the Road Safety Quiz for Primary 7 children taking place in Mid Ulster. Members agreed to providing support.

Proposed by: Councillor John McNamee

Seconded by: Councillor Anne Forde

ROADSAFE ROADSHOW

The PCSP Manager informed Members that the Roadsafe Roadshow will take place on Thursday 28 September 2023 in Sperrin Integrated College in Magherafelt, consisting of 2 sessions, 1 at 10.30am and 1 at 1.30pm. Members are welcome to attend, photographs will be taken at 10.15am prior to the first session. A total of 645 6th Form pupils from 8 Post Primary schools across the district will be attending the event.

The PCSP Manager advised that PCSP have contributed annually to this very successful event and sought approval to provide support of £700 towards coach hire costs to transport pupils to and from the venue. Councillor Cuthbertson advised that he had attended the Roadsafe Roadshow held in Dungannon Leisure Centre last year and agreed it was an excellent event. Full details of the event will be circulated to Members for their information.

Members agreed to provide support to assist with the running of the event.

Proposed by: Councillor Clement Cuthbertson

Seconded by: Councillor Deirdre Varsani

PCSP282/23 RE-DEPLOYABLE CCTV CAMERAS

The PCSP Manager sought approval from Members to purchase 10 re-deployable CCTV camera kits costing approximately £100 each. The cameras will be utilised in areas where issues arise, and referrals received from the Crime Prevention Officer.

Pearse McFlynn advised that reports have been received that the current CCTV cameras in Moneymore are not working and asked if they could be checked out and repaired or replaced. He also reported that a car windscreen had been broken, and damage caused to a grave in Moneymore at the weekend.

In response, the PCSP Manager stated the 2 cameras in Moneymore are not the same as in other towns across the district and confirmed that Moneymore will be included in the CCTV scoping exercise that is currently being arranged.

Councillor Forde referred to the 'basketball' area in Castledawson and asked if a camera could be re-instated as there has been a few recent anti-social behaviour incidents in this area, and a camera would act as a deterrent. All incidents have been reported to Police.

In response to Councillor Forde, the PCSP Manager advised that the re-deployable camera was taken down for repair and has been re-instated. The camera has a 15 to 20 metre motion sensor range which is currently directed at the MUGA at this location. The Member will check if the camera angle / direction needs to be changed and will inform the PCSP Manager accordingly.

Responding to a question from Councillor Cuthbertson in relation to the procedure and timescale used for re-deployable cameras, the PCSP Manager advised that as they are low-cost items a camera can be handed over to a community organisation or church where asb is happening and they can then deal directly with Police with regards to incidents captured by the camera. If a camera is positioned on Council property PCSP will retain ownership and will liaise with Police regarding any incidents captured by the camera.

Members were happy to approve the purchase of 10 re-deployable cameras which will be utilised by referrals received from the Crime Prevention Officer.

Proposed by: Councillor Clement Cuthbertson

Seconded by: Councillor Sean McPeake

PCSP283/23 THEMATIC & PCSP MEETING DATES & TIMES 2023/2024

The Chair referred Members to the schedule of Thematic sub-group meetings for anti-social behaviour; night-time economy and vulnerable victims of crime and advised they are all being held in Dungannon at present as work is not yet complete in Cookstown or Magherafelt offices to facilitate hybrid meetings. If

necessary, meetings can be re-located to Cookstown or Magherafelt when the work is completed.

Members were happy to approve the schedule of Thematic sub-group meetings for 2023/2024.

Proposed by: Councillor Brian McGuigan

Seconded by: Councillor Anne Forde

The Chair referred to the schedule of PCSP and Policing Committee meetings and advised that they are all being held in Dungannon at present as work is not yet complete in Cookstown or Magherafelt to facilitate hybrid meetings. If necessary, meetings can be re-located to Cookstown or Magherafelt when the work is completed.

Members were happy to approve the schedule of PCSP and Policing Committee meetings for 2023/2024.

Proposed by: Councillor Deirdre Varsani

Seconded by: Councillor John McNamee

PCSP284/23 PROJECTS UPDATE

The PCSP Manager provided Members with a brief update on PCSP Projects.

SP1 – PCSP Awareness and Engagements; SP2 – Night-Time Economy Projects; Anti-Social Behaviour Projects; and Vulnerable Victims of Crime Projects; SP3 – Improve Community Confidence in Policing

The PCSP Manager advised Members that facebook is currently used to advertise several PCSP campaigns, approval was sought to broaden the use of facebook to promote PCSP work right across the Action Plan. Members agreed with extending advertising levels with facebook to cover areas of work across the Action Plan.

Ryan McGee provided the following update on EA Youth Service intervention projects.

- Friday Night Project – this project was rolled out across Northern Ireland to engage with hard-to-reach young people who are on the verge of anti-social behaviour or involved in some level of criminal activity. Professionally qualified EA staff arranged a few day trips to Portrush and Newcastle during which engagement and intervention took place. A total of 80 young people participated.
- YEP - 'Engage for Change' Programme is planned for Dungannon and Magherafelt which will run from September 2023 to March 2024 and possibly a further YEP in Cookstown in early 2024.
- Currently planning a programme of engagement work across the district during the Halloween period.
- A new initiative surrounding bonfire engagement called 'Youth Cultural Expressions Programme' a very successful 10-week programme

delivered with the Department of Education in Leckagh Estate, Magherafelt which was identified as a hotspot area.

- A lot of work and intervention has taken place in Moygashel surrounding bonfire engagement. A number of young people who were involved in asb themselves are now qualified Youth Leaders and have delivered a 1-week Junior Summer Scheme themselves. This is a very positive outcome following a programme of engagement and intervention initiatives in the Moygashel area.
- A Programme is currently being developed to take place in Maghera in conjunction with Maghera Cross Community Link involving a number of identified 18 and 19 year old males involved in criminal activity and / or risky behaviour. This programme will commence in September 2023.

Ryan McGee thanked Mid Ulster PCSP for the funding provided for the various programmes and initiatives, stating that the support has been invaluable.

The PCSP Manager advised that all SIDs are being checked as the weather has taken its toll on them, resulting in 7 having to be repaired. It is hoped they will be returned and erected soon. PSNI are currently reviewing which SIDs are showing the highest speeds recorded, times and locations to target these areas with increased Police patrols. All statistics in relation to SIDs can be accessed on the database available on PCSP Facebook page.

In response to a question the PCSP Manager advised that Coagh Primary school is on the waiting list to receive a SID and that Primary and Post Primary schools are areas of priority during term time.

The PCSP Manager advised that the Tender process has commenced for the Domestic Violence 'Healthy Relationship Programme', sexting will form part of this programme.

The PCSP Manager advised that three events for 'older people' will be arranged across the district. Members will be informed when and where these events will take place in due course.

The PCSP Manager stated that the RAPID bin in Coalisland is the only one not receiving deposits of drugs, hence as discussed earlier in the meeting it is being moved to a better location with the hope that it will be used.

The PCSP Manager advised that Neighbourhood Watch events will be organised across the district with the co-ordinators, Members will be notified when dates have been agreed.

The PCSP Manager provided Members with clarification on how data collection for awareness of PCSPs is collated and further information on the statistics contained in the Report Cards.

In response to a question from Sue Chada in relation to Hate Crime incidents, Chief Inspector McPhillips advised that this type of crime is now showing a downward trend, but stated there was a spike due to a spate of criminal damage caused to bi-lingual street signs which are recorded as hate crimes. There have also been bonfires, election posters and parades which accounts for a small uplift in hate crime incidents.

PCSP285/23 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Focus Meeting to discuss flags and offensive posters erected in Town Centres across Mid Ulster District

Councillor McNamee proposed arranging a focus meeting to discuss flags and offensive posters which have been erected in town centres across the district, primarily referring to Cookstown town centre. Council and local Sinn Fein and SDLP MLAs have received numerous complaints alongside business owners emphasising the negative impact this is having on the town. Invites could be extended to representatives from organisations who erect flags and emblems throughout the year all of whom are very responsible, but there is a group of people who are intent on erecting offensive flags and posters and have no accountability. The aim would be if representatives could use their influence to emphasise the need for respect and tolerance of each other's culture which would be to the benefit of all. The initial meeting would be to discuss issues in Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt.

Councillor Mallaghan supported the proposal to arrange a focus meeting, stating there are excellent examples of where contentious issues have been resolved by inclusive discussions with all community groups and statutory organisations.

Grace Meerbeek stated it would be best if there was legislation surrounding the flying of flags and emblems.

Councillor Cuthbertson stated that the proposed meeting should not be limited to town centres only, all areas should be up for discussion and if not, he would not lend his support to the proposal.

The Chair referred to protocols which were drawn up a number of years ago for Magherafelt, which could possibly be used as a template for proposed discussions. If the outcome proves successful, the same approach could be implemented in other areas across the district.

PCSP Audit 2022/2023

The PCSP Manager advised Members that a satisfactory report was received following the recent PCSP annual audit, 'satisfactory' being the highest attainable level. A recommendation within the report highlighted the importance of Members submitting their completed annual declaration of interest forms to ensure compliance with the PCSP Funding Agreement and Financial Guidelines.

The Chair referred to an e-mail issued on the 5 September 2023 to Members regarding Declaration of Interest forms and asked that they return completed forms at their earliest convenience.

PCSP286/23 Date of Next Meeting

The next PCSP meeting will take place on Wednesday 13 December 2023 in Council Chamber, Dungannon and via MS Teams at 3.30pm.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.30pm.

Report on	Extension to the Partnership Liaison Officer post shared between Councils and HSENI
Date of Meeting	10 th January 2024
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
Contact Officer	Melanie Patterson, Environmental Health Service Manager

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 information on the extension request for the Partnership Liaison Officer (PLO) post between the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) and district Councils and to seek approval to continue with Mid Ulster District Council's financial contribution until 31 st March 2026.
	Background
2.1	Since 2002, Councils have contributed to a jointly funded post to facilitate an effective working partnership between the regulatory stakeholders for health and safety. The role was developed to allow the aims and objectives outlined in the HELANI strategy for workplace Health and Safety to be brought forward and to ensure the operational delivery "Saving lives not stopping them".
2.2	In September 2018, Members at the Environment Committee resolved to approve annual funding towards a 'Partnership Liaison Officer' post (minute reference: E248/18). This is a shared resource between all eleven Councils within Northern Ireland and the HSENI.
2.3	Subsequently the Development Committee in February 2022 resolved to continue funding the Partnership Liaison Officer for a further 2 years until the next review in 2024 (minute: reference D028/22).
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) are the employing authority for the Partnership Liaison Officer, and they recover the overall cost of the post equally from all eleven Councils within Northern Ireland and the HSENI.
3.2	The current cost to Mid Ulster District Council is £4,500 per annum and provision has been made each year within the annual Environmental Health departmental budget.
3.3	Previously in February 2022, it was noted that the funding contribution would be continued for a further period of two years until 31 st March 2024.
3.4	The current post via the employing authority LCCC has been occupied since 21 st July 2020 via a two-year interchange secondment and subsequent extension to end of March 2024.
3.5	However, during the Covid -19 pandemic the postholder operated as a point of contact between 'The Executive Office' and other groups. It is only since Covid-19 that there has been the opportunity to build on the partnerships between Councils and HSENI to deliver on the key priorities of the region.

3.6	Whilst financial constraints on Councils is acknowledged, all local authorities are being asked to give consideration to the extension of the current secondment for another 2 years. It is also proposed that during the second year of this extension, the Northern Ireland Health and Safety Liaison Group will conduct a review of this post and make future recommendations.
3.7	Whilst the final cost to each council has not yet been determined, it is estimated given an increase for pay awards etc. the cost should not exceed approximately £6,000 per annum, should the arrangement continue.
3.8	Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council are suggesting that this post be offered as a 2-year extension to the current secondment contract if the following criteria are met: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All 12 partners (11 Councils and HSENI) must be committed to the post 2. Costs associated with the post must be divided equally amongst the 12 partners. 3. LCCC will continue to host the PLO in Lagan Valley Island and give day-to-day management support as the host council, with the assistance of HSENI. 4. LCCC will continue to be the employing authority and recover costs as before until March 2026. 5. A review of the effectiveness of the PLO will be conducted in the second year to inform whether the post should continue post March 2026 and if so in what form.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: approximately £6,000 per year – can be met within current annual Environmental Health budget.
	Human: LCCC are the employing authority for the PLO post.
	Risk Management: Considered in line with relevant Council policies and procedures.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.
	Rural Needs Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the contents of this report and give approval to continue with the provision of annual funding towards the Partnership Liaison Officer until 31 st March 2026.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	N/A

Report on	1. Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 2. Go Succeed Grants 2024/25 3. DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan
Date of Meeting	10 January 2024
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

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"/>

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>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26</p> <p>In September 2022, Mid Ulster District Council approved Council's participation in the new 11-Council Digital Transformation Fund (DTFF). This Fund is led and managed by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NM&DDC) and seeks to provide grants to 600 micro and small businesses / social enterprises from across the 11 Council areas to resource their digital transformation plans (it is estimated that 10% or 60 of these will be in the Mid Ulster District Council area). The DTFF has £7.5million of funding available, funded by the Complementary Fund (£6m), the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (£1.1 million) and Derry City and Strabane District Council. Having secured funding from the NI Executive for an Inclusive Futures Fund, DCSDC (City Deal Region) were excluded from applying to the Complementary Fund. However, the Council has committed £450,000 to pay for their involvement.</p> <p>The DTFF grants are worth between £5,000 and £20,000 and can fund up to 70% of the cost of a project with 30% match funding from the applicant.</p> <p>Newry, Mourne and Down Council are responsible for leading the assessment process, issuing Letters of Offer to successful applications and verifying claims submitted. They will then give instruction to Councils to issue the payments to successful businesses in their respective Council areas, following which Councils will subsequently reclaim the monies from NM&DDC.</p>

	<p>Call 1 has opened in November 2023 with Letters of Offer scheduled to be issued in January 2024. There will be 4-5 more calls up until December 2025 (or until all funding has been allocated).</p> <p>2.2 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25</p> <p>Go Succeed is the new 11-Council enterprise support service for new starts and existing businesses seeking to grow. It is led by Belfast City Council with Contractors delivering in each Council area and is funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund and the 11 Councils. In February 2023, Mid Ulster District Council approved Council’s participation in the new Service, to March 2025.</p> <p>Funding has been allocated within the Service for a Small Grants provision to new ‘high growth’ starts (i.e. those seeking to create employment opportunities in addition to the owner) and for existing business with growth ambitions.</p> <p>Once a business has completed 50% of their mentoring, they can then be invited to apply for a grant of up to 70% (£4,000) for a total spend of £5,714.</p> <p>This can be towards an activity which is specifically aimed at driving business growth objectives (purchasing equipment, marketing materials, consultant support etc).</p> <p>The grants will be managed and delivered by each Council, who will be responsible for the assessment of Applications, issuing Letters of Offer and verification of items purchased, processing claims, and claiming all expenditure from Belfast City Council.</p> <p>2.3 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan</p> <p>The Department for the Economy (DFE) has launched a public consultation on a draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland which outlines a 10-year plan to increase the value of tourism in Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26</p> <p>Delegated authority is therefore sought for the Chief Executive to approve the issue of payments to successful applicants from Mid Ulster District Council area under the DTFF, in line with the amount that will be advised by NM&DDC Council. A full list of successful applicants will be brought to Committee thereafter for information.</p> <p>3.2 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25</p> <p>Delegated authority is therefore sought for the Chief Executive to approve the issue of Letters of Offer to successful applicants under “Go Succeed”, and subsequent grant payments. A full list of successful applicants will be brought to Committee thereafter for information.</p>

3.3 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan

DFE's draft Tourism Strategy sets out a vision that seeks to establish Northern Ireland as a year-round world class destination which is renowned for its authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture and which benefits communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core.

The consultation advises that the draft Tourism Strategy will be a key enabler of the DFE's 10x Economic Vision, to help position the region internationally as an attractive place to visit, making our visitors feel welcome whilst at the same time helping to make the lives better of all our citizens.

It will seek to deliver on the objectives of 10x by generating economic growth that is sustainable, inclusive and innovative.

It is premised on five themes and seeks to strive for a new and ambitious growth trajectory that is:

- Innovative and uses our creative skills
- Inclusive by bringing opportunities for all
- Sustainable for generations
- Attractive to visitors and investors
- Collaborative to deliver a shared vision

The consultation document identifies the key challenges and opportunities for growth.

During the development of the draft Tourism Strategy, DFE engaged with stakeholders across government, its delivery partners Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland and a number of other industry stakeholders. DFE/TNI also organised a consultation workshop at Hill of the O'Neill, Dungannon on 27th November 2023, where two officers from each of the 11 Councils were invited to attend.

A select number of industry/businesses and sectoral bodies were invited by DFE/Tourism NI to attend consultation workshops on;

- 29 November 2023 – Bishops Gate Hotel, Derry/Londonderry – (Industry workshop).
- 1 December 2023 - Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick – (Industry workshops x2).
- 11 December 2023 -Tourism NI HQ, Belfast (Sectoral body workshop)

Officers from Mid Ulster Council requested Tourism NI to invite a greater sample size of tourism trade businesses from Mid Ulster to the industry workshops to ensure their voice was heard. To assist Tourism NI, Council Officers provided further names of tourism trade businesses from across the district.

Council's Tourism Team, with the assistance of a Consultant Facilitator, organised further consultations/workshops to which Mid Ulster's tourism trade, stakeholders, elected representatives etc were invited to attend. These virtual consultations/workshops took place with the following groupings on:

- 12 December 2023 – Mid Ulster Tourism Development Group
- 13 December 2023 – Mid Ulster - Open Industry Engagement Session
- 15 December 2023 – Mid Ulster - Open Industry Engagement Session

DFE’s public consultation and final submission of consultation responses must be made to the Department by Friday 12 January 2024.

During the above consultations, Mid Ulster tourism businesses communicated their concerns of the timing of DFE’s consultation taking place over their busiest trading period ie, Christmas/New Year. Council Officers made contact with DFE/TNI to seek an extension to the closing date of 12th January 2024, outlining the concerns of tourism businesses and the short response turnaround time coinciding with Christmas and New Year. DFE/TNI declined Council’s request, indicating this date was set to meet current deadlines.

Taking on board the collective feedback provided to Council from Mid Ulster stakeholders, a comprehensive and robust response is currently being developed on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council. The draft response will be shared with Members ahead of the Development Committee Meeting on 10 January 2024.

DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan Consultation Document is enclosed on **Appendix 1**.

Mid Ulster Council’s draft Consultation Response to DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan is on **Appendix 2**. *(NB: Appendix 2 to follow prior to meeting as a late paper).*

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial:</p> <p>4.1.1 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 Grants are 100% funded by the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund.</p> <p>4.1.2 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25 Grants are 100% funded by the Go Succeed Fund. It is anticipated that Council will receive resource funding equating to 10% of the value of letters of offer issued to successful applicants.</p> <p>4.1.3 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan Consultancy fee of £2,850 to facilitate a range of workshops with key tourism stakeholders and collate views and draft comprehensive consultation response on behalf of Council and stakeholder organisations.</p>

	<p>Human:</p> <p>4.1.4 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 Officer time to process payments and submit claims to Newry, Mourne & Down District Council.</p> <p>4.1.5 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25 Officer time to assess applications, draft and issue letters of offer, verify claims, process grant payments and submit claims to Belfast City Council for reimbursement.</p> <p>4.1.6 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan Officer time to facilitate consultation response.</p>
	Risk Management:
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>4.2.1 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 & Go Succeed Grants 2024-25 Equality and Good Relations screening was carried out by the respective lead Councils prior to commencement of both schemes.</p>
	<p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p>4.2.2 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 & Go Succeed Grants 2024/25 Rural Needs screening has been carried out by the respective lead Councils prior to commencement of the Schemes.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26
	5.1.1 Approve that delegated authority be granted to the Chief to approve the payment of grants to successful applicants from the Mid Ulster Council area in line with the Letters of Offer. A report will be brought to the Development Committee thereafter to update Members on the outcome of assessment and to note approved projects.
5.2	Go Succeed Grants 2024-25
	5.2.1 Approve that delegated authority be granted to the Chief to approve the issuing of Letters of Offer to successful applicants. A report will be brought to the Development Committee thereafter to update Members on the outcome of assessment and to note approved projects.

<p>5.3</p>	<p>DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan</p> <p>5.3.1 (i) Approve Mid Ulster Council’s draft Consultation Response to DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan and;</p> <p>(ii) Grant delegated authority for Council’s Chief Executive to submit MUDC’s Consultation response to DFE, by the deadline of Friday 12 January 2024, prior to Council Meeting on 25 January 2024.</p>
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2 – MUDC Consultation Response to DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan (<i>to follow</i>)</p>



TOURISM STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

10 YEAR PLAN

TOURISM STRATEGY
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

10 YEAR PLAN



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tourism is one of Northern Ireland's most important economic sectors and key to dispersing wealth right across Northern Ireland, contributing an annual tourism expenditure of more than £1 billion in 2019 and supporting approximately 71,000 jobs across the region.¹

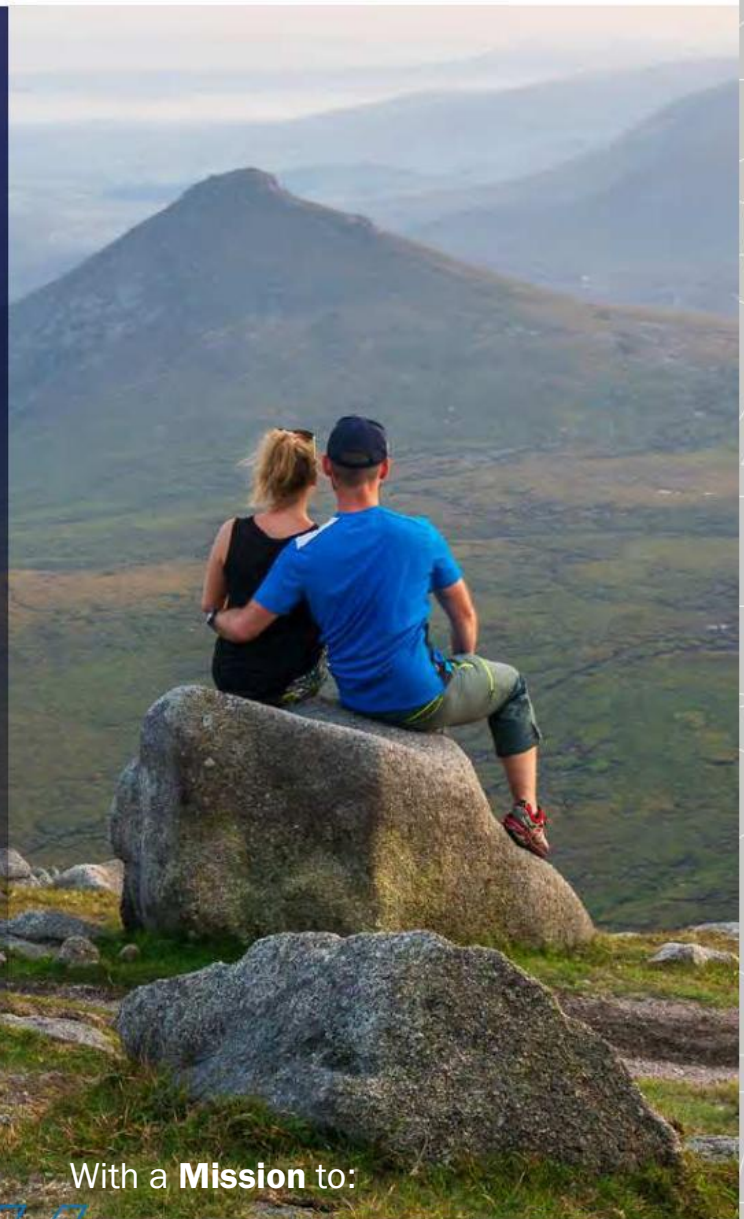
In addition to revenue and job creation, development of the tourism sector has the capacity to cultivate and showcase local history, culture and natural and built heritage, making Northern Ireland not only a great place to visit but also a great place to live.

The Tourism Strategy: 10 Year Plan establishes a vision and mission for the growth of the tourism sector in Northern Ireland over the next decade. It will be a key enabler of the Department's 10x Economic Vision to help position the region internationally as an attractive place to visit, making our visitors feel welcome whilst at the same time helping to make the lives better of all our citizens. It will seek to deliver on the objectives of 10x by generating economic growth that is sustainable, inclusive and innovative.

¹ Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2019 (nisgra.gov.uk) (Due to the Covid pandemic these remain the most up to date figures to act as a baseline)

The **Vision** of the Strategy is to:

“**Establish Northern Ireland as a year-round world class destination which is renowned for its authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture and which benefits communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core.**”



With a **Mission** to:

“**Support the Tourism Sector in building a more innovative, sustainable and inclusive tourism industry for all people and places in Northern Ireland which enriches its people, its economy and its guests.**”

The Vision and Mission are supported by a **Strategic Aim** to increase the value of tourism to the Northern Ireland economy compared to 2019 – which is the last full year of tourism statistics currently available.

It is designed to be a roadmap, premised on five themes, which seeks to strive for a new and ambitious growth trajectory that is **Innovative, Inclusive, Sustainable, Attractive** and **Collaborative** over the next decade. These five themes form the core of the Strategy and are designed to support continued growth in tourism in Northern Ireland to appeal to both overseas and domestic visitors, and also contribute to a better quality of life for the people who live here, enriching communities and spreading the economic and social benefits of tourism throughout the region.

The document identifies the key challenges and drivers for growth.

It recognises the industry's ability to develop as a thriving, sustainable industry of the future, showcasing world class visitor attractions and creating a year-round destination that will stand out in international markets.

It will also position Northern Ireland on the world stage as a destination of choice as well as increasing its attractiveness as an investment location.

This Strategy provides a framework for our delivery bodies such as Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to work with other public authorities and the tourism industry to shape and develop local tourism strategies and action plans which will support and guide the industry to prepare for future success for the benefit of all of our communities. The Indicators associated with each theme will guide our delivery partners as they set shorter term, measurable objectives in their business plans to ensure we realise our vision and optimise tourism's contribution to the ambitions of the Department's 10x Economic Vision. The vision and mission of the Strategy can only be realised by businesses, communities and regional and local government working together in a truly collaborative approach.



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The importance of tourism as a significant driver of economic growth and its potential to deliver wide reaching change presents a real opportunity to maximise its contribution to growing the Northern Ireland economy and continue its role as an important export sector and provider of employment.

The tourism sector in Northern Ireland is a vital element of our export led economy and the industry has experienced healthy growth over the past decade, contributing an annual tourism expenditure of more than £1 billion (2019)². However, there is significant potential for further expansion and opportunities exist to build on our strengths and grow the sector in line with the Department's 10x economic vision by enabling the innovative, inclusive and sustainable development of this value-added sector.

Recovering and rebuilding from the impact of the global pandemic provides us with a fantastic opportunity to think differently, to think longer-term and most importantly to consider how we can emerge as a thriving sustainable

tourism industry for the future, enriching local quality of life and showcasing world-class visitor attractions and creating a year-round destination that will stand out in international markets. With new international destination choices and visitor experiences continually emerging, we need a long-term vision which will require all those with a tourism interest to work collaboratively, grasping every opportunity to grow our tourism sector and bringing benefits to every part of Northern Ireland and make everyone feel welcomed.

The Department for the Economy has worked closely with our delivery partners, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland, to develop this draft 'Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy: 10 Year Plan'.

² Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2019 (nisra.gov.uk) (Due to the Covid pandemic these remain the most up to date figures to act as a baseline)

The Department provided Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland with a Vision Statement to signal our direction of travel and to help them plan for the incoming financial year and beyond. We have engaged with other relevant government departments. Tourism NI has used its close links with the tourism industry to help us engage with a range of stakeholders across the sector. This has greatly assisted our thinking and informed the development of our Strategy. This Strategy identifies the strategic future direction needed to realise tourism's already vital contribution to the Department for the Economy's '10x Vision: A Decade of Innovation'³; the outcome of which will ultimately see Northern Ireland positioned amongst the elite small advanced economies in the world, and the benefits of this change felt by all of our people. The 'Research on the Future of Tourism in Northern Ireland' Report⁴, commissioned by the Department and published in May 2023, demonstrates how tourism is aligned with the 10x Vision and is already delivering on key priorities.

Over the next decade, the 'Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy: 10 Year Plan' will be at the heart of everything

we do. It provides a framework for our delivery bodies such as Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to work with other public authorities and the tourism industry to shape and develop local tourism strategies and action plans which will support and guide the industry to prepare for future success for the benefit of all of our communities. This will be our focus and the vehicle through which we deliver on our common purpose of supporting a growth in tourism that is Innovative, Inclusive, Sustainable, Attractive and Collaborative. These five themes form the core of the strategy and we want this growth to contribute to a better quality of life for all our citizens.

Alignment with this framework provides an opportunity to shape the future growth of tourism, harnessing the full potential of the industry; building on the strengths we have; adding to our appeal to both overseas and domestic visitors; and creating opportunities to spread sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits around the region, so that communities in **all** parts of Northern Ireland benefit, **all** year round.

³ [10x Economy NORTHERN IRELAND'S DECADE OF INNOVATION](#)

⁴ [Research paper on the future of tourism in Northern Ireland](#)

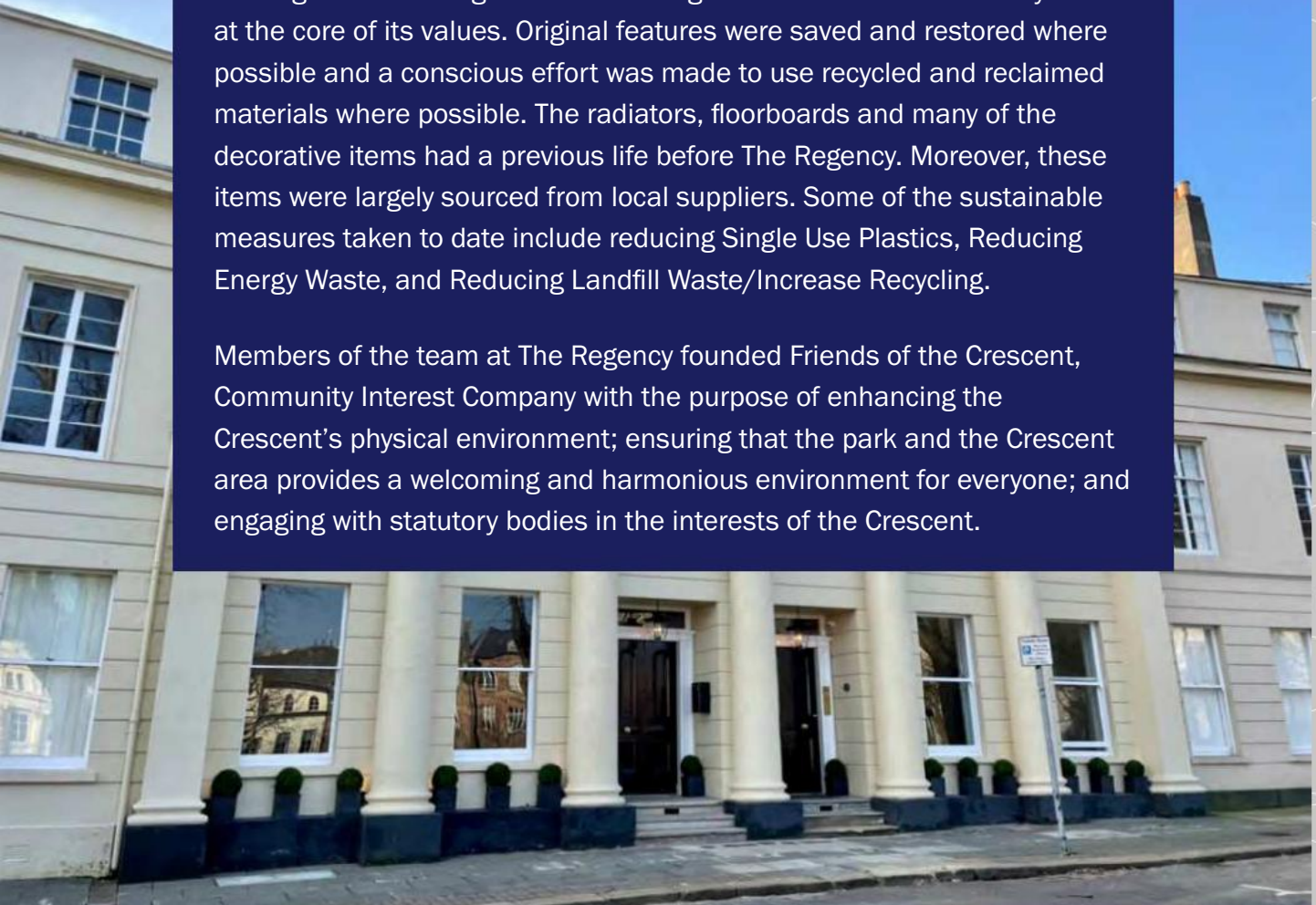
CASE STUDY

THE REGENCY

Situated in the heart of Belfast's historic Queen's Quarter and close to the city centre, The Regency is tucked neatly into South Belfast's Upper Crescent.

The £2.5m restoration of two derelict Georgian townhouses dating back to 1846, has transformed this unique property into luxurious accommodation offering short stays complete with 24/7 butler-style service. Some of Northern Ireland's most talented craftspeople were enlisted to transform the neglected buildings back to life. Regeneration and Sustainability are at the core of its values. Original features were saved and restored where possible and a conscious effort was made to use recycled and reclaimed materials where possible. The radiators, floorboards and many of the decorative items had a previous life before The Regency. Moreover, these items were largely sourced from local suppliers. Some of the sustainable measures taken to date include reducing Single Use Plastics, Reducing Energy Waste, and Reducing Landfill Waste/Increase Recycling.

Members of the team at The Regency founded Friends of the Crescent, Community Interest Company with the purpose of enhancing the Crescent's physical environment; ensuring that the park and the Crescent area provides a welcoming and harmonious environment for everyone; and engaging with statutory bodies in the interests of the Crescent.

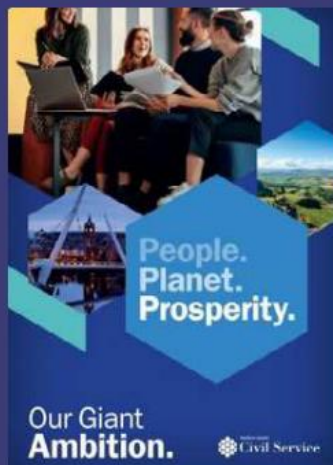
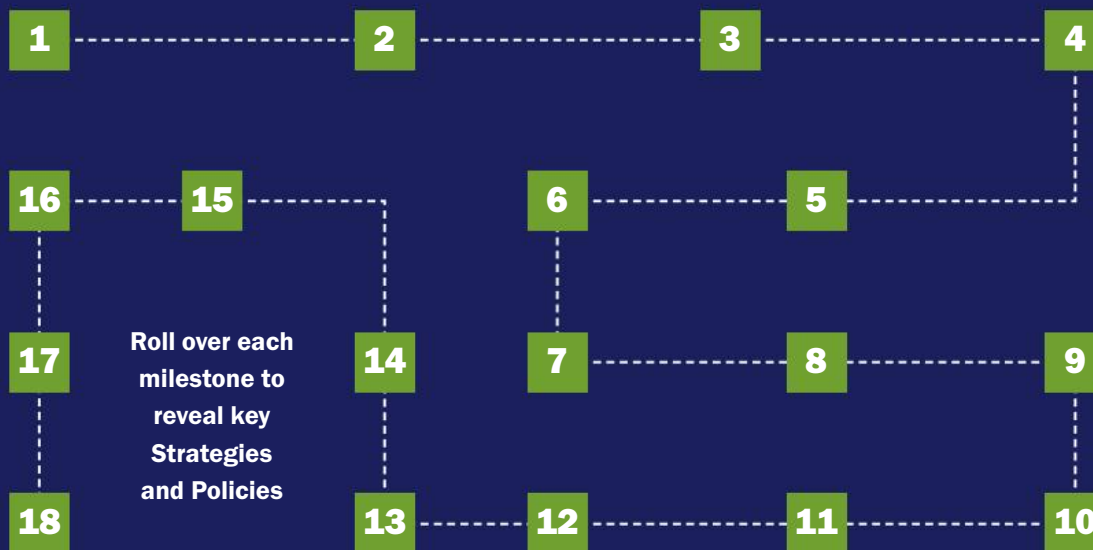




THE POLICY CONTEXT

THE POLICY CONTEXT

The importance of tourism is fully recognised by Government and this Strategy seeks to complement the aims and objectives of other key strategies and policies, both published and emerging, across a wide range of sectors who have an interest in shaping the future direction of the growth of the sector.



**PEOPLE.
PLANET.
PROSPERITY.**

Our Giant
Ambition.



The Department for the Economy's economic vision, '10x Economy - an Economic Vision for a Decade of Innovation', seeks to set a long term vision for the Northern Ireland economy to deliver a ten times better economy. The outcome of this vision will ultimately see Northern Ireland positioned amongst the elite small advanced economies in the world, and the benefits of this change felt by all of our people.

The 'Northern Ireland Tourism Strategy: 10 Year Plan' will be a key enabler of the vision for a 10x economy and our tourism sector will be integral to contributing to the ambitions of this vision. Working together we can shape the future direction of the growth of the sector, growth that will be sustainable, inclusive and innovative that builds our sense of place making Northern Ireland an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit. This will be crucial to our ability to compete in global markets and, therefore, our tourism sector will be at the forefront of marketing our reputation and attractiveness to the world.



**VISION, MISSION
& STRATEGIC AIM**

VISION, MISSION & STRATEGIC AIM

The vision, mission and strategic aim of the Department's Tourism Strategy are set out below.

OUR VISION



Establish Northern Ireland as a year-round world class destination which is renowned for its authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture and which benefits communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core.

OUR MISSION



To support the tourism sector in building an innovative, sustainable and inclusive tourism industry for all people and places in Northern Ireland which enriches its people, its economy and its guests.

OUR STRATEGIC AIM



To increase the value of tourism to the Northern Ireland economy by 50-75% compared to 2019⁵.

⁵ Please note the 50-75% increase in the value of tourism expressed in the Strategic Aim is based on a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 4-6%.



WHY IS TOURISM IMPORTANT IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

WHY IS TOURISM IMPORTANT IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

Tourism has the power to foster inclusion, protect nature & promote cultural understanding.⁶

Tourism plays a vital role in the preservation of our historic, cultural and recreational resources and helps to sustain and promote our internationally renowned landscapes. It creates a unique sense of place, provoking pride and confidence within local communities; providing fertile ground for enterprise, creating new, independent, small businesses and new services or facilities that could not be sustained by the local population alone.

⁶ World Tourism Day 2022: Sector United Around "Rethinking Tourism" for People and Planet (unwto.org)



CASE STUDY

CHOCOLATE MANOR

Located in the picturesque village of Castlerock, Chocolate Manor was grown from a homebased, startup business established in 2012 to one of NI's leading artisan chocolate producers, winning best Food & Drink tourism business at the 2022 NI tourism awards.

In 2020, owner Geri Martin moved into new premises in Castlerock, establishing the North Coast's only Chocolate Shop & Chocolate Experience Provider, running a range of hands-on, bespoke experiences and a food emporium where visitors can see, and purchase locally made creations, welcoming thousands of visitors per year.

In March 2022, Chocolate Manor became the 12th Economusée in Northern Ireland, the first chocolate maker outside of Canada to gain this accolade, focusing on the preservation and protection of traditional skills and crafts.

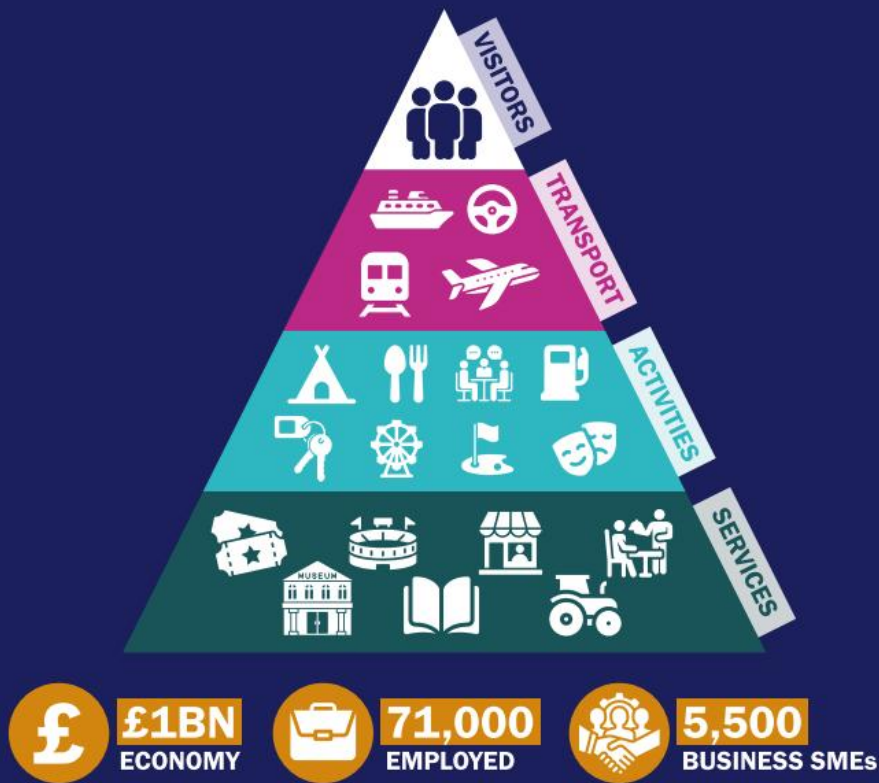
Northern Ireland has a unique history, culture and landscape, all contained within a small geographic area. We have the capacity and potential to be the 'hidden gem' that visitors can discover and enjoy. We are ambitious for the future and believe in our capacity and capability to deliver sustainable growth ahead of the international tourism market, competing on the global tourism stage.

The societal impact is key in that a vibrant tourism economy positively positions Northern Ireland as a place to visit, study, live, work and invest. Positive perceptions of a destination are critical to wider business decisions and choices linked to inward investment, exports and education. It brings new facilities to our towns and cities, creates opportunities in rural areas and is a source of pride for local people.

Northern Ireland tourism remains one of the largest, locally owned, internationally traded sectors of our local economy, directly impacting the economy by generating demand for tourist services such as accommodation, recreational and cultural activities and transport services. As visitor numbers and spend increase, so too does the direct economic impact for the local economy.

More widely, indirect benefits are also generated as tourism generates demands on sectors across the economy, such as construction and agriculture. The tourism sector overall has grown to become a key contributor to the Northern Ireland economy firmly establishing its role in supporting the Department for the Economy reaching its 10x ambitions.

How Tourism Supports the Northern Ireland Economy



The Northern Ireland Tourism Landscape

In Northern Ireland, our tourism sector has become a huge success story. In 2019, the sector contributed £1 billion of expenditure to the local economy, including delivering £731 million in export earnings⁷. The sector employed approximately 71,000 people throughout the region, accounting for one in every 12 jobs. An estimated 12,800 new jobs were created across the tourism and hospitality sectors between 2013 and 2019 (+22%).

Employment was geographically dispersed with 70% of those jobs outside of Belfast offering inclusive opportunities and benefits throughout all regions and to all ages.

2019 was also another record year for overseas trips to Northern Ireland, indeed the 7th consecutive record year. In 2019 overseas visitors contributed £589m (£369m from GB, £220m from Other Overseas) to the economy.

⁷ [Tourism Statistics Annual Publication 2019](#)

TOURISM STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

10 YEAR PLAN



With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 the tourism industry experienced an immediate shock with an unprecedented and detrimental impact on a global scale. In Northern Ireland this was further exacerbated with preparing for, then delivering on, EU Exit. Additionally, we have faced challenges such as a cost-of-living crisis, high inflation, and political uncertainty.

However, by 2022 the tourism sector showed positive signs of recovery to pre-COVID levels, especially from our closest markets.

In 2022, Northern Ireland welcomed over 1.1m overnight trips by Republic of Ireland residents, eclipsing the one million figure for the first time and seeing record levels of trips, nights and spend.

Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland trips, nights and spend during 2022 have each seen an increase of 50.6%, 41.6%, and 64.6% respectively, compared to 2019.

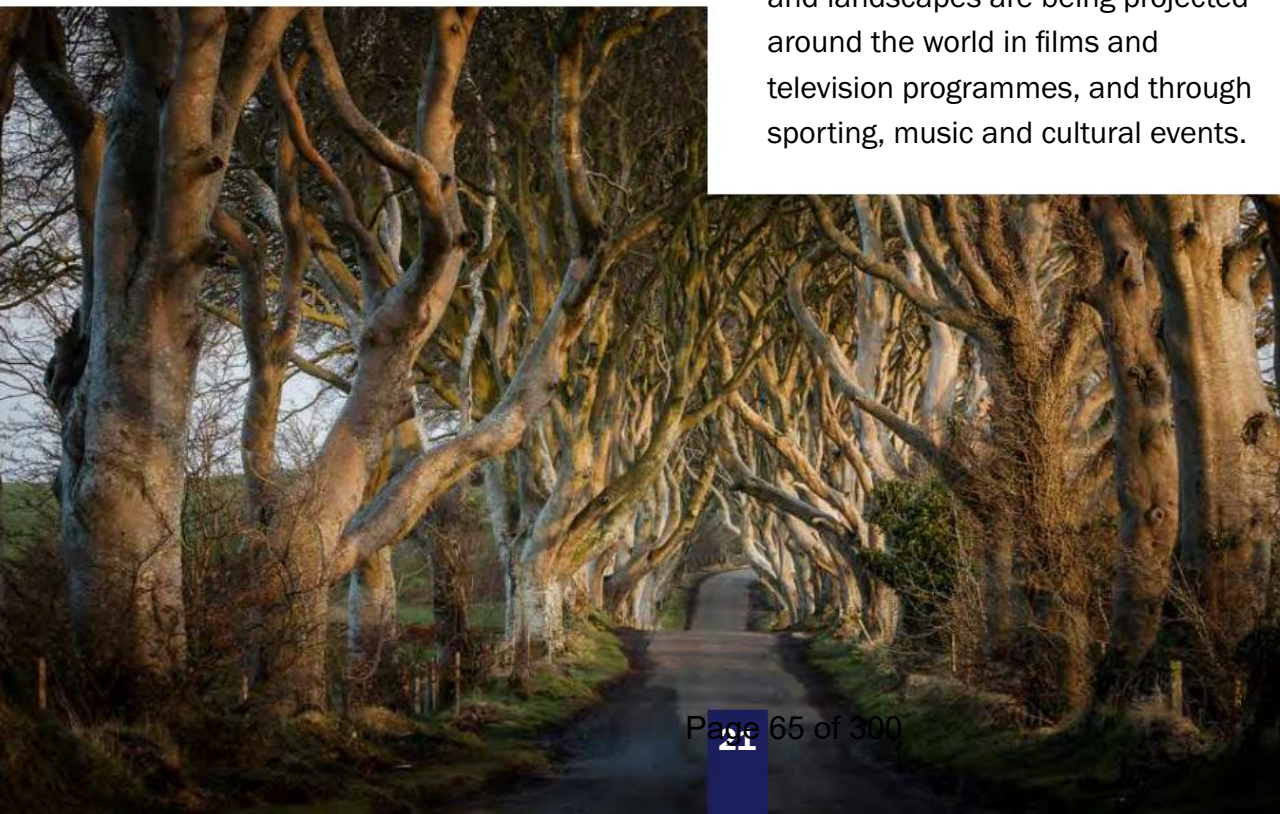
In 2023 there has been a strong post covid recovery and its anticipated visitor numbers will reach 90% of 2019 levels (GB 91%, Other Overseas 87%).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2019 remains the last year for which NISRA tourism statistics are available and hence that will be the baseline year for our strategic aim. The NISRA statistics measure expenditure within the tourism sector. The Department has also contracted NISRA to complete work on a Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) to give a measure of the wider value of the Tourism sector to our local economy including the number of jobs supported. A TSA is an internationally recognised methodology and consists of a set of data tables based around analyses of data on both expenditure by tourists, and on business sectors which serve tourists. It is hoped that this will be available by the end of the 2023-24 financial year.

Northern Ireland's International Reputation

For a long time, Northern Ireland was not viewed as an attractive tourism destination due to our recent troubled past. Since the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, the tourism industry in Northern Ireland has emerged as one of the greatest success stories of the wider peace process. Since then, we have been able to capitalise on our tourism potential as we develop a reputation as a great place to visit with outstanding scenery, strong culture and heritage, authentic experiences and warm people.

Our tourism attractions are officially being recognised as 'world-class' and images of our amazing scenery and landscapes are being projected around the world in films and television programmes, and through sporting, music and cultural events.



CASE STUDY

TITANIC BELFAST

Titanic Belfast opened in 2012 with the aim of establishing Belfast as the home of RMS Titanic, celebrating the city's maritime and industrial heritage, and showing that the spirit that built Titanic remains today. Since then, the visitor attraction has gone from strength to strength on a local, national and international level.

A £4.5m large-scale refreshment of the Titanic Experience, completed in partnership with Maritime Belfast Trust in 2023, was designed to deliver a world-class spectacle, enabling the attraction to continue to drive visitors to Belfast and Northern Ireland while enhancing the interpretive and interactive experience in an innovative way for future generations. The project helps the Titanic story to come to life in a new immersive way, incorporating innovative new technology whilst also including authentic storytelling, animation, music and more. An illuminated 7.6m long scale model of RMS Titanic is suspended from the ceiling and fully rotates, known as 'The Ship of Dreams'.

Continuous improvement at Titanic Belfast drives digital innovation, focusing on seamless experiences for visitors through mobile ticketing, digital maps and multi-media guides provided in different languages. Social sustainability is an important consideration throughout, partnering with local businesses where possible and creating jobs across these companies.

The growth in Northern Ireland tourism 2011-2019



WHY IS TOURISM IMPORTANT IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

There is, however, still significant potential for further growth if the Northern Ireland tourism economy is ultimately to perform at the same level as that of the rest of the Island of Ireland.

In 2019, 11.3m overseas tourists were welcomed to the island of Ireland, 2.2m visited Northern Ireland, 26% of overseas visitors to Northern Ireland arrived via the land border (7% of GB tourists, 62% of Other Overseas tourists).

Total GB and Other overseas visitor tourism revenues in ROI were over seven times the level achieved in NI – £4.5 billion in ROI compared with £589 million in NI. In landmass terms, the Republic of Ireland is five times larger than Northern Ireland and 2.5 times larger by population in 2019. During 2019, 67% of total overnight tourism revenue in ROI came from GB and Other Overseas visitors compared with 56% for NI, these earnings were mainly generated by visitors from mainland GB rather than outside the UK.

A further indicator of the future potential of the Northern Ireland tourism sector is when compared to ROI the average spend per visit for GB and Other Overseas Visitors was only £264 in Northern Ireland during 2019, compared to £470 in Republic of Ireland. GB and Other overseas visitors also stay longer in ROI, staying on average 7.4 nights compared with 4.4 nights in NI (2019). NI spend per head in ROI (for the over-16 population in 2019) was £235; conversely, ROI spend per head in NI was £34, demonstrating a ratio of 7:1 in favour of ROI.





OUR SUCCESS

OUR SUCCESS

How did we get here?

There are a number of key drivers which can be attributed to our past growth. Our decade of success undoubtedly helped enable the sector to reach the significant achievement of becoming a £1billion industry in 2019. Now regarded as one of the most important export sectors of the region's economy, the tourism sector is a key pillar of economic growth.

It generates wealth, jobs, civic pride and innovation. Understanding these drivers will help equip us to meet the challenges facing the industry as we move through the next decade and grasp the opportunities to set tourism on a path to a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable future, creating wealth for the Northern Ireland economy.

DRIVERS FOR GROWTH

Visitor Attractions and Experiences - Outdoors, Culture & Heritage



Accommodation



Screen Tourism



Food & Drink



Events



Business Tourism

Underpinned by

Targeted Marketing and our Experience Brand, 'Embrace a Giant Spirit'
Digital Innovation and Enhancements

Regional Spread

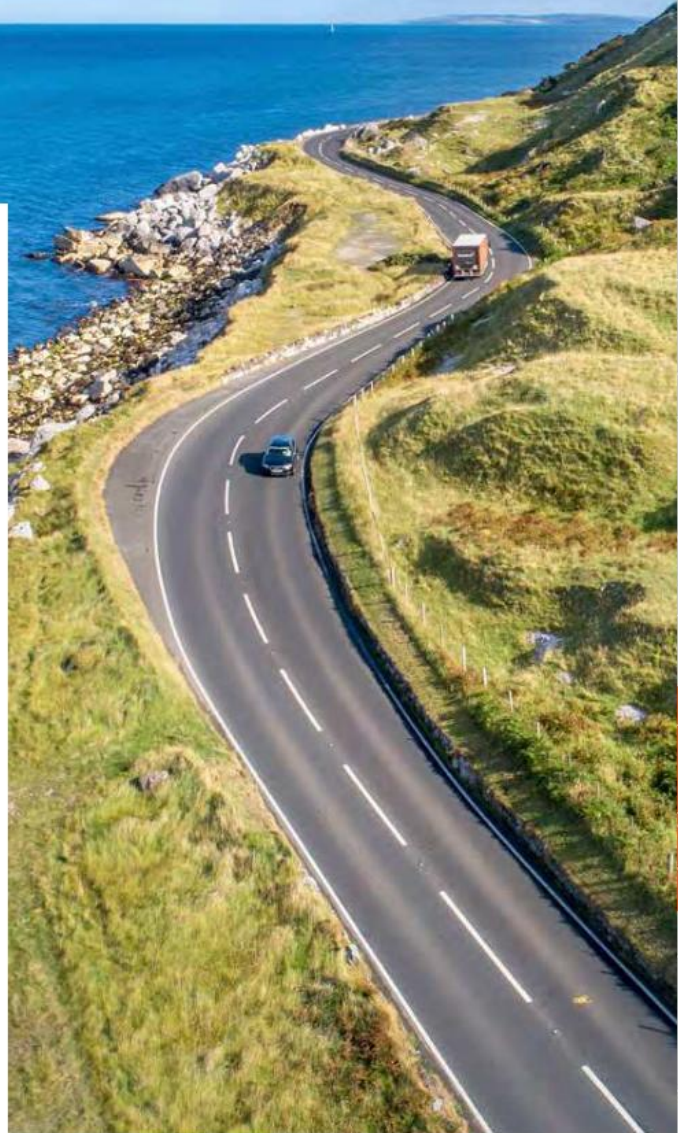
ENABLING

Season Growth

In 2012, there were a number of “signature” tourism projects completed with Tourism NI having invested around £100 million in support of projects worth more than £225 million. These projects included the new visitor centre at the Giant’s Causeway World Heritage Site and Titanic Belfast. These authentic ‘Hero Products’ have delivered a step change in the number of visitors coming to Northern Ireland to see these world class attractions.

These visitor attractions are clearly focused on our landscape and our heritage whilst at the same time meeting the expectations of those visitors from Northern Ireland’s core target markets and priority market segments.

However, since our last significant capital investment over a decade ago, our competitor destinations have been continuing to invest in their tourism infrastructure. Our tourism products are focused in key honey pots, namely Belfast and the Causeway Coastal Route - with many of these sites reaching capacity in peak season and creating potential frustrated demand.



It is welcome therefore that significant investment through City and Growth deals offers capacity building opportunities through development of additional demand generating product in other locations that will encourage wider geographical dispersion of visitors.

Our approach to tourism development requires strategic alignment and collaborative thinking on both a geographical and organisational level.

CASE STUDY

HOTEL KILLEAVY CASTLE

Opened in April 2019 by Mick and Robin Boyle after a sympathetic restoration, Killeavy Castle Estate offers accommodation including a 19th century castle, boutique hotel and luxury lodges. The 365-acre estate has an onsite working farm, Walled Garden and Estate Garden. The Estate is complete with a 2 AA Rosette award-winning restaurant, bistro bar, spa and farm store. Amongst a range of accolades, the Estate won Best Food & Drink Tourism Provider at the 2022 NI Tourism Awards.

Sustainability principles are prioritised in the day-to-day running of the hotel, in particular to the authentic Farm to Fork dining experiences with 90% of food served in the dining areas either grown onsite or sourced within a 20-mile radius.

Visitors to the Estate can take a farm & heritage tour or foraging experiences with visitor experiences designed to maximise the positive environmental impacts of tourism. Additionally, Killeavy Castle Estate has a sustainability plan in place which aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This internationally recognised framework focuses on 17 key goals and guides, the setting of targets and measures for each, which are reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis. Future committed plans include planting 50,000 native trees on their 200-acre mythical woodlands to create a biodiversity corridor between the estate and Slieve Gullion.

Enhanced Visitor Accommodation

Our tourism accommodation offering has developed to provide a breadth of choice to visitors. New arrivals have ranged from luxury hotels to luxury glamping pods. Private sector development across the region's hotel sector boosted high quality

accommodation and other tourism developments with a low environmental footprint. The enhanced accommodation supply has helped to meet the demands, needs and expectations of our visitors, in terms of volume of supply, quality, and affordability.

CASE STUDY

SALT HOUSE

The Salthouse Hotel, in the seaside town of Ballycastle, generates its own energy through solar and wind power, with a wind turbine mounted onsite and solar panels installed around the hotel.

The energy generated is used to ignite the hotel's motion-sensor LED lighting, heat the hotel through heat pumps, charge the electric vehicle charging points as well as the electric bikes onsite. It also supplies energy for the fully electric kitchen in the restaurant and the SMART technology system which monitors consumption around the hotel. Timber frames around the building are used to retain any heat, and biogas and wood pellet boilers are used for further heating. The net result is that the hotel gives back more to the grid than it consumes. These measures not only minimise emissions but also lead to significant cost savings for the property.

Local and eco-friendly options are favoured as part of the hotel's purchasing policy. Local sourcing builds local relationships, contributes to the local economy and allows for shorter and quicker delivery times. The hotel works with local, environmentally-conscious waste management companies. There is also a herb garden onsite from which produce is used in the kitchen.

Sharing knowledge and educating both staff and guests is a fundamental element of The Salthouse Hotel's Sustainability Strategy.

Collectively, Belfast and Causeway Coast and Glens account for just over half (52%) of all of Northern Ireland's accommodation. In developing future accommodation policy it will, therefore, be important to consider how to encourage development of

accommodation outside the Belfast area that will support a greater balance across Northern Ireland and provide the visitor with a choice of places to stay that will lead to greater regional dispersal and, hence, more nights spent on trips.

Events

Events have played an important role in the growth of the tourism industry in Northern Ireland in recent years. International events such as the Giro d'Italia, the MTV European Music Awards, hosting of the Irish Open and the Women's Rugby World Cup have played a key role in generating a positive impact on the perception of Northern Ireland in key overseas markets. The 148th Open, hosted at Royal Portrush in 2019 itself brought over £100m economic benefit to Northern Ireland. Expectations are high for its return in 2025.

Events have the potential to play a role in the overall visitor experience and economic benefit for Northern Ireland. Events offer the visitor the opportunity to immerse themselves in local culture, heritage and tradition. Events also meet other important industrial, cultural and social agendas, including creating a sustainable, inclusive and welcoming event programme for all our local communities as well as visitors.

Our vision is to create a portfolio of distinctive, high-quality sustainable tourism events which tell a compelling story of Northern Ireland to the world.

We will also work to maximise the tourism benefit for Northern Ireland from any events curated through the development of a Northern Ireland Events Framework.

Tourism Marketing Campaigns

Northern Ireland tourism specific campaigns sought to maximise the opportunities in both the NI and ROI markets to increase visitor numbers and spend. Campaigns in ROI yielded a considerable rise in spend and revenue in NI businesses. This increased our share of the all-island staycation market particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic with a significant number of people from ROI having travelled to NI for the first time on leisure breaks.

Overseas marketing campaigns delivered by Tourism Ireland have enabled dramatic improvement in visitation to Northern Ireland. In 2022 Northern Ireland featured in the highly successful Green Button campaign that kick started the recovery of overseas Tourism. In 2023, in addition to the Global Campaign Fill Your Heart with Ireland, spotlight features on Belfast City of Music UNESCO designation were brought to New York and Boston. In Great Britain there were collaborations with Spotify to position Belfast's vibrant music scene.



Tourism NI's high profile "Embrace a Giant Spirit" re-brand was launched at the end of 2019 to promote Northern Ireland as a visitor destination on the island of Ireland and supports Tourism Ireland's messaging overseas. This was developed to help Northern Ireland stand out amongst our competitors, emotionally connect with its target market segments and communicate to the consumer the experience they can expect if they choose to visit Northern Ireland. The rebrand is synonymous with a high-quality tourism offering and visitor experience, instantly recognisable as distinctively Northern Irish and has ensured the region has the ability to complement and compete with the other experience brands on the Island of Ireland. The appeal of the "Giant Spirit" re-brand has undoubtedly played a pivotal role in driving increased visitor numbers. It also capitalised on the staycation trend across the island that had started to surge prior to 2020, which was then accelerated by the pandemic.

Fill your heart with
Ireland 



Tourism Ireland has promoted Northern Ireland as part of the island of Ireland destination message overseas in over 20 markets worldwide. This approach has seen dramatic improvements not just in terms of visitation and contribution to the sector but to the desirability of Northern Ireland as a holiday destination. The development of new attractions, accommodation offerings and experiences are visible and promoted heavily across Tourism Ireland media platforms and headline brand campaigns. The 2023 "Fill Your Heart with Ireland" TV campaign featured actors from the internationally recognised "Derry Girls" programme.

CASE STUDY

CRUMLIN ROAD GAOL

Crumlin Road Gaol is Northern Ireland's only remaining Victorian era prison. Having closed in 1996 it was re-opened as a visitor attraction in 2012, designed to allow visitors to gain a unique and memorable insight into 150 years of history surrounding the daily lives and routines of both prisoners and staff.

Innovation is central to the experience at the Gaol, continuing with the 2023 completion of a digital project to enhance the self-guided visitor experience which includes holograms to bring the history to life and an AR Zone for visitors to fully immerse themselves into the Gaol when it was a working prison.

Audio Guides are also available to help customers navigate their way around the 13-acre site. To enhance the inclusiveness of their self-guided offer, content is offered in 6 languages and there is also a facility to allow British Sign Language allowing material to be interpreted via sign videos and making the tour more accessible.

Digital Innovation and Enhancements

From an innovation perspective, the industry has had to continually innovate to adapt to the digital revolution which has swept through the travel and tourism industries in recent years. Today's traveller is accustomed to being able to do practically anything from their mobile

device; from booking flights, checking in, and booking hotel rooms, unlocking their hotel room door, ordering room service, accessing information, booking experiences, sharing these with their peers and sharing their opinions instantly on review websites.

CASE STUDY

DERRY GIRLS SPONSORSHIP

With an average of 2.9m viewers per episode, TV series Derry Girls, has been an international success connecting to audiences through its humour and storytelling. In 2022, Tourism Ireland in GB sponsored the final series of the show on Channel 4 including creating idents around the broadcast and an online partnership with C4. Producing a creative infused with humour and aligned to the style of the show enabled Tourism Ireland to showcase Derry-Londonderry and NI as an exciting holiday destination.

The campaign delivered excellent results with a broadcast reach of 9.5m adults and a reach of over 41m impressions through video on demand driving 96k clicks through to the Ireland.com website. On social media, 9m Facebook impressions were delivered with 12.7m impressions on YouTube of the sponsorship. A follow up brand study demonstrated that 23% of viewers claimed to have visited Ireland.com in the month following the sponsorship and consideration of NI as a holiday destination rose by 12%.

Screen Tourism

Screen tourism has grown at a phenomenal rate with Northern Ireland having become an ever-increasing popular destination choice for filming television and screen dramas such as Game of Thrones and Derry Girls. The significant investment in the growth in studio space has also helped secure Northern Ireland's reputation as a world class film location.

Visitors want to visit locations and landmarks where the most exciting and memorable scenes have been filmed. The industry has responded to this trend by adding value to the tourists' experience with a range of offerings such as guided tours having been developed around the story-telling and the opening of new attractions such as the Game of Thrones Studio Tour in Banbridge.



Business Tourism

Business Tourism, (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions sector) has grown our international reputation by showcasing Northern Ireland as a destination for unique, authentic and memorable conferences and events supporting the region's economic development, education and tourism objectives.

Business Tourism plays an important role in offsetting seasonality and in 2019, it generated £37 million of direct expenditure for the Northern Ireland economy. Tourism Ireland provides platforms overseas to enable operators to grow this business.

Food & Drink

Northern Ireland's food & drink offering has played a key role in enhancing the visibility and reputation of NI as a must-see destination. Food & drink are key elements of the travel experience and contribute to some of the strongest memory triggers. Importantly, food & drink expenditure accounts for around a third of total overnight visitor spend. The success

of the Northern Ireland Year of Food and Drink initiative back in 2016 did much to enhance the visibility and reputation of Northern Ireland's artisan produce, restaurants, markets, food tours and festivals. Ultimately this led to Northern Ireland being awarded the prestigious 'Best Food Tourism Destination' at the 2018 World Travel Awards.

CASE STUDY

WALLED CITY BREWERY

Walled City Brewery is a multi-award-winning restaurant and craft brewery at the end of the Peace Bridge in the heart of Derry/Londonderry, opened in May 2015 by husband-and-wife James and Louise Huey. Housed in an historic military barracks, Walled City Brewery have crafted over 500 different beers with identifiable links to the city, and in 2022, opened new additions to enhance the visitor experience including a taproom which resulted in a 50% uplift in revenue.

Walled City Brewery are members of the Legenderry Food Network and active supporters of other entrepreneurial enterprises in the city, encouraging smart ideas in food and hospitality. Collaboration is equally important, collaborating with family-run business Foyle Bia Mara to host the UK & Ireland's first ever Oyster & Stout Festival in February 2023, where everything was produced within a 15-mile radius.

Further extending their appeal to visitors, Walled City Brewery offer a range of tasting experiences that celebrate the art of gin-making and rich history of brewing, including the Earheart Gin School, where visitors can design, distill and take home a bespoke gin recipe.

Food-motivated visitors are of significant value, tending to spend more, stay longer and often buy products both in destination and when they return home. Both international and domestic visitors are looking for experiences that are unavailable where they live, seeking to eat foods as close to their source or place of origin as possible. This, coupled with a more sustainable approach to travel,

will increase the focus on local food & drink in the years ahead. Northern Ireland is well poised to meet these needs with its warm welcome, giant spirit and high quality, traceable food & drink offer. The food & drink offer, therefore, needs to deliver to a consistently high standard, complimenting and reflecting Northern Ireland's agricultural importance and history, and our broader culture and heritage.

A photograph of a modern building with a faceted, metallic facade. The building is set against a clear blue sky. In the foreground, there is a large, circular, white sculpture made of thin metal rods. The building's facade is composed of many small, rectangular panels that create a complex, geometric pattern. A few people are visible near the entrance of the building, which has a sign that reads "APPRENTICESHIP CENTRE".

WHAT TYPE OF TOURISM IS BEST FOR NORTHERN IRELAND?

WHAT TYPE OF TOURISM IS BEST FOR NORTHERN IRELAND?

What Visitors Want

Consumers seek authentic, immersive experiences and a wider tourism economy that allows them to connect with the people and places they are visiting. They increasingly see their holidays as an extension and reflection of themselves.

This includes a desire to discover new and interesting places, explore, learn, and have a memorable time with friends and family. Moreover, they are prioritising eco-friendly options that are affordable, sustainable, and accessible.

CASE STUDY

OM DARK SKY PARK

OM Dark Sky Park at Davagh Forest is one of only 78 destinations around the world with Dark Sky accreditation, and the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland.

It offers a range of compelling visitor experiences such as daily guided tours and collaborates with local guides for their innovative Stars and Stones experience where visitors can spend a night under the stars, learn about the ancient Beaghmore Stone Circles and gaze at the constellations through a state-of-the-art telescope. They further collaborate with Sperrin View Glamping to encourage visitors to extend their stay in the area and promote the destination.

Protection against the negative impact of light pollution is a core ethos of OM Dark Sky Park, safeguarding the night skies for present and future generations.

TOURISM STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

10 YEAR PLAN



Source: Tourism NI Product Review 2023

With ever changing market demand for tourism product and experiences it is vital that the tourism industry remains innovative and a destination that champions its warm welcome, authentic stories, natural landscapes, and cultural assets.⁸

Key Markets

Concentration of our efforts will be vital to our future success. With this in mind, our strategy for growth will focus on a number of priority market and segments. This focus does not imply that there are markets or segments that we are not interested in, rather there are ones that we are focused on ahead of others.

The strategy will seek to develop a well-balanced market portfolio and minimise overreliance on any one market.

Fundamental to our focus on being a sustainable destination, our emphasis will be less on encouraging more visitors, and more on encouraging our visitors to stay longer, consume more tourism product thus spending more.

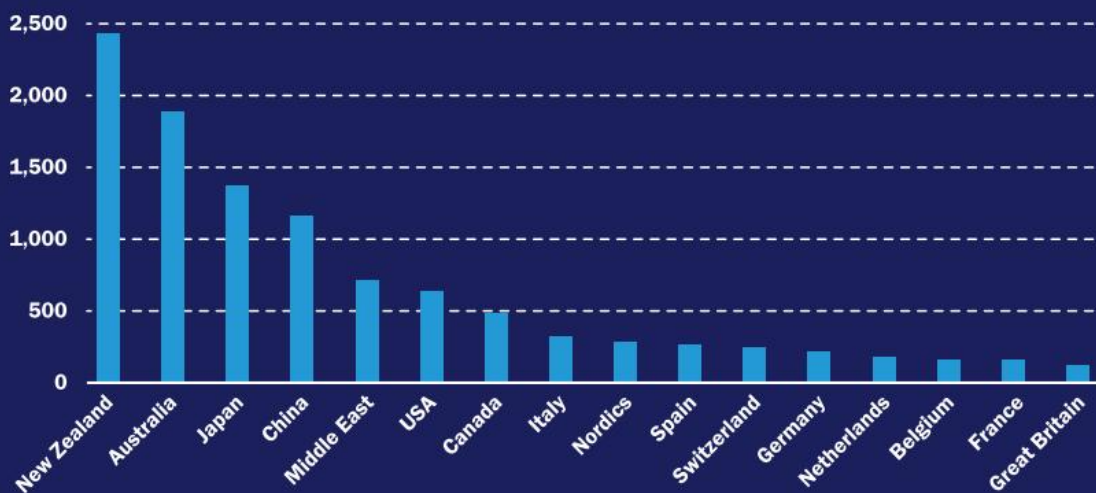
The four markets of primary focus will be the NI domestic market, Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and North America. Official statistics show that in 2019 there were 5.33 million overnight visitors in NI, staying for a total of 16.6m nights and spending £1.04 billion.

8 Based on TNI Experience Research (Innovation Screener), 2020

The domestic, ROI, GB and North American markets collectively accounted for 90% of these trips, 82 % of nights spent and 87% of revenue generated. The three 'closer to home' markets of NI, ROI and GB, represented the focus of our Covid-19 recovery

programme under the Tourism Recovery Action Plan. With this stable base for further recovery and growth and with the full opening up of international travel in 2022, pent up demand in the US has resulted in a strong recovery from this market in 2023.

Passengers from long-haul markets generate higher CO₂e



These four markets have been chosen based on their scale, value, potential for growth and likely propensity to consider Northern Ireland as a holiday destination. Critically, they are markets where the carbon footprint of the visitor will have least environmental impact.

to travel, visitors from the US and Canada tend to spend more and stay longer.

The North American market has been included in our priority list as, whilst it obviously has a higher carbon footprint than the closer to home markets due to the distance required

These markets will be given primary consideration with respect to strategy and resource allocation in the following areas:

- Marketing and brand activation
- Product and experience development
- Distribution development and network building.

Northern Ireland

Overall, Northern Ireland is held in high esteem as a short break destination within the domestic market, perceived as offering better value for money than the Republic of Ireland and GB. In 2019 it accounted for 44% of all overnight trips taken in NI with 65% of these being holiday trips – higher than any other key market. For some Local Authority areas, the NI domestic market accounts for up to 65% of visitors. NI consumers taking a break in NI are keen to relax and unwind and have fun. The domestic market is important for both season extension and regional dispersal.

Great Britain

As NI's single largest market in terms of revenue, 35% in 2019, it is imperative that GB is a core focus for the future. GB holidaymakers making their first visit to Northern Ireland see us as a short-break destination which can be enjoyed at any time of the year. Subsequently, 53% of our GB holidaymakers are coming on a repeat visit – a much higher proportion than from any other source market. Encouraging previous visitors to come back again and explore other parts of Northern Ireland beyond Belfast on their return trip, is a real opportunity from GB.

The majority of GB residents enter directly through NI airports or seaports.

Republic of Ireland

As our nearest neighbour, the Republic of Ireland market is one that represents huge potential, having previously underperformed. The ROI Market Recovery Taskforce launched its growth strategy in 2017, further refreshed in 2021. With highly focussed priorities required to drive growth, the strategy has been embraced by the industry and enabled by Tourism NI's targeted marketing campaigns and supporting activities. This has directly resulted in a post pandemic recovery of ROI to NI trips, nights and spend (£233m) during 2022 each seeing increases of 50.6%, 41.6%, and 64.6% respectively, compared to 2019. Consumer sentiment research throughout 2022 and into 2023, indicated that approximately half of NI's visitors from ROI were visiting for the first time, presenting an opportunity to attract these visitors for a return visit. The ROI market is also stronger for regional dispersal than other markets.

North America

In 2019 visitors from the North American market took 280,000 overnight trips in Northern Ireland, staying 1,341,000 nights and spending £79m (8% of total revenue in 2019). US and Canada visitors stayed on average 4.8 nights in Northern Ireland and spent on average, £281 per trip. For the majority of these visitors (62%), a holiday was their main reason for visiting Northern Ireland. Around one-third (32%) came to visit friends/relatives, with the remaining 6% visiting for business/other reasons. The US market accounts for 56% of the Incentive trips to Northern Ireland since 2019-20 and is Northern Ireland's largest market for incentive at present. Post covid, the US market has been recovering during the second half of 2022. The US market's desire to travel is evident and holiday makers are keen to make up for lost time. USA's historic political connections with Northern Ireland and a strong diaspora ingrain a strong connection between the US and the Island of Ireland. Canada too has an affinity with Northern Ireland, through diaspora and Scots Irish ties, and strong air access to the island with possible potential for a future direct route to NI.

Canadian visitors, like US visitors, will be familiar with the requirements of Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs).

Tourism Ireland forecast that visitors from North America will return to 2019 visitor number levels by 2024/25 and revenue spend by 2023/24. By 2030, North American revenue is forecast to increase by 35% on the 2019 level (by 11% in real terms).

Other Important Markets

The French and German markets are also key sources of visitors from Mainland Europe. In 2019, France and Germany jointly accounted for 120,000 trips, 680,000 nights and £26m in overnight visitor spend. These closer to home European markets with direct access have proven to be strongly attracted to the type of tourism product on offer in Northern Ireland.

It is important to reiterate that the focus on these markets does not mean that opportunities in other markets will be ignored or not acted upon. However, these markets will be prioritised as they offer the greatest capacity to drive the sustainable growth and development required.

A scenic view of a rocky cliffside with a suspension bridge. The cliff is covered in green grass and has a callout box highlighting a specific rock formation. The suspension bridge is made of metal mesh and runs along the edge of the cliff. The ocean is visible in the background under a clear blue sky.

DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES FOR CHANGE

DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES FOR CHANGE

Trends in consumer needs and requirements:

Value for Money: With significant increases in the cost of living and high inflation, consumer disposable income has seen a dramatic reduction. Despite the current economic uncertainty, there is still a strong desire for travel. Travellers will prioritise a trip that delivers strong value for money, however, will still expect high quality experiences.

Relaxation and Escapism:

Motivations for travel vary among different market segments, but relaxation and getting away from it all are key reasons behind post pandemic travel. Linked to this, the trend of wellness travel continues. Travelling solo to get away from it all is on the rise particularly among young people.

Authentic Experiences: There is rising interest in unique and authentic experiences. Local excursions are likely to become increasingly popular as tourists search for authenticity in destinations that have a culture different to their own.

Immersive culinary journeys will allow travellers to sample local produce and screen tourism will provide unique experiences to a range of tastes.

Sustainable Tourism: There is more to the topic of sustainability than just the environmental focus. The social aspect of sustainability is equally important and, given the rising costs facing tourists and businesses, the economic aspect of sustainability is now more crucial than ever.

Seamless Travel: Aligning with relaxation being the top motivation for travelling, consumers want a seamless, hassle-free experience when taking a trip. They are interested in how the latest digital innovations can enhance their experience but still expect high quality, human-led hospitality.

Challenges to the growth of the tourism sector:

As the targeted government interventions provided to support the tourism and hospitality sector survive and recover from the pandemic withdrew, as the sector opened up and restrictions were lifted, ongoing and new challenges and threats have put significant pressure on the industry again.

Many businesses are still recovering from the effects of the pandemic, experiencing cash flow difficulties with the need to pay back government loans amongst other financial and resourcing pressures.





Economic Pressures:

High inflation and unprecedented energy costs and constrained public expenditure resulting from the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in early 2022, increasing UK interest rates and an uncertain economic situation continue to present challenges for businesses in the tourism sector.



Skills and Recruitment:

Skills shortages and recruitment difficulties have been particularly exacerbated by the pandemic, with many employees leaving the sector and not returning. Prior to the pandemic, the tourism and hospitality sectors had a reputation of offering a poor work/life balance with long working hours and conditions, and a lack of career progression opportunities. Brexit also impacted the sector due to new immigration rules resulting in a significant number of EU nationals employed in the industry leaving NI.



Reducing Carbon Emissions/Climate Change:

Businesses will need to implement sustainable working practices in order to reduce their carbon footprint and use energy from more renewable sources. This will be a challenge for some businesses more than others and will require ongoing investment in order to support the delivery of energy reduction targets whilst ensuring that their tourism offer is sustainable to positively respond to changing consumer demands. Outdoor and nature-based attractions will play an important part in communicating a sustainable approach to visitors.

Significant strides have been made in addressing perceptions of the sector, however with a tight labour market, an ongoing focus on communicating the career opportunities and positive changes in employer terms and conditions will be required to ensure that access to a skilled workforce does not restrict sustainable growth of the sector. A potential solution lies in tourism's ability to address economic inactivity in both our urban and rural communities through bringing people who have been outside the labour market back into a working environment that can offer flexibility and tangible career options.

ONS statistics show that 1 in 3 employees in the sector are between the ages of 16 and 20 - for many young people it provides a path out of joblessness into the employment market. Across the UK, the tourism and hospitality sectors support almost half (46%) of all people aged under 24 in the UK workforce. The tourism industry provides a career path for school leavers into management and leadership that is rarely found across other sectors. The soft skills that young people are equipped with when working in tourism and hospitality are highly transferable to many occupations. As a socially important sector, it provides a route to greater social mobility for many within our most deprived city and rural communities. It provides jobs for less highly qualified or educated people and so can attract workers from a wide spectrum of society. In the longer term, the only way to resolve NI's social problems and dependency on benefits is to create meaningful employment opportunities for our young people who otherwise will continue to suffer from low aspirations and low self-esteem which in turn exacerbates economic inactivity. It is worth noting that a core characteristic of the tourism sector is the job intensive nature of the industry.

It is estimated that for every £ million output, tourism supports 31 jobs, substantially higher than the majority of other sectors, including construction (24 jobs) and telecommunications (7 jobs).



**Sustainable
Market Connectivity:**

Given our dependency on both sea and air travel to remain competitive as a tourist destination, we will need to strike the balance between managing the risks associated with rising carbon prices and maintaining connectivity of airports between target tourist markets. Northern Ireland is physically remote from the rest of the UK and does not have the same road and rail connectivity options available. All direct flights to NI are from GB and mainland Europe and direct access from North America and long-haul markets is via the Republic of Ireland. Around two thirds of overseas (excluding GB) visitors to Northern Ireland arrive through the Republic of Ireland. There is a heavy reliance on air travel for both business and leisure travellers to and from NI. Attracting inbound visitors, access to tertiary education, and connecting the NI diaspora also depends heavily on aviation.



Changing Government

Policy: The UK government's Borders and Nationalities Bill to introduce a new travel visa known as an ETA will be a requirement to all non-visa national visitors to Northern Ireland whether they arrive directly at a UK airport or ferry terminal. Some 70% of overseas tourists arrive in ROI first, mainly into Dublin, and include a visit to NI as part of their trip. The Department for the Economy is working with key stakeholders and the Home Office to inform the UKG communications campaign with the aim of ensuring that the ETA requirement will not deter overseas visitors from coming to Northern Ireland.



Market Competition:

Northern Ireland's geographical location and the legacy of the Troubles, particularly regarding consumer perceptions, create a unique set of circumstances and challenges that are not faced by the other UK nations. Northern Ireland is a relatively immature tourism destination compared with the well-established industry infrastructure and destination attractiveness of the ROI.

The 52% growth in overnight visitor spend demonstrated in Northern Ireland between 2012 and 2019, was much higher than that experienced across Europe and the world. However, when compared with the revenue growth experienced by the ROI, our nearest neighbour, Northern Ireland's growth pales in significance. ROI overnight tourism expenditure grew by 69% between 2012 and 2019, equating to an average annual growth of 9.8%.



Technological

Advances:

Advances in new technologies and the application of these, such as Artificial intelligence (AI) are moving very quickly. As consumers adapt to new technologies, travel and tourism businesses need to ensure that they are utilising the latest methods of engaging with potential customers and in the running of their day-to-day operations.



Infrastructure Investment:

In order to remain competitive and have a tourism infrastructure that supports our ambition, investment in visitor centric tourist attractions and accommodation, particularly in hotels outside Belfast, will be required.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Where are we going?

To fulfil the potential of our tourism industry in Northern Ireland we require a shared vision for the future; a vision which recognises the vital role tourism plays, and will continue to play, in showcasing the very best experiences of our incredible landscape. Not only for our international visitors but for our domestic visitors who can enjoy world class visitor experiences at home.

With new destination choices continually emerging, Northern Ireland is under intense pressure to remain both attractive and competitive. In this competitive environment, we must be authentic, distinctive, innovative, and creative in our approach.

In addition, there are a number of initiatives underway of mutual and synergetic benefit to the Tourism Economy. In the past co-operation has seen global events like “Giro d’Italia” deliver material benefit. Currently work is underway on an all-island Sustainability Certification programme, and opportunity to more seamlessly experience the North West by better aligning the offerings of the Causeway Coastal Route, Derry/Londonderry and Wild Atlantic Way.

The Department has identified its strategic intention through our 10x Vision. Aligning with this Vision, the Tourism Strategy provides a regional approach to growing tourism across Northern Ireland in the next 10 years. Our delivery partners, Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland, are already embedded in the local tourism industry bringing a wealth of knowledge and expertise, providing support and guidance on local tourism strategies. These delivery partners will lead the sector in designing approaches and targeted programmes and prioritise interventions which will aggregate towards achieving the strategic aim and indicators of this Strategy, and ultimately contribute to the 10x Vision.

The Strategy will enable the region to capitalise on its uniqueness and authenticity to help market and promote Northern Ireland internationally as an attractive place to visit, whilst at the same time helping to make the lives better for those that live, work and study here.

CASE STUDY

FINN LOUGH

Finn Lough has been operating as a luxury accommodation provider since 1983, as a quiet hideaway nestled on a 100-acre peninsula resort, in County Fermanagh.

With the next generation of owners taking over Finn Lough in 2012 they set out to develop the experience in a way that was eye catching, respectful and largely invisible within the forest surroundings. This led to the addition of the unique bubble domes in 2017. A bespoke private spa trail experience, set within the forest was also added. The sustainability merits of Finn Lough also evolved naturally with initiatives such as capturing and using rainwater and composting waste. As the only place to stay in a bubble dome on the island of Ireland, these take glamping to another level of luxury. They have received international recognition and attention and in 2017 Finn Lough Fermanagh was ranked as the coolest hotel in Ireland by The Times.

How will we get there?

Five interrelated and interdependent Themes and associated Indicators have been developed to help ensure we support our businesses, entrepreneurs and innovators; boost economic productivity; expand career pathways; break down barriers for residents and visitors with disabilities; improve regional dispersal and increase off-season growth. Together these measures can contribute to the sustainable growth of our tourism industry and benefit our communities across the region.

It provides a framework for implementing the Vision and Mission of the Strategy and contributing to the aims of the 10x Economic Vision. Taking these steps will lay the foundation for future development in the tourism sector over the next 10 years as government (central and local), the tourism industry and wider stakeholders work together to achieve our Strategic Aim of increasing the value of tourism to the NI economy by 50 - 75% compared to 2019 and support the tourism economy to realise its potential for the future.



CASE STUDY

GLENSHANE COUNTRY FARM

Fourth generation sheep farmer Jamese McCloy opened up his family farm, Glenshane Country Farm, to tourism visitors in 2019. Since then he has embraced continuous development and improvement to sustainably grow his offer of a truly authentic Northern Irish experience to show an appreciation for the special landscapes of the Sperrins and to keep the traditional sheep farming practices alive.

The visitor offering on the farm has recently been enhanced with the development of an iconic visitor centre, which not only enriches the quality of visitor services for the international visitor but increases capacity to attract additional leading international global tour operators.

Glenshane Country Farm has become a tourism destination driver and plays a pivotal role in collaborating with other tourism businesses within the destination to encourage longer stays and increased spend.

These Five Strategic Themes reflect the priorities identified in the 10x Performance Management Framework⁹ and the associated Indicators provide a framework for implementing the Vision and Mission of the Strategy to enhance the contribution the tourism sector is already making to the implementation of the principles of the 10x Vision.

Achieving any one of the Indicators will not be enough; delivery against **all** of the indicators will reinforce that tourism can deliver economic, social and environmental benefits accelerating tourism's contribution towards a more innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy.

9 [10x-performance management framework consultation document](#)

STRATEGIC THEMES

Inclusive

A tourism ecosystem that brings opportunities for all, with lasting and positive economic and societal benefits to our communities throughout all parts of Northern Ireland.



Innovative

We will build on our culture of innovation and creativity to deliver positive change. We will pursue excellence and world class ideas to make our industry more competitive and sustainable.



Attractive

To inspire and energise others through our passion, enthusiasm, pride, determination and Giant Spirit. Our spirit will set us apart and make Northern Ireland a great place to work, live, visit and invest.



Sustainable

We will build upon Northern Ireland's unique journey of regeneration. We will evolve our tourism ecosystem to be greener and sustain and invigorate our people, our place and our natural environment. We inspire future generations to thrive.



Collaborative

We collaborate widely in a spirit of true partnership. We nurture a shared vision and common clarity of purpose.



WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?



STRATEGIC THEME ONE: **INNOVATIVE**



10x Vision: 'A focus on innovation is increasing incomes, improving productivity levels, providing opportunities for all our people, creating a net zero economy and showcasing our brilliance.'

Tourism Strategy: We will build on our culture of innovation and creativity to deliver positive change. We will pursue excellence and world class ideas to make our industry more competitive and sustainable.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit the tourism sector harder than any other and, as a result, the sector had to be **innovative** in its response, embracing ways to mitigate the impact and not only kickstart its recovery efforts but also build for the future of the sector. The sector has demonstrated its resilience and ability to successfully respond to the toughest of challenges, displaying creativity and agility to

move with changing consumer trends. Research, insights and data analytics have allowed the sector to develop products aligned to market needs including digitisation and using new technologies to attract tourists, maturity of VR and IR and sector diversification, providing new and innovative experiences and activities for visitors and local communities alike.

To meet rapidly changing demands from international and domestic tourists it will be important to support small businesses – who make up 89%¹⁰ of the Northern Ireland economy - to operate online and have the ambition to reach new international markets, to create a sustainable sector where everyone can use technology

ensuring our tourism offer remains competitive internationally. Focussing our innovation and entrepreneurship in areas where we have real strengths can create a more sustainable future for all, not only increasing the quality of the experience for visitors but also improving the quality of life for our residents.

What Innovative success looks like

- Use creative ideas and methods to develop new products or services to maximise benefits.
- Capitalise on new and emerging technologies to develop solutions to tourism industry challenges.
- Tourism workforce has the right digital skills to ensure that they meet the needs consumers' evolving needs.
- Use real time quantitative analytics and insights to develop, market and monitor performance of our tourism offer.

Innovative Indicators

Creating new and innovative tourism experiences:

- Annual Increase in the number of our tourism businesses receiving Innovate NI recognition levels.
- Annual Increase in the number of high value-added business start-ups and entrepreneurship levels within the tourism sector.
- Increase the export value of the tourism sector measured by expenditure from overnight visitors from outside Northern Ireland.
- Annual Increase in the number of tourism businesses participating in Tourism Innovation Programmes.
- Annual Increase in the number of meetings, incentives, conferences and business events aligned with the 10x strategy to position Northern Ireland as a place to innovate.

¹⁰ In March 2022, the majority of businesses (89 per cent, 70,510) in Northern Ireland were micro-businesses (less than 10 employees). Just over 2 per cent (1,640) of businesses had 50 or more employees. Source: [DfENIBusinessActivityJune2023](#)

STRATEGIC THEME TWO:
INCLUSIVE



10x Vision: All people across Northern Ireland are benefitting from improved economic prosperity, there is a fairer distribution of opportunities for all our people and there are better opportunities for our young people.

Tourism Strategy: A tourism ecosystem that brings opportunities for all, with lasting and positive economic and societal benefits to our communities throughout all parts of Northern Ireland.

Creating an environment that our people are proud to call home with a high quality offering requires businesses to have the right amount of people with the right skills working in the sector. Tourism is people oriented. It has a major role to play in delivering an **inclusive** balanced sub-regional growth and has the potential to address economic inactivity in both our urban and rural communities. It is one of the few industry sectors which has the potential to create substantial employment across every part of Northern Ireland and within every section of our society. By placing an emphasis on our people, their skills and professionalism we can enhance the attractiveness of Northern Ireland as a world class visitor destination.

A challenge for the sector is the image of tourism as a career choice. Without a confident, well trained and

professional workforce we have no visitor experience. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address the identified skills gaps and shortages within the tourism sector and develop tourism career opportunities and life-long career pathways, creating a sector that people of all ages aspire to work in.

To deliver the strategy, the ability to further drive sustainable regional and seasonal growth will also be dependent upon the development of a number of tourism hubs across Northern Ireland.

These hubs, which have the right mix of accommodation, attractions, experiences and a vibrant evening economy to meet the needs of the tourist, will provide a base from which visitors can explore the surrounding area on every day of the week on a year-round basis.

These hubs are likely to already have a minimum level of tourism infrastructure or be close to attractions with substantial growth potential and have the potential too, to contribute to the placemaking priority in 10x. It will be critical that these destination hubs can offer

all of the key requirements for the visitor to ensure that they do not just become a day trip destination with visitors migrating back to Belfast for their overnight stay. Regenerative investment will be required in new tourism and retail infrastructure to ensure success.

What Inclusive success looks like

- More sectors of the economy across the whole of Northern Ireland will benefit from tourism.
- Tourism investment, conferences and events have tangible benefits to local communities.
- The sector is actively engaged with local communities as valued stakeholders in tourism development and delivery.
- Tourism is an inclusive employer offering a diverse range of desirable career paths throughout Northern Ireland.

Inclusive Indicators

Contributing to a more inclusive economy:

- Improve the Work Quality¹¹ for the tourism sector, including competitive salaries, career pathways, opportunities to secure qualifications and comfortable working conditions, creating an accessible, competitive and attractive industry in which to work.
- Annual Increase in the number of employees within the tourism sector from underrepresented groups (including people who are economically inactive, people with disabilities, and from deprived areas) contributing to an equitable distribution of opportunities to all our people.

11 [Work Quality in Northern Ireland - July 2021 to June 2022 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk)

CASE STUDY

GALGORM COLLECTION

Through its strong leadership commitment, inclusive policies, diverse workforce, comprehensive training programs, and a welcoming guest experience, Galgorm Collection creates a vibrant and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered. It recently became the first hospitality group on the island of Ireland to achieve official Great Place to Work certification.

Its recruitment practices focus on attracting talent from diverse backgrounds, leveraging collaborations with Community organisations such as a strategic partnership with the NOW Group, and creating its own academies to remove barriers to employment whilst seeking to address the current skills shortage.

The Galgorm Collection continues to work with the local council and colleges to strengthen its employer credentials and grow new talent through its School of Excellence and Spa Scholarship. In 2021, it partnered with a local charity and two other local hotels to launch the Northern Ireland Hospitality School and in 2022 the Galgorm Collection launched a new Chef Academy.



STRATEGIC THEME THREE: **SUSTAINABLE**



10x Vision: Tourism is supporting a greener, more sustainable economy which is delivering positive economic, environmental and societal outcomes.

Tourism Strategy: We will build upon Northern Ireland's unique journey of regeneration. We will evolve our tourism ecosystem to be greener and sustain and invigorate our people, our place and our natural environment. We inspire future generations to thrive.

The growing global demand for responsible tourism – including climate consciousness, sustainable tourism, environmental tourism and a desire for culturally and socially enriching activities – has been in part driven by legislation, an increasing sense of corporate responsibility but, most importantly, as a result of consumer expectations. This has accelerated the need to develop new and innovative products and services which are more **sustainable**.

Promoting tourism developments with a low environmental footprint takes into consideration the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹² which strives for a better and more sustainable future for all through economic growth, reducing poverty, supporting cultural heritage and environmental sustainability.

These can lead to improving the experience for our tourists and also the quality of life for our residents.

Sustainable Travel International estimates that 8% of the world's carbon emissions are generated by activities relating to tourism, including the fuel required to fly passengers to their destination. Northern Ireland has a high dependency on tourists arriving via sea and air. In 2019, of the 5.3 million overnight trips taken in Northern Ireland, around 3 million (56%) of these were taken by external visitors (visitors originating from outside of NI). In December 2019, Northern Ireland air passenger flow for the previous 12 months was recorded at 8.9 million, demonstrating NI's airplane dependency at the time.

¹² <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

CASE STUDY

BROOK HALL ESTATE

For over thirty years, the historic estate of Brook Hall located on the banks of the River Foyle has actively committed to researching and promoting renewable energy, environmental, and landscape management strategies to achieve genuine sustainability and inspire behavioural change; becoming the first heritage landscape in Northern Ireland to be measurably beyond carbon neutral.

Keen to share the impact of their sustainability practices, David Gilliland, the sixth generation living at Brook Hall, developed a series of innovative tourism experiences which take visitors on a journey through the heritage, nature, and sustainability of the demesne. Experiences include a guided tour of the willow farm and biomass processing facilities followed by a series of experimental activities across the wider estate and gardens, exploring the soil health and biodiversity within the landscape along the way.

The vulnerability in this dependency was exposed due to the fact that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, global connectivity with air traffic into Northern Ireland's three airports reduced by 85% in early 2020¹³.

Given our dependency on both sea and air travel as part of our external tourism, to remain competitive as a tourist destination, we will need to strike the balance between managing the risks associated with rising carbon prices and maintaining connectivity of airports between target tourist markets.

The sustainability of NI's future air connectivity is hugely important in light of the obligations of the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022. International aviation will be subject to the targets in the Climate Change Act and air carriers will be expected to reduce or offset carbon emissions.

Northern Ireland is physically remote from the rest of the UK and does not have the same road and rail connectivity options available. There is a heavy reliance on air travel for both business and leisure travellers to and from NI.

13 [Research of future tourism Northern Ireland](#)

Attracting inbound visitors, access to tertiary education, and connecting the NI diaspora also depends heavily on aviation. By working with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs who are leading on the development of Northern Ireland's first Climate Action Plan which will cover the period 2023 to 2027, and with the UK Department for Transport, we have the opportunity to co-ordinate our approach rather than make separate regulations for emissions of greenhouse gas from domestic and international aviation.

Progressing sustainable practices involves finding new ways to reduce the sector's carbon footprint, including promoting the circular economy; caring for our natural environment; protection and conservation of our cultural, natural and built heritage; advocating local businesses by supporting locally produced goods and services, in turn helping the local economy; enhancing our outdoor experiences; and support our businesses to develop quality sustainable products and experiences and ultimately to embark on a journey towards sustainability accreditation.

What Sustainable success looks like

- Tourism will be a key driver of green growth and will make a full contribution to NI's ambition to become a net-zero society.
- Tourism will bring benefits to the local community for future generations.
- Tourism businesses in Northern Ireland will become more self-sustaining, agile and resilient.
- Sustainability will be at the heart of Tourism, we will develop and manage tourism effectively and responsibly.

Sustainable Indicators

Supporting a greener and more sustainable economy:

- Support the tourism sector to become more sustainable through an annual increase in participation in a tourism specific Sustainability Accreditation scheme.
- Improve regional dispersal and seasonal growth of the tourist offering to enhance Northern Ireland as a competitive all year-round tourist destination.
- Support tourism businesses towards becoming carbon neutral.

CASE STUDY

LIFE ADVENTURE CASTLEWELLAN

Life Adventure, located within Castlewellan Forest Park, is on the edge of the Mourne Mountains. Owned by Martin McMullan, the company has been at the core in the development of many key activity tourism products and services across the Mournes, tapping into the unique outdoor assets the Mournes has to offer. The company's site at Castlewellan Adventure Centre covers paddle board, kayak and mountain bike adventures and hire, coupled with the development of a new 'Bike Mourne' with two new outlets at the Rostrevor Mountain Bike Trails and in Newcastle with a particular focus on electric bikes. The big focus is on sustainability, increasing the attractiveness of the destination, facilitating responsible visitors and activity and providing direct and in-direct economic benefits across the destination.

The careful restoration of the heritage courtyard visitor centre provides comfort and functionality while retaining the unique and authentic character of the building itself. Life Adventure have achieved a carbon neutral status, recognised by a 'Gold Award' certification from Green Tourism UK.

The business has also invested in their people assets to ensure high standards of service, reinforced by their 'Adventure Mark' accreditation, a kite mark for quality provision in the adventure activity industry.

STRATEGIC THEME FOUR: **ATTRACTIVE**



10x Vision: We are building on our success in attracting visitors to world class, experiences and events, energising our ecosystem through innovation and collaboration.

Tourism Strategy: To inspire and energise others through our passion, enthusiasm, pride, determination and Giant Spirit. Our spirit will set us apart and make Northern Ireland a great place to work, live, visit and invest.

It is also important to consider the sustainability of the tourism sector in Northern Ireland to ensure long-term resilience in a more agile way and protect and accelerate the future of the sector both in terms of regional spread and seasonal growth. A key challenge for any destination is overcrowding at popular resorts and attractions, especially during peak seasons and it will be important to promote Northern Ireland as an **attractive** year-round destination, promoting experiences that offer variety, quality and authenticity – the things that make Northern Ireland special.

The importance of sustaining the domestic and closer to home markets cannot be overemphasised. The domestic market is vital to the season extension and regional dispersal as it provides the sector with a loyal

customer base and counters, to some degree, the current seasonality of external visitors.

Tourism is about place making - its success is based on developing and caring for local attractions and amenities and managing growth so it enriches the lives of local residents as well as visitors. The quality of Northern Ireland's natural environment and cultural offering makes the region ideally placed for the further development of tourism attractions and experiences.

Over the next few years, Northern Ireland will benefit from a package of investment from four City and Growth Deals. The combined funding from the NI Executive and the UK government will total £1.3bn which will also be complemented by private sector and other sources of funding.

This investment package provides an opportunity for a further step change in the visitor offering, helping to deliver benefits across the region in an inclusive and sustainable way.

It will increase tourism's contribution to local economies through job creation, and additional incomes for residents and business across all parts of the sector. Sustainability

and inclusion will be at the heart of an approach which seeks to achieve strong connections between people, place and prosperity.

As globally compelling propositions, the projects are designed to appeal to key international markets and will inspire future visitors to stay longer and to spend more in our local communities.

What Attractive success looks like

- Deliver high quality, memorable and authentic experiences, making Northern Ireland renowned as a unique and prime location for international visitors and investors.
- We have a clear brand and reputation of having a big-hearted, pioneering, legendary and elemental spirit.
- Our tourism offer is varied with rich experiences and across Northern Ireland all year round.
- We will be responsive to changing trends in customers' needs.

Attractive Indicators

Promoting Northern Ireland as an attractive place to visit:

- Enhance our international profile and tourism appeal as measured by Northern Ireland's Net Promoter Score.
- Annual Increase in number of return visitors and/or visitor average length of stay to fuel local and regional economic growth.
- Secure a portfolio of distinctive, high-quality sustainable tourism conferences and events which underpin and optimise Northern Ireland's attractiveness as a dynamic tourism destination.

CASE STUDY

EBRINGTON

Ebrington is a 29-acre heritage asset situated on the Foyle riverfront. Initially built by the army in 1841, the military base was home to the British military in Derry-Londonderry until 2001 when the site was gifted by the Ministry of Defence to the Executive Office.

The Peace Bridge, which itself has become a major tourist attraction in Derry-Londonderry, connected the site to the Walled City when it opened in 2011 and was the catalyst for the redevelopment of the site as a new public space in the city.

The transformation of the former parade grounds into Ebrington Square, a world class events space attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to major events such as the Maritime and Halloween Festivals, BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend and hosted the Turner Prize during the UK City of Culture in 2013.

The former soldier and officer accommodation quarters have been transformed into the stunning, Ebrington Hotel and Spa, which opened in June 2023.

Three of the buildings flanking the hotel are soon to become the new Derry North Atlantic Maritime Museum with support from Tourism NI, Department for Communities and The Executive Office.

Ebrington is a living demonstration of how tourism can not only protect our built environment, so it is enjoyed by residents and visitors alike, but in doing so create vibrant spaces which encourage creative industries to invest there as well.

STRATEGIC THEME FIVE:
COLLABORATIVE



10x Vision: We have created clusters which have built upon existing strengths and capitalising on windows of opportunity.

Tourism Strategy: We collaborate widely in a spirit of true partnership. We nurture a shared vision and common clarity of purpose.

Crucial to the success of the Tourism Strategy: Ten Year Plan the willingness for **collaborative** working. If our tourism industry is to be successful and sustainable all partners must work together to meet and exceed the expectation of our visitors by giving them an experience they will never forget.

Tourism is the responsibility of many stakeholders, all of whom have a part to play in delivering our vision. Those stakeholders are wide and varied. They include:

- Those government departments and their agencies who are responsible for maintaining our landscape and built heritage, providing transport infrastructure, supporting culture and the arts, licencing laws and regulatory services, rural development, urban regeneration and the provision of broadband and telecommunication services.
- **The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)** DAERA has a vision for sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone and has a key role in championing thriving rural communities that contribute to prosperity and wellbeing. DAERA recognises the economic and social benefits that sustainable rural tourism can bring to rural communities and is committed to working in collaboration with DfE, Tourism NI and other key stakeholders to maximise these benefits and to showcase the tourism opportunities of Northern Ireland's wonderful environment and its world class food and drink production. DAERA also recognises the challenges in relation to tourism in rural areas including access to sustainable transport options, access to quality broadband and

telecommunications, the impact of climate change and the need to safeguard rural tourism assets. DAERA will continue to provide support to DfE, Tourism NI and local councils with implementing the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 to help ensure that the social and economic needs of people in rural areas are appropriately considered and to help deliver better and more sustainable outcomes for rural communities, rural businesses and people visiting rural areas for the purposes of tourism.”

- **The Department for Communities (DfC)** DfC’s common purpose is supporting people, building communities and shaping places. The Department’s work in supporting place-based regeneration, including significant interventions through the City and Regional Growth Deals in places such as Carrickfergus and Derry~Londonderry, provides places that are attractive to residents and visitors alike. It provides overall support for the large and diverse voluntary and community sectors which support all strands of what makes our places authentic and distinctive. It has a lead role in supporting the

development of sport and physical activity, with its intentions brought together in Active Living, the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland, recognising that many visitors travel to Northern Ireland in association with sporting activity. And it has a lead role in the support and development of Northern Ireland’s culture and heritage – key drivers for our tourism industry. A Culture, Arts and Heritage strategy is in preparation, building on the ongoing work across the sectors which has been refined and reshaped to build back from the challenges and opportunities presented by the Covid pandemic. This recognises the ways in which our culture, arts and heritage support our prosperity, strengthens our society, and shapes our character. The particular interface between our culture and heritage, and our attractiveness to visitors, has been strengthened in recent years, following joint activity during the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage which has developed into a joint programme of work coordinated by a Leadership Group of cultural, heritage and tourism representatives.

- **The Department for Infrastructure (Dfi)** To compete globally Northern Ireland needs to be well connected both internally and with the rest of the world. Gateways are strategically important transport interchanges which are important for economic development, tourism and employment generation. The quality of connection from the air and seaports to the internal transport network in Northern Ireland is crucial for tourism and economic competitiveness of the region and the convenience of the travelling public. Any visitor to Northern Ireland will enter the province by one of these gateways whether that be our ports, airports or transport networks to and from the Republic of Ireland.

Dfi has the prime responsibility in Northern Ireland for the development and management of key transport infrastructure and services to and from gateways and across the region. Dfi recognises the crucial role played by tourism in driving economic growth and through promoting our region. A key focus of the Department is to ensure that visitors arriving here have easy access to all parts of the province through the transport network.

Dfi has invested heavily in the upgrade of transport infrastructure and services in the last number of years to improve the accessibility of our transport network to gateways and key tourist sites. This has included upgrading of our major roads on our Strategic Road Network like the A1 to Dublin, A4 to Enniskillen, A6 to Derry/ Londonderry, A8 to Larne and A26 to the North Coast. Given the need to significantly and urgently reduce transport emissions, in line with commitments within the Climate Change Act and associated carbon budgets, the Department has also invested heavily in new and improved public transport on both our bus and rail network including the development of new transport hubs in Belfast, Portrush and the North West. Increased frequency and capacity of rail services and the expansion of zero emission buses will help to reduce our carbon emissions. The Department is working with Local Councils to develop more sustainable travel options for tourism including the development a range of greenways across the region. It also is committed to working with Local Councils to provide additional, reliable, EV infrastructure throughout Local Council regions.

- **The Executive Office** As a Devolved Administration, there are limitations to our international role as international relations remain formally an excepted matter. However, it is well established that we can and should build relationships with international partners, on matters within the devolved competence. The Executive Office International Relations team coordinate and maximise the international activities of all NICS departments with a view to ensuring that Northern Ireland is a place where people want to live and work, to visit, study and invest. The TEO team seek to influence governments and their stakeholders to respond positively to Northern Ireland's priorities and view us as a favourable trading and knowledge exchange partner, encouraging mutual exchange of people and ideas, tourism and beneficial business relationships by working with partners across government to foster and cultivate an understanding at home of the benefits and opportunities from international engagement (business, policy and tourism led) and create a greater desire to pursue those opportunities.
- Our eleven Councils also have a role to play as they manage many of our visitor attractions, run our Tourist Information Centres, deliver festivals conferences and events and ensure our towns and villages are attractive and safe places in which to live and visit.
- Businesses within the tourism industry - which are wide ranging in size, from micro enterprises to large international hotel chains – and their representative organisations are key to making Northern Ireland tourism flourish.
- Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland, both of whom play a critical role in the development and promotion of the Northern Ireland tourism product both at home and overseas.
- Tourism NI's work on the development of three thematic Visitor Experience Development Plans (Food and Drink, Culture and Heritage and Landscapes and Activity Tourism) is to support the development of market-led tourism experiences which will set Northern Ireland apart in the international marketplace.
- Tourism NI is working with both DAERA and DFC in the development of these plans, ensuring alignment with respective strategies.

- Tourism NI has worked in collaboration with DAERA in delivery of key actions within the Tourism Recovery Action Plan to ensure we enhance the competitiveness of the region. For example, this has included the development of a new DAERA Rural Tourism Investment Scheme to build on the 2014-2020 £10 million Rural Tourism Scheme.
- There is also engagement with the DFI on the development of public transport routes relevant to tourism and also with Translink. Licensing and events management are two further areas where Tourism NI is actively involved with DfC and the Department of Justice.
- Numerous charities and voluntary organisations which provide services to our visitors such as the National Trust who manage some of our most iconic visitor attractions.



Key to making NI tourism industry flourish lies with the industry itself and the businesses and organisations at its heart.

Working together in clusters can unlock huge potential – local businesses who have an affinity in areas where it is easy and natural for them to work together can enhance the offering for new and returning domestic and international visitors.

It can improve their own sales performance but being knowledgeable about other tourism activities in their area can spread the benefits to other local businesses, create jobs and strengthen the local economy. Councils too have a pivotal role to play in presenting what the region has to offer, supporting the expansion of tourism right across the region.

What Collaborative success looks like

- Collaboration will be embedded within the Sector, Government and key strategic partners to bring benefits to the whole of Northern Ireland.
- The Sector will work together to develop creative products and services that maximise opportunities across Northern Ireland.
- Government will work together at a local, regional and national level to align strategic priorities.
- Industry will work with local communities to ensure they experience the benefits of Tourism.



CASE STUDY

AND SUSTAINABLE GIANTS

Launched in 2022, AND Sustainable Giants are a collaborative group of tourism businesses who actively demonstrate commitment to providing a sustainable choice for visitors to Ards & North Down; helping to make the destination climate-ready and recognised as a sustainable destination to live, work and experience. Their goal is to position themselves at the forefront of green and sustainable practices leading to the achievement of a ‘green destination status’.

Sustainable Giant businesses commit to a charter of six key principles of sustainability, including protecting the natural environment, working to ensure that tourism has a positive contribution to the social sustainability of local communities, employing local people and using ethical products wherever possible.

Through a collaborative approach, the members work together to encourage visitors to come to the area more often, stay longer and spend more, whilst helping to enrich communities, improve the environment and support growth of local businesses.



STRATEGY ON A PAGE

TOURISM STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

10 YEAR PLAN

TOURISM STRATEGY GOAL	OUR VISION	STRATEGIC INTENTIONS	HOW WILL WE GET THERE?	WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?
<p>Tourism Growth is:</p> <p>INNOVATIVE and uses our creative skills</p> <p>INCLUSIVE bringing opportunities for all</p> <p>SUSTAINABLE for generations</p> <p>ATTRACTIVE to visitors and investors</p> <p>COLLABORATIVE to deliver a shared vision</p>	<p>Establish Northern Ireland as a year-round world class destination, which is renowned for its authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture and which benefits communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core.</p> <p style="background-color: #4a7c5c; color: white; padding: 2px;">OUR MISSION</p> <p>To support the tourism sector in building an innovative, sustainable and inclusive tourism industry for all people and places in Northern Ireland which enriches its people, its economy and its guests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on our culture of innovation and creativity to deliver positive change. We will pursue excellence and world class ideas to make our industry more competitive and sustainable. A tourism ecosystem that brings opportunities for all, with lasting and positive economic and societal benefits to our communities throughout all parts of Northern Ireland. Build upon Northern Ireland's unique journey of regeneration. We will evolve our tourism ecosystem to be greener and sustain and invigorate our people, our place and our natural environment. We inspire future generations to thrive. Inspire and energise others through our passion, enthusiasm, pride, determination and Giant Spirit. Our spirit will set us apart and make Northern Ireland a great place to work, live, invest and visit. Collaborate widely in a spirit of true partnership. We nurture a shared vision and common clarity of purpose. 	<p>Creating new and innovative tourism experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Increase in the number of our tourism businesses receiving Innovate NI recognition levels. Annual Increase in the number of high value-added business start-ups and entrepreneurs levels within the tourism sector. Increase the export value of the tourism sector measured by expenditure from overnight visitors from outside Northern Ireland Annual Increase in the number of tourism businesses participating in Tourism Innovation Programmes Annual Increase in the number of meetings, incentives, conferences and business events aligned with the 10x strategy to position Northern Ireland as a place to innovate. <p>Contributing to a more inclusive economy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the Work Quality¹⁴ for the tourism sector, including competitive salaries, career pathways, opportunities to secure qualifications and comfortable working conditions, creating an accessible, competitive and attractive industry in which to work. Annual Increase in the number of employees within the tourism sector from underrepresented groups (including people who are economically inactive, people with disabilities, and from deprived areas) contributing to an equitable distribution of opportunities to all our people. <p>Supporting a greener and more sustainable economy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the tourism sector to become more sustainable through an annual increase in participation in a tourism specific Sustainability Accreditation scheme. Improve regional dispersal and seasonal growth of the tourist offering to enhance Northern Ireland as a competitive all year-round tourist destination. Support tourism businesses towards becoming carbon neutral. <p>Promoting Northern Ireland as an attractive place to visit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance our international profile and tourism appeal as measured by Northern Ireland's Net Promoter Score. Annual Increase in number of return visitors and/or visitor average length of stay to fuel local and regional economic growth. 	<p>Innovative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism workforce has the right digital skills to ensure that they meet consumers' evolving needs. Use real time quantitative analytics and insights to develop, market and monitor performance of our tourism offer. Use creative ideas and methods to develop new products or services to maximise benefits. Capitalise on new and emerging technologies to develop solutions to tourism industry challenges. <p>Inclusive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More sectors of the economy across the whole of Northern Ireland will benefit from tourism. Tourism investment and events have tangible benefits to local communities. The sector is actively engaged with local communities as valued stakeholders in tourism development and delivery. Tourism is an inclusive employer offering a diverse range of desirable career paths throughout Northern Ireland. <p>Sustainable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism will be a key driver of green growth and will make a full contribution to NI's ambition to become a net-zero society. Tourism will bring benefits to the local community for future generations. Tourism businesses in Northern Ireland will become more self-sustaining, agile and resilient. Sustainability will be at the heart of Tourism, we will develop and manage tourism effectively and responsibly. <p>Attractive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver high quality, memorable and authentic experiences, making Northern Ireland renowned as a unique and prime location for international visitors and investors. We have a clear brand and reputation of having a big-hearted, pioneering, legendary and elemental spirit. Our tourism offer is varied with rich experiences and across Northern Ireland all year round. (for example in culture, social, escape, sport, business and screen) We will be responsive to changing trends in customers' needs. <p>Collaborative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration will be embedded within the Sector, Government and key strategic partners to bring benefits to the whole of Northern Ireland. The Sector will work together to develop creative products and services that maximise opportunities across Northern Ireland. Government will work together at a local, regional and national level to align strategic priorities. Industry will work with local communities to ensure they experience the benefits of Tourism.
<p>PURPOSE</p> 	<p style="background-color: #4a7c5c; color: white; padding: 2px;">OUR STRATEGIC AIM</p> <p>To increase the value of tourism to the Northern Ireland economy by 50-75% compared to 2019.</p>			

14 Report of work quality indicators in Northern Ireland for the period July 2021 to June 2022



ALIGNMENT OF INDICATORS WITH 10x METRICS

ALIGNMENT OF INDICATORS WITH 10x METRICS

INNOVATION



10x Tier 1 Metrics

- Increase total R&D expenditure by 55%.
- Increase the number of R&D performing businesses by 450.
- Increase number of innovation active firms to 55% of NI businesses
- 10% of NI businesses receiving Innovation Accreditation.
- Increase proportion of individuals leaving NI HE institutions with first degrees and post-graduate qualifications in narrow STEM subjects from 24% to 27%.

10x Tier 2 Underpinning Metrics

- Number of R&D Companies.
- R&D Companies by (employee) size, ownership, location, sector.
- Number of Innovation Driven Enterprises (IDEs) (subject to data availability).
- Innovation Accreditation.
- Entrepreneurship.

Tourism Strategy Indicators

Creating new and innovative tourism experiences:

- Annual Increase in the number of our tourism businesses receiving Innovate NI recognition levels.
- Annual Increase in the number of high value-added business start-ups and self-sustaining levels within the tourism sector.
- Increase the export value of the tourism sector measured by expenditure from overnight visitors from outside Northern Ireland.
- Annual Increase in the number of tourism businesses participating in Tourism Innovation Programmes.
- Annual Increase in the number of meetings, incentives, conferences and business events aligned with the 10x strategy to position Northern Ireland as a place to innovate.

INCLUSIVE



10x Tier 1 Targets

- Increase Northern Ireland Household Disposable Income above the SAE average while maintaining NI as one of the top performing SAEs in relation to the Gini-coefficient (a measure of income equality)
- Close the employment gap between men and women; people with disabilities and people without; and most deprived area of NI and the least deprived area of NI
- Increase the proportion of the working age population with qualifications at level 3 and above from 57.2% (2020) to 70%-75%

10x Tier 2 Targets

- Employment rate/gap by gender, age, disability, geography, MDM
- Proportion of the working age population with qualifications at level 2 and above or level 3 and above. Broken down by gender, age, disability, geography, MDM
- Career progression by gender, age, disability, geography, MDM
- Economic inactivity by gender, age, disability, geography, MDM
- Disability and gender pay gap
- Work quality indicators for a 'Good jobs' metric

Tourism Strategy Indicators

Contributing to a more inclusive economy:

- Improve the Work Quality¹⁵ for the tourism sector, including competitive salaries, career pathways, opportunities to secure qualifications and comfortable working conditions, creating an accessible, competitive and attractive industry in which to work.
- Annual Increase in the number of employees within the tourism sector from underrepresented groups (including people who are economically inactive, people with disabilities, and from deprived areas) contributing to an equitable distribution of opportunities to all our people.

15 [Work Quality in Northern Ireland - July 2021 to June 2022 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk)

SUSTAINABILITY



10x Tier 1 Targets

- 80% electricity consumption from renewable sources
- Greenhouse gas emissions 48% lower than baseline
- Double the size of NI's low carbon and renewable energy economy to more than £2bn turnover

10x Tier 2 Targets

- Energy-related greenhouse gas emissions
- Business energy purchases relative to turnover
- Energy efficiency indicators

Tourism Strategy Indicators

Supporting a greener and more sustainable economy:

- Support the tourism sector to become more sustainable through an annual increase in participation in a tourism specific Sustainability Accreditation scheme.
- Improve regional dispersal and seasonal growth of the tourist offering to enhance Northern Ireland as a competitive all year-round tourist destination.
- Support tourism businesses towards becoming carbon neutral.

ATTRACTIVE



Tourism Strategy Indicators

Promoting Northern Ireland as an attractive place to visit:

- Enhance our international profile and tourism appeal as measured by Northern Ireland's Net Promoter Score.
- Annual Increase in number of return visitors and/or visitor average length of stay to fuel local and regional economic growth.

**MID ULSTER DISTRICT COUNCIL'S
RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT FOR ECONOMY'S CONSULTATION
ON DRAFT TOURISM STRATEGY FOR NI - 10 YEAR PLAN**

January 2024

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Department for the Economy (DfE) consultation process on the draft Tourism Strategy 2024-2034.

The stated purpose of this strategy is to:-

- provide a framework for the national tourism bodies Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland to work with public authorities (i.e., Mid Ulster District Council) to shape and develop strategies that can maximise opportunities via the domestic and global marketplace
- create opportunities to spread sustainable, economic, social and environment benefits in **all** parts of Northern Ireland, **all** year round
- enhance the quality of life for citizens and deliver a quality experience for visitors
- position tourism at “the heart of everything” in Northern Ireland
- leverage opportunities generated via strong tourism destinations to positively position Northern Ireland as a place to visit, study, live, work and (importantly for Mid Ulster) to invest
- support the wellbeing and prosperity of urban and rural communities (i.e. Mid Ulster) and safeguarding rural tourism assets

The Council's response includes commentary requested by DfE's Consultation Questionnaire and also sets out the critical issues that need to be addressed to enable Mid Ulster to achieve the growth ambition outlined in the draft Tourism strategy aligned with the district's ambition to become a high-performing tourism economy. This response shares collective feedback following:-

- consultations with
 - Mid Ulster District Council staff
 - Mid Ulster Tourism Development Group representatives
 - Mid Ulster District Council Elected members
 - Mid Ulster District Council tourism and hospitality businesses
- attendance by Mid Ulster District Council Tourism staff at a workshop organised by Tourism NI to review and discuss the draft strategy.

The response by Mid Ulster District Council is outlined under the following sections:

- **2.0** Overview of Mid Ulster including Key Growth Barriers
- **3.0** Response to the Draft Tourism Strategy
- **4.0** Response Summary

2.0 OVERVIEW OF MID ULSTER INCLUDING PERFORMANCE AND KEY GROWTH BARRIERS

Mid Ulster is an historic area in Northern Ireland (NI) with a strong cultural identity and geographical qualities that are ripe for further development and the advancement of the local economy but also as a significant contributor to Northern Ireland and the Island tourism product both national and internationally. The area is rich in natural and built heritage.

Mid Ulster covers 1,714 km² (14% of NI land mass) extending some 60 miles from Swatragh in the north to Fivemiletown in the south. The area represents a multicultural population of more than 150,293 across 1,714 km² (14% of the NI land mass) and is the fastest growing new Council area in Northern Ireland. The area's population is forecast to grow to 160,620 people by 2032 (+ 6.9%, 2021 - 2032). A large number of people are employed in a diverse range of sectors, including, manufacturing, services, construction, retail, agriculture, forestry, and fishing.

Mid Ulster is within a 30-minute reach of Belfast (Dublin - 2 hours) and shares a land border with Republic of Ireland providing access to 450,000 people within a 50km radius.

Mid Ulster is recognised as one of the most entrepreneurial and enterprising regions in Northern Ireland. Its economy is private sector driven, boasting the largest business base outside the Belfast Metropolitan area with 9,430 VAT registered businesses. Over the last 5 years Mid Ulster had the fastest pace of employee job creation of any council area in NI growing at 13% (6,680 new jobs) compared to a total NI growth rate of 7%.

The region has higher productivity per head of population compared to the Northern Ireland average and a GVA¹ of £3.97bn (producing 8.1% of NI's economic output).

Strategic Location

An important characteristic of Mid Ulster is its strategic location within an hour's drive of Northern Ireland's significant tourism regions – Causeway Coast, Derry/Londonderry, Fermanagh Lakes, Belfast, and the cross-border destinations of Donegal and Monaghan. This strategic location presents opportunities to develop and promote tourism experiences within easy striking distance of these destinations and encourage more visitors to visit and stay within Mid Ulster. By widening the Mid Ulster appeal by linking to these signature tourism products for mutual advantage would help improve visitor spend and job creation and thus add to the local economies.

¹ Office for National Statistics 2021

Performance of The Sector - Destination and Products

Mid Ulster is not defined as a single or unified tourism “product” or destination; it has not been, to date, a discernible tourism location. It is currently an amalgam of tourism products and visitor experiences, with individual attractions and activities succeeding independently in the tourism market. However, this absence of market distinctiveness disadvantages the promotion of the area as a unique destination and its tourism products.

Key sections of the current tourism performance are largely based on specific rural and outdoor activities linked to the Sperrins landscape and across the whole Mid Ulster area. They take advantage of the area’s natural attributes and myriad environmental resources comprising a compelling mix of heritage properties, and historic and archaeological sites positioned across the district. Tourism performance is also connected to the strong retail proposition available in the market towns of Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt.

Recent years has seen some dynamic tourism developments in the Mid Ulster council area. Prominent examples include, a strong events-based programme, ‘Hill of The O’Neill’ and Ranfurly House Arts and Visitor Centre, mountain biking at Davagh, and the development of the OM Dark Sky project. While these are performing relatively successfully there is potential for advancement. The complementarity of arts, culture and tourism is important as the Seamus Heaney Homeplace and Open Ground affirms. Also, the role of sport is significant as an appeal of contributors and spectators who could be encouraged as ‘cross over’ visitors to the tourism attractions.

Generally, tourism in the area is primarily dominated by day trips and people visiting friends and relatives. Mid Ulster is a developing tourist destination that in recent years has not fulfilled its ultimate potential to contribute to economic growth.

Key Statistics

Most recent data for the Mid Ulster area shows a downward trend in both number of overnight trips and total estimated expenditure since 2016. The District’s most prominent challenge in relation to the tourism sector is the lack of accommodation (especially hotels) within the Dungannon and South Derry/Magherafelt areas.

In 2019, the Mid Ulster area accounted for just 3% of Northern Ireland’s total overnight trips and just 2% of associated visitor spend. Average estimated spend per night across the MUDC area in 2019 was £136, over 20% below the Northern Ireland average. While updated data reflecting the impact of more recent additions to the Mid Ulster tourism offer will likely bolster overnight trips and expenditure, scope still remains to grow these aspects of the tourism economy in future. There is no reliable data on day trips which, if available, could further increase the value of tourism to the local economy.

There is a need to increase Mid Ulster’s accommodation base as it is recognised this is needed in order to attract large groups and coach tours. The area would benefit greatly from further hotel investment especially in the Dungannon and Magherafelt areas, located close to the M1 and M2 motorways. This will have the potential to increase overnight stays, business tourism and overall tourism growth.

	Mid Ulster District Council		NI
Data Source / Indicator	#	%	
No. of Overnight Trips	146,964	3%	5,475,376
Spend on Overnight Trips	£19,994,129	2%	£1,043,996,095
No. of Visitors	1,186,696	7%	16,513,368

Tourism Statistics (NISRA) 2013-2019

Importantly, Mid Ulster has a strong track record in the delivery of a quality tourism offering which is acknowledged in the draft tourism strategy via the presence of case studies including;

- Davagh Forest in the Sperrins; home to the first internationally accredited OM Dark Sky Observatory and Visitor Centre
 - 78th dark sky park to be accredited worldwide and the only one in NI
 - the Sperrins are a defined Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, one of only eight in Northern Ireland
 - Davagh Forest is a historic site of international significance with megalithic monuments, ancient field systems, standing stones, stone circles and burial tombs.
- Glenshane Country Farm; a rural experience that is typical of Mid Ulster
 - home to fourth generation sheep farmer, James McCloy
 - showcasing the special landscapes of the Sperrins and ensuring that traditional sheep farming practices are kept alive

Key Growth Barriers in Mid Ulster

While the above confirms Mid Ulster's ability to achieve success, there are barriers to realising tourism growth potential, some of which are faced across Northern Ireland:

- Covid-19 and Brexit impacts
- Rising labour and material costs
- Staff recruitment and retention (particularly in the tourism and hospitality industries)
- Cost of living crisis
- Sterling devaluation
- Rising rates and rents (NI has the highest rates in OECD)
- Concerns that the ETA visa will dissuade visitors from choosing Northern Ireland
- Lack of connectivity in rural areas
- Public transport infrastructure in rural areas
- Brown signage
- Funding to support strategic tourism events

However, there are several serious barriers to tourism growth that are specific to Mid Ulster. Noting that this strategy acknowledges the rising demand to experience authentic

communities and destinations such as Mid Ulster, the Council requests that the draft Tourism strategy acknowledges and addresses barriers that are hindering development as summarised below and outlined in more detail in Section 3:

- a) **A legacy of under investment in Mid Ulster**
 - b) **An emphasis on City and Growth Deals for tourism funding that places Mid Ulster at a disadvantage**
 - c) **An accommodation deficit in Mid Ulster**
 - d) **Brown signage policy for Northern Ireland**
- a) **A legacy of under investment in Mid Ulster** has led to inadequate infrastructure and connectivity whilst it is noted past investments in Northern Ireland have been repeatedly focused on Northern Ireland's two largest cities, and the North Coast region. Council calls upon DfE/Tourism NI in their new 10-year plan, to 'level up' investment across the region to;
- address existing gaps / disparities that have prevailed for far too long across Northern Ireland (geographical inequality)
 - ensure that Mid Ulster as a rural destination can maximise its tourism growth potential
 - enable Northern Ireland to achieve its growth and sustainability targets by empowering Mid Ulster region to attract its fair share of year-round visitors.
- b) **City and Growth Deal Funding:** The Council is concerned that the draft Strategy makes repeated reference to City and Growth Deal funding as the means to deliver key Tourism Projects. It is the Council's view that financial support for tourism projects should not be predicated on City and Growth Deal funding.

Due to historic underinvestment by Government's in Mid Ulster's strategic infrastructure, the Council has been required to commit infrastructure funding in Mid Ulster towards a major roads scheme which has been in the pipeline for 40 years. As a result, Council has no additional infrastructure funding to commit to 'Tourism Projects' within Mid Ulster's Growth Deal funding allocation.

- c) **Accommodation Deficit:** The Strategy concedes that +52% of all Northern Ireland's accommodation is in Belfast and Causeway Coast and Glens alongside the need to encourage development that will a) "support a greater balance across Northern Ireland" and b) "provide the visitor with a choice of places to stay," leading to "greater regional dispersal."

Considering that Mid Ulster suffers from a serious deficit in accommodation provision, this approach is welcomed by the Council. The Council requests that the strategy recognises the:-

- specific need to develop the accommodation product in this district, in particular the need for hotel accommodation in the Dungannon and Magherafelt areas, and
- requirement to provide capital investment and grants to leverage private and public investment.

d) Brown Signage Policy for Northern Ireland

Tourism brown sign policy in Northern Ireland is implemented by the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) in partnership with Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI). The brown sign policy in Northern Ireland is based on a set of guidelines which outline the criteria for the provision of brown signs, however, there are concerns that the policy has not been reviewed since 2014 to ensure that it remains effective and sustainable, and to reflect changes in the tourism industry and visitor behaviours. The signs are an important part of the overall tourism infrastructure and are used to guide visitors to a wide range of attractions and destinations, including historic sites, natural landmarks, and cultural events.

Discussion and feedback with tourism stakeholders has highlighted concerns and negative feedback regarding the process and approval of brown tourism signs. A sample of these would include;

- Some private sector tourism organisations have indicated they are still deemed ineligible for brown tourism signs even though they are significant tourism bodies and employ a considerable amount of local people.
- The extensive length of the process and involvement of too many partners as well as the expense.
- It was noted that the eligibility criteria for a Tourism Body to be permanently open can be too onerous and excludes smaller tourism businesses.

Benefits of Tourism in Mid Ulster

As a dispersed rural location in Northern Ireland, tourism is a priority industry for Mid Ulster upon which the Council relies to generate social and economic benefits.

As previously mentioned, Mid Ulster is home to several prominent and unique tourism attractions including, Seamus Heaney HomePlace, Lough Neagh, Sperrin Mountains, Hill of The O'Neill and Ranfurly House, Clogher Valley, OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory, etc.

Glenshane Country Farm is an excellent example of how tourism can support the livelihood and wellbeing of residents in a way that;

- enables the McCloy family to remain in their homeplace
- benefits the local and wider economy
- preserves traditions for future generations
- raises pride and identity within the Mid Ulster community and across Northern Ireland

In a destination that has a rising population with multiple towns and villages that are struggling economically and socially, Mid Ulster District Council is duty bound to emphasise that the above-noted barriers must be addressed within this 10-year tourism strategy so that the success achieved by the McCloy family can be amplified across the region.

Section 3 entitled Response to the Draft Tourism Strategy explores the barriers highlighted above in more detail in addition to other salient points raised via the consultation process under the following headings:

- 3.1 Tourism investment and funding in Mid Ulster
- 3.2 Addressing accommodation deficits in Mid Ulster
- 3.3 Feedback re: the draft Vision, Mission and Strategic Aim
- 3.4 Acknowledge tourism for the key sector that it is and resource the industry adequately
- 3.5 Feedback re: the strategic themes and the addition of Measurement and Levelling Up as two new priority themes
- 3.6 Feedback re: the Embrace A Giant Spirit brand, markets and segmentation
- 3.7 Strategy format and the need for an action plan
- 3.8 Key actions required to contribute to achieving the key indicators outlined in within the Strategy

3.0 RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT TOURISM STRATEGY

3.1 Tourism Investment and Funding in Mid Ulster

As noted under Section 2, Mid Ulster has suffered from a prolific lack of investment that has placed the district at a significant disadvantage by comparison with other ‘honeypot’ destinations that have benefited greatly from repeated funding initiatives, especially those in Northern Ireland’s two largest cities and the North Coast region.

To help address this, under the auspices of the Mid South West Growth Deal, Mid Ulster Council working with our partners, Fermanagh and Omagh Council and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council, developed a new collaborative ‘Regional Economic Strategy’ (RES). The RES for the MSW region was launched by the then First Minister Arlene Foster MLA and Deputy First Minister Michelle O’Neill MLA on the 9th of September 2020 (<https://midsouthwestregion.org/res/>).

The headline ambition of the RES is to supercharge the growth of the collective MSW economy and ensure inclusive prosperity. Building a high-performing tourism economy is identified as a priority strategic pillar in this ambition.

Consumer research indicates that travellers are increasingly seeking to participate in outdoor activities, explore the landscape and engage with local communities through authentic experiences and storytelling. Mid Ulster naturally meets this need and can be a leading NI destination in this regard. In addition, Mid Ulster has developed a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for ambitious tourism projects including;

- **Slieve Gallion/Gateway to the Sperrins Experience:** with a proposal to embed a hero attraction in the Sperrins, Ireland’s largest mountain range in an untapped Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- **Hill of The O’Neill – Visitor & Multi-Media Hub of Excellence:** encompassing a new multi-media arts, heritage and learning complex with improved events facilities to advance participation, education and visitor experience and to preserve the O’Neill story (Ireland’s last chieftain).

While Mid Ulster’s ambition for tourism is undeniable, this has been curbed by a persistent absence of investment. In the current climate in a post COVID-19 and Brexit recovery context this is being further exacerbated as the Council must strike a balance between immediate challenges and the need for longer-term transformative action to build economic strength that can withstand any future economic shocks.

As a dispersed rural location, investment in road connectivity infrastructure has thereby been identified as an immediate priority. The need for same has been emphasised via consultations with professional travel buyers who have stressed the requisite for fit for purpose infrastructure (respectful of the natural environment) that can comfortably and safely access indigenous assets by day and by night.

As this investment in infrastructure relies upon the MSW Growth Deal, it means that there is no opportunity to address Tourism Projects within Mid Ulster’s Growth Deal Portfolio. Accordingly, Mid Ulster District Council is concerned that the current draft Tourism Strategy references the reliance on City and Growth Deals for tourism funding. The Council strongly advocates that DfE/Tourism NI must not rely on City/Growth Deal funding being the sole source of capital funding to support tourism projects over the next 10 years. Doing so, places areas like Mid Ulster at an even greater disadvantage than its current position. We implore DfE/Tourism NI to ensure that funding support is provided to those regions like Mid Ulster where there has been an historic lack of tourism investment, and if targeted funding is provided to such regions, it will create an opportunity to develop a number of exciting seismic tourism projects to ‘level-up’ the region and thus provide a more balanced tourism offering across NI as a whole.

As a priority, to achieve the Strategy’s stated ambition to benefit “all parts of Northern Ireland” the revised Strategy should call out the need to;

- address historic investment deficits (including tourism) in Mid Ulster in the interest of fairness and equality so that the district can realise its full tourism potential and thus maximise social and economic benefits.
- research and secure alternative funding streams (eg, via DfE, TNI etc) so that a soul focus on the City and Growth Deal (that will not benefit Mid Ulster in terms of tourism) is removed

3.2 Addressing Accommodation Deficits in Mid Ulster

In addition to feedback regarding the need for robust infrastructure, professional travel buyers have emphasised the need for Mid Ulster to acquire quality accommodation to attract high spend visitors and increase dwell time in the destination. Currently, there is only one 4 star hotel (99 rooms), seven 3-star hotels (349 rooms) and one 2-star hotel (103 rooms). Hotels comprise just 39% of available rooms stock with the balance spread across guesthouses, B&Bs and self-catering.

Over the last decade, it has been repeatedly noted that Mid Ulster has the second lowest number of hotel rooms of all local district council areas (see <https://www.tourismni.com/globalassets/industry-insights/local-gov-district-tourism-statistics/lgd-2018/lgd-all-fact-cards-2018.pdf>). This places Mid Ulster at a significant disadvantage by comparison with destinations like Belfast and Causeway Coast and Glens where +52% of all Northern Ireland's accommodation is located.

Not only does this lack of accommodation prohibit Mid Ulster from achieving increased dwell time that maximises economic opportunities via leisure tourism (i.e., holiday markers), but it also hinders the opportunity for the region to win business tourism opportunities (e.g., corporate meetings and conferences) even though there are indoor and outdoor venues that can cater for a high number of delegates including

- Ballyronan Marina: 8,500 delegates
- Hill of The O'Neill and Ranfurly House: 600 delegates
- Meadowbank Sports Arena: +800 delegates

The absence of accommodation means that Mid Ulster is already at high risk of having a reputation for being a “drive through” rather than a “stay over” destination.

The development of accommodation in Mid Ulster is essential for a successful thriving tourism economy and thus the Council requests that the revised strategy identifies the need to:

- develop and invest in accommodation in Mid Ulster to include hotel accommodation in Dungannon and Magherafelt areas
- conduct due diligence with in-depth research to define sustainable accommodation solutions that can fulfil the needs of the region
- identify capital investment and grant frameworks that can successfully win private/public investment

3.3 Feedback on the draft Vision, Mission and Strategic Aim

While the consultation process has confirmed general agreement with the Mission, there have been a) requests for adjustments to the Vision and b) the Strategic Aim has been challenged.

Vision: Mid Ulster welcomes the focus on establishing Northern Ireland as a **year-round** destination. This approach is vital for sustaining livelihoods and the local economy, particularly in this region where rural communities in remote locations are prevalent.

The reference to heritage and culture is misleading as it does not express the full breadth of Mid Ulster's / Northern Ireland's offering where, for example, experiences in the great outdoors are key. Noting that this vision will be a guiding light for industry and key stakeholders and that thereby one theme cannot be noted to the exclusion of others, it is strongly recommended that all of the themes that can drive visitation should be referenced including

- culture and heritage
- activities and adventure

- food and drink
- wellness
- events and festivals

While the vision references landscape, it omits to reference water / seascapes. Referencing the full breadth of natural assets is essential for raising the profile of what Northern Ireland has to offer and motivating longer visitation. As Mid Ulster is home to the renowned Lough Neagh that is Britain's largest lake and deeply connected with Ireland's history and mythology, it is recommended that the revised strategy is expanded to elevate the importance of other natural assets including water.

There is a need for funding to develop or grow existing strategic tourism events / festivals identified by Councils in their tourism plans. We are aware of the International Events Fund, however, this is extremely difficult to attain this funding due to the criteria and Mid Ulster's rural location. Historically large funding has been targeted towards NI's two largest cities and the North Coast.

Strategic Aim: This aim expresses the ambition to increase the value of tourism to Northern Ireland's economy by 50-75% versus 2019. The Consultation Questionnaire requests feedback on the quantitative aspect of this aim that "balances ambition, realism and sustainability."

The consensus in Mid Ulster is that it is not possible to formulate an opinion on whether these growth targets are realistic and robust when;

- a) there is no explanation of the rationale underpinning these targets and;
- b) there is no action plan detailing how these targets can be achieved.

Importantly, noting that the cost of travel and tourism has increased significantly since 2019, the 10-year draft strategy provides no insight into the proportion of growth attributable to inflation versus profit.

In addition, the growth targets span a 25% differential between 50% and 75%. It is not clear where the higher versus the lower end of the growth targets are expected to land.

There are concerns in Mid Ulster that unless the low availability of accommodation, the lack of investment to date and viable funding opportunities are addressed as urgency that this region will not realise its full growth potential.

The growth target is a priority element in the strategy. Over the next 10 years this target will be a fundamental anchor, relied upon by Mid Ulster District Council in multiple ways including to inform the region's tourism development plans and provide guidance to local businesses.

While the Council welcomes the ambition expressed within the face value of these targets, it is requested that the revised strategy

- explains the rationale that underpins the growth targets
- includes an action plan that details how and when these targets can be achieved
- provides detail into the proportion of growth attributable to inflation versus profit

- provides an insight into where the diverse growth brands (from 50% to 75%) will be attributed including for Mid Ulster and for diverse kinds of tourism businesses (e.g., accommodation providers, visitor attractions, experience providers)
- provides details into the funding initiatives that will assist the levelling up process and enable Mid Ulster to maximise its growth potential for the benefit of the local economy and wider Northern Ireland economy

3.4 Acknowledge tourism for the key sector that it is and resource the industry adequately

Noting that the strategy acknowledges the value of tourism in Northern Ireland as a “huge success story,” contributing +£1 billion of expenditure to the local economy and accounting for one in every 12 jobs, to achieve the ambition expressed in the draft strategy Mid Ulster calls for tourism to be recognised for the key sector that it is aligned with an appropriate budget to achieve growth and support regional economies.

The reality is that tourism in Northern Ireland and particularly in Mid Ulster (due to a consistent historic lack of investment) needs adequate resourcing to encompass a wide menu of national and regional needs such as investment in market research, communications, training and development, data collation systems, tourism product development (e.g., experiences, events and festivals etc), accommodation development, quality standards, sustainability/regeneration policy, supports and experience development.

The Council thereby requests that the revised strategy:

- details a commitment to provide adequate resources (human and financial) at a national and regional level
- clarifies the availability of funds and how these can be accessed by regions such as Mid Ulster to achieve progress and level-up to address historic gaps in investment
- confirms a process for multi-year budgets that allow for forward planning, noting that the existing structure of in-year budgets is not fit for purpose and makes it challenging for NI to compete against other destinations
- outlines a national and bespoke regional action plan (that can meet the specific needs of Mid Ulster) over short, medium and long terms supported by appropriate resources and funding
- consults with key stakeholders at a national and regional level to ensure that this action plan is targeted with SMART objectives that can achieve clear progress over a defined timeline (e.g., short term: 2024-2026, medium term: 2027-2030 and long terms +2031) to comprehensively address the menu of needs noted above from market research, communications, training and development to data collation systems, quality standards, product and policy development
- clarifies processes for accessing funds with clearly stated and reasonable timelines for decision making

3.5 Feedback re: strategic themes and the addition of Measurement and Levelling-up as Priority Themes

The draft Tourism Strategy Questionnaire requested feedback on the five themes outlined in the strategy and to what extent these are the realistic targets for future growth. While there is broad agreement that in their essence the five key themes noted are relevant for the strategy, the following points have been raised:

1. Greater clarity is required regarding the definition, purpose, relevancy and outcomes that can be realised via the proposed five themes.
2. MEASUREMENTS must be added as a priority to the existing proposed five themes (as detailed below).
3. LEVELLING UP must be added as a priority to the existing proposed five themes (as detailed below).

Existing five themes (Innovative, Inclusive, Sustainable, Attractive, Collaborative):

In relation to the existing five themes Mid Ulster advises as follows:

- Greater clarity is required with a full explanation of each key theme and a comprehensive list of qualitative and quantitative outcomes for how each theme will manifest. For example
 - the term INCLUSIVE can encompass cross collaboration at local, regional and national level and accessibility (i.e., the provision of communications and services for people with diverse needs)
 - the term ATTRACTIVE can encompass raising the profile of Northern Ireland as a compelling destination that in turn can win the attention of investors from tourism and non-tourism industries
 - the term COLLABORATIVE can manifest in many diverse ways. The strategy needs to reference a recommended collaborative structure with set standards.

In addition, the revised strategy must;

- position these themes within their current context to establish a baseline so that progress can be assessed over the Strategy's 10-year period.
- include the provision for national and bespoke regional SMART plans developed in collaboration with industry and the Council (ensuring that Mid Ulster's specific circumstances are addressed) so that instead of being abstract, the themes are vehicles for progress

MEASUREMENT: data collation and analysis: While there is reference to the use of "real time quantitative analytics and insights" to monitor performance under the term INNOVATIVE, it is strongly advised that the term MEASUREMENT needs to be added as its own separate theme.

The success of this plan needs to be visible and robust data analytics are required to confirm progress and achievement of the growth targets. Otherwise, the strategy is simply aspirational. A process for robust data collation and analysis with a culture of measurement embedded at regional and national level is essential so that

- progress can be independently assessed in a way that is visible and measurable
- strengths, weaknesses and challenges can be swiftly identified and addressed

As a priority, MEASUREMENT must be added as a sixth theme. Along with a clear explanation of what this theme encompasses, the expected outcomes must also reference how effective data collation and analysis is essential for

- empowering businesses and regions to measure progress

- strengthening the position of businesses and regions like Mid Ulster to secure investment and grant funding

LEVELLING-UP – Levelling Up should be included as an additional Thematic Area (No. 7) within the draft Tourism Strategy for NI. Council strongly believes DfE/TNI must prioritise support for regions like Mid Ulster where there has been an historic lack of tourism investment in the last 10 years and where there will not be capital funding available through the Growth/City Deal funding in the next 10 years. This ties in with the ambitions outlined in the UK government’s Levelling Up agenda to address geographical inequality. It is also important to provide a clear explanation of what this theme encompasses, the expected outcomes must also state how the draft Tourism Strategy will eliminate historic funding gaps in the Mid Ulster area and highlight other funding opportunities to support capital and revenue projects.

In summary, Mid Ulster District Council requests that the revised Tourism strategy:

- provides greater clarity regarding the definition, purpose, relevancy and outcomes that can be realised via the five themes proposed in the draft strategy
- includes SMART Action plans so that visible progress can be achieved via the themes with a bespoke plan to meet the specific needs of Mid Ulster
- itemises MEASUREMENT as an additional Priority Theme
- details the baseline for each theme so that the current status can be benchmarked against future progress over the lifetime of the 10-year plan
- works with local government and the national tourism bodies to agree
 - what should be measured (e.g., jobs, revenue generation, visitors numbers according to their place of origin, environmental and social benchmarks)
 - what mechanisms should be used for measurement, noting that while NISRA data should be included this cannot be solely relied upon as there are gaps in the information provided and the data is not consistently available when the industry most requires it
 - how data can be effectively collated and aggregated (ensuring that only necessary data is collated and that processes are easy for all to administrate)
 - how information should be shared to measure performance, provide benchmarking and support strategic development
- includes LEVELLING-UP as a Priority Theme to address geographic inequality to support for regions like Mid Ulster where there has been an historic lack of tourism investment in the last 10 years and where there will not be capital funding available through the Growth/City Deal funding in the next 10 years. This will serve to create a more balanced tourism offering across the whole of Northern Ireland.

3.6 Feedback re the Embrace A Giant Spirit brand, markets and segmentation

Via the consultation process, the following points have been raised

- the Embrace A Giant Spirit experience brand is demoted within the strategy and its alignment with the 5 noted strategic themes is unclear
- to achieve success, tourism destinations must be clear on the markets and customer segments that are a match for its offering

- while the draft strategy identifies first priority markets (Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Great Britain, North America) and second priority markets (France and Germany) it makes no reference to the customer segments that have been identified via the national tourism bodies as key targets

Embrace A Giant Spirit experience brand: A low level of reference is made within the strategy to the Embrace A Giant Spirit destination experience brand launched in 2019 that distinguishes Northern Ireland in the domestic and global marketplace by comparison with other global and Ireland brands including Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East and Dublin Surprising by Nature.

Additionally, this brand incorporates key values including a big-hearted, pioneering, legendary and elemental spirit. The purpose of this brand needs to be clearly stated in the revised strategy and how the brand aligns with the strategic themes needs to be clarified.

Segmentation: at a regional level, Mid Ulster relies upon the segmentation defined by the national tourism bodies to identify the customers from the domestic and global marketplace that are a match for this region's offering. No reference is made within the draft strategy to this segmentation or its purpose.

The Council thereby requests that the revised strategy:

- emphasises the importance and function of the Embrace A Giant Spirit destination experience brand
- clarifies the positioning of this brand and how it aligns with the draft strategy's key themes
- references the need for support to provide effective guidance regarding the purpose and function of tourism communications across brands and themes
- in addition to the target markets, makes reference to the customer segments that are a key target for Northern Ireland (noting that a summary of the current segments per marketplace can be recorded in the appendices for future records)
- includes an action plan detailing how opportunities can be maximised at a national and regional level via a targeted and strategic methodology
- references how first and second priority markets can access Northern Ireland and Mid Ulster
 - in the current climate: i.e., via flight, ferry, public transport road, bike etc.
 - in the future: via plans to improve access for domestic and global visitors
 - via sustainable travel solutions for example, a connected infrastructure that supports movement via public transport, biking etc; a robust infrastructure that facilitates safe travel via roads and supports the use of carbon-free transport; encouraging longer stays and increased dwell time in Northern Ireland

3.7 Strategy format and the need for an Action Plan

An effective strategy involves setting goals and priorities, determining actions to achieve goals and mobilising resources that can execute the actions and achieve identified targets. While Mid Ulster welcomes that this strategy acknowledges the importance of tourism as a vital Northern Ireland industry, it is our view that the draft entitled *Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland 10 Year Plan* reads as a policy document rather than a strategic plan.

While this draft cites growth targets, it gives no guidance or narrative for how these can be achieved. The existing strategy is devoid of a roadmap and (vitaly) a SMART action plan that can ensure Northern Ireland achieves measurable success over the next 10 years. Neither does the strategy address the unique circumstances of Mid Ulster (which is not referenced once in strategic terms) as a region that has been inadequately resourced over time and now requires special attention and a bespoke action plan to address our unique needs to maximise social and economic benefits.

In a post pandemic and Brexit climate, this strategy is essential for supporting the recovery of the tourism industry and capitalising upon the ever growing demand to explore Northern Ireland that tourism stakeholders have fought to establish with unwavering resilience throughout the Troubles over many decades.

In its current format, the strategy falls short and reads as aspirational. Without a “how to,” it lacks the clear direction and clarity required to achieve real success. Parts of the strategy read more like a marketing brochure. For example, 15 case studies (20% of the report) with no stated purpose or connection to the wider strategy have been included. While Mid Ulster welcomes that Glenshane Country Farm and OM Dark Sky Park have been referenced as quality tourism assets, in their current format these studies are best placed in the appendices. Additionally, inaccuracies in the text need to be corrected; OM is the 78th dark sky park to be accredited worldwide (the only one in NI) and it is also not possible to stay in the Observatory but nearby at Sperrinview Glamping.

Noting the crucial importance of this strategy at this pivotal point in the positioning of Northern Ireland as a leading tourism destination, the Council calls for the following:

- further engagement with the Council, tourism industry and key stakeholders to ensure that the strategy is appropriately informed and devoid of inaccuracies
- ensuring that the final version reads as a credible strategy that achieves buy-in and success over a 10-year period, rather than as a policy or marketing document
- ensuring that the strategy details a robust situational analysis outlining the current environment including national and specific regional challenges (along with any identified insights and solutions for same) that can act as an accurate benchmark for the future as this strategy advances over a 10-year period:

Northern Ireland-wide challenges	Mid Ulster-specific challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid-19 and Brexit impacts • Rising labour and material costs • Staff recruitment and retention • Cost of living crisis • Sterling devaluation • Rising rates and rents (NI has the highest rates in OECD) • Concerns that the ETA visa will dissuade visitors from choosing Northern Ireland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding to develop the tourism product in comparison with other preferred areas • The urgent requirement to level-up rural areas such as Mid Ulster through targeted investment • An absence of viable investment and funding options to support tourism projects • Need for hotel accommodation in Dungannon and Magherafelt. • Deficits in rural infrastructure and connectivity

- ensure that the strategy includes a clear narrative and roadmap for achieving success aligned with a SMART Action plan with clear objectives to be addressed over short, medium and long terms to achieve the progress that will benefit Northern Ireland

3.8 Key actions required to contribute to achieving the key indicators outlined in within the Strategy (maximum of 7 selected)

- Develop and deliver a bespoke Skills Action Plan
- Develop a Quality Employer Charter
- Develop a Tourism Employer Excellence Programme
- Build awareness in businesses of sustainability (green) practices
- Encourage and develop NI cross government collaboration
- Build awareness of, and support for, accessing sources of alternative funding
- Build awareness in businesses of innovation within the tourism sector
- Formally recognize/accredit businesses for demonstrating innovation
- Additional Data Collection and Robust Benchmarking
- Marketing Campaigns – Regional messaging across international campaigns
- Develop a NI Events Framework
- Support local events and festivals
- Support larger events that attract people from outside of NI
- Promote importance of Business Tourism and deliver on Business Tourism Strategy
- Deliver an annual tourism awards programme to recognise best practice in the industry
- Develop an air route development programme to improve connectivity with France and Germany
- Increased delivery of Travel & Tourism programmes in schools leading to increased qualifications
- Stronger connection between employers/delivery partners/programmes to support businesses to participate in opportunities
- Develop a bespoke Sustainability Accreditation Scheme and/or promote a framework to promote and recognize other quality assured sustainability accreditation schemes
- A Regenerative/Sustainable Tourism Development Programme similar to the EDP to support the development of new and enhanced sustainable tourism experiences;
- Promote the role tourism plays in sustaining other sectors, eg culture, arts & heritage and food
- Encourage and facilitate collaboration within the sector to share best practice/knowledge/networks
- More collaboration between councils to produce integrated tourism/destination plans at local level

4.0 RESPONSE SUMMARY

While Mid Ulster welcomes the value placed on tourism along with the aspirations outlined in the draft, our response calls for a revised Tourism strategy that reflects and addresses national needs and the specific local needs of Mid Ulster. This strategy emerges at a critical point in Northern Ireland's evolution as a tourism destination where there is now ever-growing demand from the domestic and global marketplace, thereby a robust strategy that can leverage this opportunity by delivering visible and measurable success over the next ten years and beyond is essential.

As a priority, the strategy must include informed growth targets that provide clear benchmarks at a national, regional, industry and business level. It must also include a comprehensive situational analysis based on the current climate and (crucially) a SMART Action plan detailing how stated ambitions and growth targets can be achieved and measured.

Rather than a "one size fits all" approach, the plan should reference the unique requirements of Mid Ulster and the bespoke solutions that can address these. Importantly, prior to revising the strategy further consultation with the Council and other key local stakeholders is necessary to ensure the final strategy provides the narrative, roadmap and action plan that can maximise social and economic opportunities that will assist with delivering the Government's levelling-up agenda within the context of a sustainable and regenerative tourism framework.

The Council is committed to seeking investment in large scale tourism projects to grow the district's tourism economy and is keen to work with central government to ensure that this goal is achieved.

*Councillor Dominic Molloy
Chairman
Mid Ulster District Council*

Minutes of Meeting of the Development Committee of Mid Ulster District Council held on Wednesday 6 December 2023 in the Council Offices, Burn Road, Cookstown and by Virtual Means

Members Present

Councillor McNamee, Chair

Councillors Bell*, Black*, W Buchanan, F Burton*, Clarke*, Corry, Gildernew*, McLernon, McQuade*, Milne*, Monteith*, Quinn*, Wilson

Officers in Attendance

Mr Black, Strategic Director of Communities & Place (SD: C&P)

Mr Gordon, Assistant Director of Health, Leisure and Wellbeing (AD: HL&W)**

Ms McKeown, Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes (AD: EDT&SP)**

Mr O McGuckin, ICT Support

Mrs Grogan, Committee and Member Services Officer

Others in Attendance

Deputation:

Department for Communities – Affordable Warmth Scheme
Adrian Boyce and David Polley

Northern Ireland Housing Executive –
Emma Stubbs

* Denotes Members present in remote attendance

** Denotes Officers present by remote means

*** Denotes Others present by remote means

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm.

The Chair, Councillor McNamee welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the meeting through the Live Broadcast. Councillor McNamee in introducing the meeting detailed the operational arrangements for transacting the business of the committee in the chamber and by virtual means, by referring to Annex A to this minute.

D191/23 Notice of Recording

This meeting will be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast on the Council's You Tube site.

D192/23 Apologies

C Linney, Assistant Director of Development (AD: Dev).

D193/23 Declaration of Interests

The Chair, Councillor McNamee reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declaration of interest.

Councillor F Burton declared an interest in Agewell as a member through Council.

Councillor Corry declared an interest in Agewell as a member through Council.

D194/23 Chair's Business

None.

D195/23 Deputation – Department for Communities – Affordable Warmth Scheme

The Chair welcomed to the committee Mr David Polley, Adrian Boyce from Department for Communities (DfC) and Ms Emma Stubbs from Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and invited them to make their presentation to members.

Mr Polley provided members with an update on the background to the whole situation and advised that we were coming to the end of the Affordable Warmth Scheme and a decision had to be made what to do. Mr Polley advised that a serious engagement had taken place with Councils alongside DfC deliberating setting their own budgets and although going through different stages, it was still happening at the same time between Christmas and the summer last year. Mr Polley said that the DfC were advised that they were going to have to work within an extremely difficult budget, both in terms of resource running costs and capital which included Affordable Warmth Scheme. DfC prioritised Affordable Warmth Scheme but nevertheless the capital was reduced in the end but were still talking to Councils to decide whether to extend the Affordable Warmth Scheme as the business case was running out in September 2023. A clear message was being received from Councils that given where we had been at the start of the Affordable Warmth Scheme, the amount of referrals they had been expecting there needed to be ability to provide a forward look for a referral model to see what future budgets would be, which would be difficult for Councils to keep involved with the Affordable Warmth Scheme. One Council had already dropped out of the scheme, with another threatening to do so, but other Councils had alluded to their willingness to keep working on the Affordable Warmth Scheme, but all Councils did point out that it was extremely difficult due to the number of referrals continuing to drop, resulting in the amount allocated dropping also, but none the less Council still had to retain staff to operate this scheme. It was going to prove difficult as DfC could not confirm a budget and at the beginning of the year, the DfC's EQIA advised of closing the budget for the Affordable Warmth Scheme, a strong message was received given that fuel prices were very high, the level of fuel poverty and the cost of living crisis that this wouldn't be acceptable. DfC had to do what they could to keep the Affordable Warmth Scheme open which was also the message that Council was giving them as it was costing them, research was carried out and this was confirmed as Councils were subsidising the scheme and were also under pressure. Mr Polley advised that DfC were looking at a budget just to keep the scheme open and at the minute managed to get £14m, although should have been £16m, but most of that was

actually referrals which were made in the previous year, resulting in the amount of referrals being put through to Councils were going to be extremely low and going to lean towards the good nature of Councils. DfC were in a position that they were beginning to lose Councils and along with the general pressure of budgets led them to a position that they decided to move towards a direct application basis for the scheme rather than a referral basis, from the addendum to the business case, and extend the scheme for a further 2 years on an application basis and stop working with Councils. Mr Polley advised that this had been an extremely difficult decision to make as DfC had been working very closely with colleagues in Council for years on the scheme, with a lot of work being done to change the features of the scheme to try and make it better for Councils including targeting so everyone was happy, but within a matter of months targeting was then stopped, which was a hard decision but had to be made due to budget risks and potential closure of the scheme altogether. Savings made the scheme more resilient as it could be kept open this year and, on that basis, worked out a business case from September and provided Councils with 3 months' notice under the Memorandum of Understanding, moving towards an application basis with NIHE from September. Mr Polley said that this had come to the NIHE at very short notice as time was contingent on the business case in order from stopping the scheme and restarting it again and commended the NIHE as they have worked very hard and done very well as this was a very difficult task. The reason it was an addendum and not extended longer, was to ensure that the scheme was kept running and next year a bid will be submitted for extra funding as it was meant to be £16m per year, this year allocation was £14m which was a very low level of activity, next year a business case is being made for £20m which would bring it back more towards the numbers which was in previous years. This would be for 2 years and then move forward towards a different scheme which would be ready for Net Zero as scheme now is about energy efficiency and getting people warmer but does not include carbon zero heat systems and money allocated is not sufficient to do those. In the future the new scheme needs to be much more comprehensive, to include carrying out work and spend on more houses and move up a scale.

The Chair thanked Mr Polley for his presentation and advised that Mid Ulster District Council was one of the most supportive of the Affordable Warmth Scheme and some members were very disappointed when Council lost control of it and transferred to the Housing Executive. The Chair said that members requested that an invite be issued to those running the scheme to come along to committee at a future date to compare stats to see if they have been doing the same equivalent or more than us over the period that was transferred. The Chair said that members were of the opinion that representatives would come along here tonight to compare statistics.

Ms Stubbs advised that it has been a very busy time in Affordable Warmth Scheme and from 1 September – 30 November, 3,740 requests for applications for the scheme had been received and these were all the people which were deemed as eligible on initial phone calls. Phone calls are coming through the Energy Advice line and even if people are not eligible for Affordable Warmth, some energy advice can be provided and direct them to other programmes for support or refer them to energy calculator which can get them insulation and help with energy efficiency costs. In regards to the number of applications which were issued, 8.7% were from Mid Ulster area, which equates to 309 applications, which was previously 9% when the Councils all split evenly. She stated that not as many applications have been returned but still a lot

more than referrals being received, in context within 3 months would have received 440 referrals from Councils, and within these three months NIHE have received 1,181 applications fully completed and returned, with 8.21% being from Mid Ulster which was very much in line with previous applications and referrals being receiving from Council at any case. Once applications are processed, approvals would be issued and under the single provider model, DfC have asked them to look at 'worst first' to include fuel poverty and the measures which need installed, with 12% from Mid Ulster having the overall approvals issued which was slightly higher than the number of enquiries which demonstrates the need and priority which was coming in from the area. Ms Stubbs said that it was still very early days and the full approval rates would be up to the end of August 24, and would continue to get full approvals issued within the budget confirmed for this year.

Mr Polley advised that Mid Ulster demonstrated an area for high fuel poverty and not surprising that there was a high number of approvals compared to other Council areas who may have less.

The Chair said that it would be beneficial to have the representatives back at the end of the year to compare their stats against Council stats.

Councillor F Burton enquired how elected representatives chase up on those still in the pipeline to get support through the Affordable Warmth Scheme, i.e. boiler replacement and asked who should be contacted as she was aware of a few people being still in the pipeline and asked if this could be chased up. The member advised that the applicants had been assured that they were eligible by Council Officers and were sitting waiting on them coming back to them to advise when things would be progressed. The member said that this could be as far back as June last year.

Ms Stubbs advised that Council would have still being making referrals up to the end of August, with 101 referrals being received from Mid Ulster with all of them having already being contacted and a technical inspection being carried out on their home. Anyone who did not get referred from the Council, the Council Officers were provided with a letter to pass on to anyone who was still on the waiting list and wouldn't have been referred, advising that they could contact the Energy Advice Line from 1st September regarding the new process. Anyone which contacted the Energy Advice Line, calls were being picked up and application forms issued and if there were specific people who haven't been contacted, or perhaps in contact with Council and not one of the referrals and unsure of the process, that she would be happy to liaise directly with members to get the relevant details and see where they were on the records. Contact can be made through the local Grants Office which she believed would be the West office who would be able to provide an update on any specific cases members may have.

Councillor F Burton said it may be useful for Ms Stubbs to liaise Council's Member Support Officer to provide a contact email for members. The member said that she couldn't be sure that the applicants have now received their new boiler, but the last time she was in contact with them they were still waiting on an update regarding the process but were confident they were eligible.

Councillor Bell said that given the popularity of the scheme and being able to make direct contact with someone within the scheme, felt that it would be a good idea to have a dedicated elected reps contact line and asked if this could be accommodated.

Ms Stubbs advised that there was not a direct line for elected members, but all of the applications were being processed through the Grants Office which was available to take phone calls and specific queries. Discussions has taken place with DfC on how regular engagements can take place with Councils to keep them up to date on statistics in their area and the level of interest. This would help Councils to promote the scheme to anyone who may benefit from the programme and provide support through the Energy Advice Line.

Councillor Bell agreed that this was very good but asked if it would be possible to inform staff in the Grants Office when elected reps make contact that they have the authority to enquire about specifics.

Mr Polley said that this would need to be checked out due to concerns around GDPR due to the fact of someone discussing another person's application, permission would be needed to do that.

The Chair advised that if time was afforded to Grants staff that they would come back to members with some clarity, as this would allow them the time to check the information which had been requested as there was a need to be careful around data protection.

Councillor Milne thanked the representatives for their presentation here tonight. The member enquired about when a referral is received, in what order do they be prioritised i.e. upgrading of heating, insulation or windows etc. The member also referred to comment in presentation regarding after the next two years and asked what the anticipated future regarding this would be.

Mr Polley advised that the scheme always had priorities with:

- Priority 1 – insulation/ventilation/ draft proofing - loft and cavity wall insulation, hot water jackets, draft proofing doors and windows
- Priority 2 - heating – replacement of solid fuels and boiler replacement
- Priority 3 - replacement windows
- Priority 4 - solid wall insulations

Mr Boyce advised that there would be a two-year policy bridge to allow DfC team to see what would essentially come next. He said that there was an issue in relation to construction inflation and capital costs currently in place which does not meet the measures required in the homes and the replacement of fossil fuels. There is a need to find a balance between carbonisation but also helping low income families with heat and find a whole inhouse approach to have as much insulation as possible without going out windows if ventilation isn't good. There is a concern regarding eligibility criteria as at the moment it is £23,000, the recent Treasury Statement which came out pushed the living wage up to a maximum of £22,800, pension inflation increases of 8% were almost going to lose the working poor within the scheme where it sits at the minute. There is now a need to look at the eligibility scheme at the minute to raise it to

a much more reasonable standard to capture more people and move the scheme forward as part of Net Zero and Climate Action Plan targets set in place. There will be changes and engagement taking place with Councils on public consultation and social reference groups to find out what is needed on the ground which will influence a set of options to hopefully go out this time next year.

Mr Polley said what comes after needed to be a lot more comprehensive in order to get to Net Zero in 2050 and make sure that transition is just which is really important to the Department as there was a need to be doing more houses and more things to the houses, costs to try and get some of the Housing Executive houses ready for solid wall dwellings is approximately £20k, there was a need to take a step back and look more comprehensively at the challenges in which we have and how to address that. He concurred with Mr Boyce regarding the work which has to be completed over the next two years and the challenges ahead regarding increased inflation costs and less funding available.

Councillor Burton said that it should not be lost in the comment regarding the 'working poor' and all the changes in money, it is ensuring that people have warm homes and that they are comfortable in their homes. The member said that for people who have worked all of their lives and all of a sudden when they hit pension age, they are ruled out of these things, we need to make sure that people are not ruled out over the head of things relating to that.

The Chair agreed that the member's comments were very valid.

Mr Polley advised that income criteria had just changed over the last number of years and agreed that this needed relooked at as part of the new scheme due to the fact that things cost more now and wages increased which was not people's fault. He said that there were always some people who just earned too much but there was a need to spend to get Net Zero ready and broaden out the scheme with a focus on fuel poverty as there was so many people who needed this.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their attendance tonight and hoped to see them back at committee after the first year to compare their stats to Council stats and hoped that they would be in par with ours.

The Chair wished the representatives a very Happy Christmas at which they withdrew from the committee at 7.29 pm.

Matters for Decision

D196/23 Development Report

The Strategic Director for Communities and Place (SD: C&P) presented previously circulated report to seek approval for the following:

- Community Grants Rolling Programme
- DFC Hardship Funding – Allocation
- Development Report

Councillor Gildernew said that she would be happy to propose the report but wished to seek clarification on an issue. The member referred to the ten foodbanks in which funding has been allocated to but enquired if Officers could look at the gaps in provision in certain areas as she was aware of an area within Clogher Valley where two foodbanks are in one end of the Clogher Valley. She asked that in the future if funding was sought could communication be made to the people within DEA areas which were not covered to advise them where to go to look for this funding.

The SD: C&P advised the member that this work was already in hand, the ten networks which were selected were done so on the back of money becoming available quite quickly from Department for Communities. It was unknown if this funding was going to be still available within the next financial year but Council were preparing to adopt a new process to help strategic partners going forward should that money become available and would be coming before the committee for consideration in January.

Councillor Monteith said that his query was similar to Councillor Gildernew's as he had raised previously about the gaps in provision. The member said that it was difficult due to having to nearly know down to the very postcode where a person is living and where they go for help and who to contact looking that help. He said that this was not easy for people and extremely intimidating for anyone to reach out for help when you are in dire circumstances and the worst thing that can happen is when someone advises at the end of a phone 'no sorry we do not cover your area or handle that'. This person will not have the confidence or courage to make a second phone call and felt that this was a legacy of money which was coming in and get out the door during covid which he understood we were now long past getting out the door quickly, there needs to be an equity of provision and some indication to the level of support that a family or an individual can expect. The member stated that some of those organisations have different rules about how often they can be contacted, some will pay for some things and not others and were now in a situation where people will need ongoing support not just one-off interventions. The member felt that it was vitally important that we burrow down into this, which hasn't been done before and hoped that January may be an opportune time to do this as we owe it to the people to provide them a with a fair crack of the whip whatever limited resources which were there and everyone should have the opportunity to avail of them, but currently this is not the case.

The Chair said that all comments would all be taken on board.

Councillor Quinn declared an interest in SVP Coalisland as they share part of the funding with SVP Clonoe in which he is a member of.

Councillor Quinn referred to previous comments and advised that Torrent was well catered for but so much in the Ardboe area, although he wasn't 100% sure if Cookstown SVP covered that area but felt that this needed to be further investigated.

Councillor F Burton said that it was her understanding where it was previously stated that these foodbanks may have been chosen quite quickly, but may have possibly picked this up wrong. The member stated that during covid a group which were very key in supporting families and the elderly more so in the Fivemiletown area was not listed to her surprise. The member enquired if this was down to how many reside in the area in terms of the differences in allocation of money and asked how this was all divvied up as it was vitally important for people to know where to go and seek support. The member was aware of the Clogher group doing a lot of work down to the lower Clogher Valley also but was aware of Caledon and Benburb area not having the support unless they go to Dungannon. The member said that there most definitely was a need to look in terms of mileage to see what provision was out there.

The SD: C&P in response to Councillor Burton's point advised that the allocation model which has been used this last number of years, has been a model as far as he understood developed during the covid period on the back of money that became available relatively quickly from the Department for Communities. Taking on board all of the points that members has raised, the reason why from an Officer perspective, we are taking this through a review process should money continue to become available from the Department for 2023/24. The SD: C&P advised members that a more detailed report would be brought back in front of committee in January which will outline a revised approach that would allow organisations from across the district to submit information and proposals to make sure that there is reach right across all parts of the district and across all the DEA's. The SD: C&P stressed to members that this would be subject to funding continuing to be made available from the Department for Communities.

In response to Councillor Burton's query about how the money was divvied up, the SD: C&P advised that this was based on the allocation model which was developed and took into consideration the size of the organisations and the number of referrals that historically had been made. The SD: C&P said that he did not have the specific allocation model in front of him tonight but could share with members after tonight's meeting and certainly in advance of the discussion at the January meeting.

Proposed by Councillor Gildernew
Seconded by Councillor McLernon and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council -

- (i) Agree the Rolling Grant Grant Allocations
- (ii) Agree the Hardship Funding Allocations
- (iii) Note the Development Report Update

D197/23 Economic Development – Renewal of Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce 2024

The Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Programmes presented previously circulated report to provide an update on key activities as detailed below:

- **Renewal of Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce 2024**

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor McLernon and

Resolved That it be recommended to Council to approve Corporate Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce costing £3,000+Vat for the period of 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024.

Matters for Information

D198/23 Minutes of Development Committee held on 16 November 2023

Members noted Minutes of Development Committee held on 16 November 2023.

Councillor Monteith referred to D177/23 Environmental Health Service Update, where it was proposed that a meeting be organised in relation to air pollution and enquired if a date had been arranged yet.

The Assistant Director of Health, Leisure and Wellbeing (AD: HL&W) advised that this was currently being worked upon as Principal Environmental Health Officers were trying to co-ordinate with external agencies to check diaries and afterwards cross-check members diaries to find a suitable date for everyone. The AD: HL&W said that it was unlikely that the meeting would take place before Christmas but the aim was to have a date in diaries before Christmas for a return early in the New Year.

D199/23 Gas Safety Initiative

Members noted previously circulated report which provided an update on Council's participation in a joint 'Gas Safety' initiative between Environmental Health, Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) and Gas Safe Register which aims to raise awareness of gas safety and the importance of maintenance of gas appliances in commercial catering and in residential care/nursing homes.

D200/23 Economic Development – OBF

Members noted previously circulated report which provided an update on:

- NIBSUP/Business Start Up Performance 2022/23
- Tourism Development Group Minutes – 29.03.23

The live broadcast ended at 7.38 pm.

Local Government (NI) Act 2014 – Confidential Business

Proposed by Councillor McLernon
Seconded by Councillor Corry and

Resolved In accordance with Section 42, Part 1 Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public in accordance with Section 42, Part 1 Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 that Members of the public be asked to withdraw from the meeting whilst members consider items D201/23 to D202/23.

Matters for Decision

D201/23 Agewell Project – Contract Extension

Matters for Information

D202/23 Confidential Minutes of Development Committee held on 16 November 2023

The Chair wished everyone a very Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

D203/23 Duration of Meeting

The meeting commenced at 7pm and concluded at 7.45 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____

Annex A – Introductory Remarks from the Chairperson

Good evening and welcome to the Council's [Policy & Resources/Environment/Development] Committee in the Chamber, [Dungannon/Magherafelt] and virtually.

I specifically welcome the public watching us through the Live Broadcast. The Live Broadcast will run for the period of our Open Business but will end just before we move into Confidential Business. I let you know before this happens.

Just some housekeeping before we commence. Can I remind you:-

- If you have joined the meeting remotely please keep your audio on mute unless invited to speak and then turn it off when finished speaking
- Keep your video on at all times, unless you have bandwidth or internet connection issues, where you are advised to try turning your video off
- If you wish to speak please raise your hand in the meeting or on screen and keep raised until observed by an Officer or myself
- Should we need to take a vote this evening I will ask each member to confirm whether they are for or against the proposal or abstaining
- When invited to speak please introduce yourself by name to the meeting
- For any member attending remotely, if you declare an interest in an item, please turn off your video and keep your audio on mute for the duration of the item
- If referring to a specific report please reference the report, page or slide being referred to
- Lastly, I remind the public and press that taking photographs of proceedings or using any means to enable anyone not present to see or hear proceedings, or making a simultaneous oral report of the proceedings are not permitted

Thank you and we will now move to the first item on the agenda

Report on	Environmental Health Service Update
Date of Meeting	10 th January 2023
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
Contact Officer	Melanie Patterson, Environmental Health Service Manager

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	At the meeting of the Development Committee in September 2023, Members resolved that a regular update on the work of Mid Ulster District Council's Environmental Health Service should be provided to committee. This report seeks to provide Members with an update on the work of the Environmental Health Service during November and December 2023.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Health, Leisure, and Wellbeing Department's 'Environmental Health Service' provides a statutory regulatory service on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council.
2.2	The Environmental Health Service provides a range of Environmental Health and licensing services across the Mid Ulster District Council area, together with an animal welfare function which is currently delivered by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council as part of a Service Level Agreement, administered on our behalf.
2.3	The MUDC Environmental Health team are also contracted to deliver a range of other regulatory services on behalf of third-party statutory agencies, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessment of Category 3 and 4 fireworks displays and the inspection of premises storing / selling fireworks on behalf of the Department of Justice • The sampling of private drinking water and completion of associated drinking water risk assessments on behalf of the Drinking Water Inspectorate for Northern Ireland. • House Fitness inspections on behalf of Northern Ireland Housing Executive
2.4	The Environmental Health Service also works in partnership with a diverse range of stakeholders, both internal and external, in striving to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of those who live, work, and visit the Mid Ulster District Council area.
2.5	The Environmental Health Service is currently delivered by officers who work across three functional areas and who are supported by key Business Support Officers within the team.
2.6	Following the most recent reorganisation of directorates within Council it was necessary to realign the work streams within Environmental Health's functional teams to account for the change in internal structure – the new allocations / work streams now fall within the new functional groupings set out below:

- Food Safety, Consumer Safety and Tobacco Control
- Health and Safety, Planning and Environment
- Neighbourhoods and Licensing

3.0 Main Report

3.1 The Environmental Health Service update set out below provides a substantial reflection of the work undertaken by the team in the period between 27th October and 8th December 2023.

3.2 The statistics within this report are indicative of the requests for service received by the Department within the specified period and these new demands are in addition to officers' ongoing work on existing caseloads.

3.3 Food Safety, Consumer Safety and Tobacco Control

Nature of Regulatory Work	Number Undertaken
Food hygiene inspections / visits	112
Food standards inspections / visits	48
Food Samples taken for analysis	65
Food Hygiene requests for service / advice	46
Food Standards requests for service / advice	12
Response to Infectious Disease Notifications	13
Consumer Protection requests for service / advice	10
Consumer Protection inspections / visits	0
Consumer Protection Initiatives Undertaken	0
Smoke Free Inspections / Visits	60

The 'Food Safety, Consumer Safety and Tobacco Control' team also undertook risk assessment work under the service level agreement with the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

3.4 Health and Safety, Planning and Environment

Nature of Regulatory Work	Number Undertaken
Health and Safety Inspections / visits	49
Health and safety requests for service	35
RIDDOR reports received	1
Ongoing RIDDOR case files under investigation	10
Fireworks Inspections / Visits	1
Planning Consultations received	48
Planning Consultations completed	54
PPC Inspections	8
Environmental Protection requests for service	70 <i>(total - not split by team)</i>
Air Quality Diffusion Tubes changed over 28 sites	98

3.5 The 'Health and Safety, Planning and Environment' team also initiated a "Medium Combustion Plant" scoping exercise in relation to legislative requirements of the PPC regime within the reporting period.

3.6	Officers are currently in the process of validating the data for the 2022 Air Quality Report. In addition to this, officers are liaising with the various stakeholders to confirm a meeting date regarding the districts air quality action plan – a meeting invite will be extended to Members in due course.																								
3.7	<p>Neighbourhoods and Licensing</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Nature of Regulatory Work</th> <th>Number Undertaken</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Public Health requests for service</td> <td>162</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Environmental Protection requests for service</td> <td>42</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private Tenancy requests for service</td> <td>18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Licensing Requests for Service (non-dogs related)</td> <td>16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Licensing inspections (non-dogs related)</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Complaints related to Dogs (all)</td> <td>172</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stray dog complaints</td> <td>72</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stray dogs impounded</td> <td>54</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Investigation into dog attacks on persons</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Investigation into dog attacks on livestock</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Investigation into dog attacks on other dogs</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>3.8</p> <p>Freedom of Information Requests</p> <p>The Environmental Health Service provided relevant information in relation to 7 freedom of information requests.</p> <p>A further update on Councils Environmental Health Service will be brought to the Development Committee in March 2024.</p>	Nature of Regulatory Work	Number Undertaken	Public Health requests for service	162	Environmental Protection requests for service	42	Private Tenancy requests for service	18	Licensing Requests for Service (non-dogs related)	16	Licensing inspections (non-dogs related)	1	Complaints related to Dogs (all)	172	Stray dog complaints	72	Stray dogs impounded	54	Investigation into dog attacks on persons	10	Investigation into dog attacks on livestock	1	Investigation into dog attacks on other dogs	6
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4.0	Other Considerations																								
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: None anticipated at this juncture.</p> <p>Human: None anticipated at this juncture.</p> <p>Risk Management: None anticipated at this juncture</p>																								
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.</p>																								
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5.1	To note the contents of this report.																								
6.0	Documents Attached & References																								
	N/A																								

Report on	Centre for Ageing Better UK Annual Conference
Date of Meeting	10 th January 2024
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
Contact Officer	Raisa Donnelly, Age Friendly Co-ordinator

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	The purpose of the report is to update Members on an Age Friendly best practice opportunity – the Centre for Ageing Better UK Network of Age Friendly Communities Annual Conference 2023.
2.0	Background
2.1	The “Ageing Well” initiative is one of the outcomes within the Health and Wellbeing Theme of the Mid Ulster Community Plan. Work on this theme is being progressed by the Age Friendly Co-ordinator within Council who is funded by the Public Health Agency.
2.2	The Age Friendly Co-ordinator continues to meet the PHA objectives by working alongside networks and colleagues locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.
2.3	In September 2021, MUDC became a member of the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities (UK Network). The Centre for Ageing Better creates change in policy and practice informed by evidence and works with partners to improve employment, housing, health and communities. As members of the UK Network an expectations of members is to engage and communicate with the network, for example: respond to enquiries; surveys; and attend events such as the annual conference and peer learning opportunities where possible.
2.4	An opportunity arose to attend an annual conference on 22 nd - 23 rd November 2023 hosted by The Centre for Ageing Better UK. Attendance at the UK conference has helped drive the MUDC Age Friendly agenda and progress towards a society for ageing well. This links closely with the Community Planning targets under the Health and Wellbeing thematic group to develop and implement an ageing well society.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Key Learnings from the conference: State of Ageing 2023 Report This publication uses the latest national and census data to paint a detailed picture of ageing in England. The report covers demographics, employment, homes, health and wellbeing,

people in society, finances and pensions. It includes an in-depth exploration of the increasing diversity of our older population and the significant disparities between how people from different ethnic backgrounds experience getting older—fifty years of progress against pensioner poverty under threat. A raft of data shows that both the current generations of retirees and the generations heading towards retirement are experiencing significant and growing financial difficulties.

“I can’t afford to enjoy adult life”, “I am greatly concerned about the future”.

“Society has been too slow to adapt to the ageing population- it’s time to catch up”.

“To make later life better – we need laser focus”.

The cost-of-living crisis and financial worries mean not turning the heat on, not seeing friends/family or seeing friends and family less, fewer showers and baths, less balanced nutritional meals, more rental homes – not able to pay mortgages and renting properties – some that are not fit for purpose or not suitable to live in. Homes have higher prices and are less affordable, and there is an increase in diversity among older people. Family structures have changed – more single-occupied and extended families living aboard. 50-60’s struggle to stay in work due to health issues, caring duties and financial insecurity, with many unpaid carers. People are eating less – and less activity.

3.2 **Ethnicity, faith and migration in Age-Friendly Communities**

The older population across the UK has become, and is becoming, increasingly diverse. This panel discussed how age-friendly communities can consider the needs and perspectives of different groups of older adults and work to address inequalities within their communities. Food festivals. BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) is no longer a helpful term – instead, use issues of REACH (Race, Ethnicity And Cultural Heritage) – this is more inclusive.

No longer hard to reach people – only poor inclusion opportunities. We need the right opportunities and systems to include older people. It’s the systems and communication that are the problem.

Faith spaces need more recognition for wellbeing. We need to use Faith Infrastructure – untapped spaces—ethnographic fieldwork. Supporting people’s faith is essential for wellbeing – smells, sound, taste, temperature, inclusion, compassion and food are necessary for mental health (cultural heritage – especially among older people – it’s their identity – faith has a rich tapestry – the experience of being together and spirituality is very soothing).

VCSE – should be renamed – Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) - to include Faith.

Conference interactive workshops:

3.3 **Partnerships and funding stream – Building Partnerships with local health systems**

We are moving from competition to collaboration. Building effective relationships within a local Integrated Care System (ICS) is increasingly essential for many Age-friendly Communities to develop new collaborations and funding opportunities, particularly from a VCSE perspective. An overview of navigating these systems, lessons on effective partnership working, and how to apply these within age-friendly communities were discussed. Speaker: Dr Helen Gilbert- Fellow, The Kings Fund, author of Actions to Support Partnership: Addressing Barriers to Working with the VCSE Sector in Integrated

Care Systems. ICS Leads and VCSE sector – Deven have a buddy system. It should be seen as a meeting of minds sharing interests rather than advocacy.

They have a reflective learning framework for partnership working - people Ageing Well Approach. Healthy Ageing Board – Fund a nurse v Fund a community development worker? Age-friendly coordinators are invited to ICS meetings to talk about goals and solutions. Middlesbrough – GPs use texting services (addressing hard of hearing).

Partnerships and funding stream – Making the Case for Age Friendly Communities. Open networking Opportunity.

In this interactive session, colleagues co-created messages to make the case for age-friendly with different audiences in mind, learning from what's already working in other communities to access new partnerships and funders. Speaker: Catherine Dempsey, Funding and Development Consultant. Third-sector partnerships are necessary – richness, gratitude & commitment. Life has changed – more older people living alone, no children, no family connections close by, ageism, racism and sexism.

Age Friendly for all Ages – University of Bristol/ Manchester

Healthier lives – Life course experience. Intergenerational connections. Manifesto for All Age Friendly Cities (Bristol). Spaces designed for all and broader trends. Combatting Ageism and Connecting Generations.

Other workshops: Age-Friendly & Dementia, Working with Older People as Co-researchers, Improving Outreach and Engagement within your Age-Friendly Community.

Further discussion:

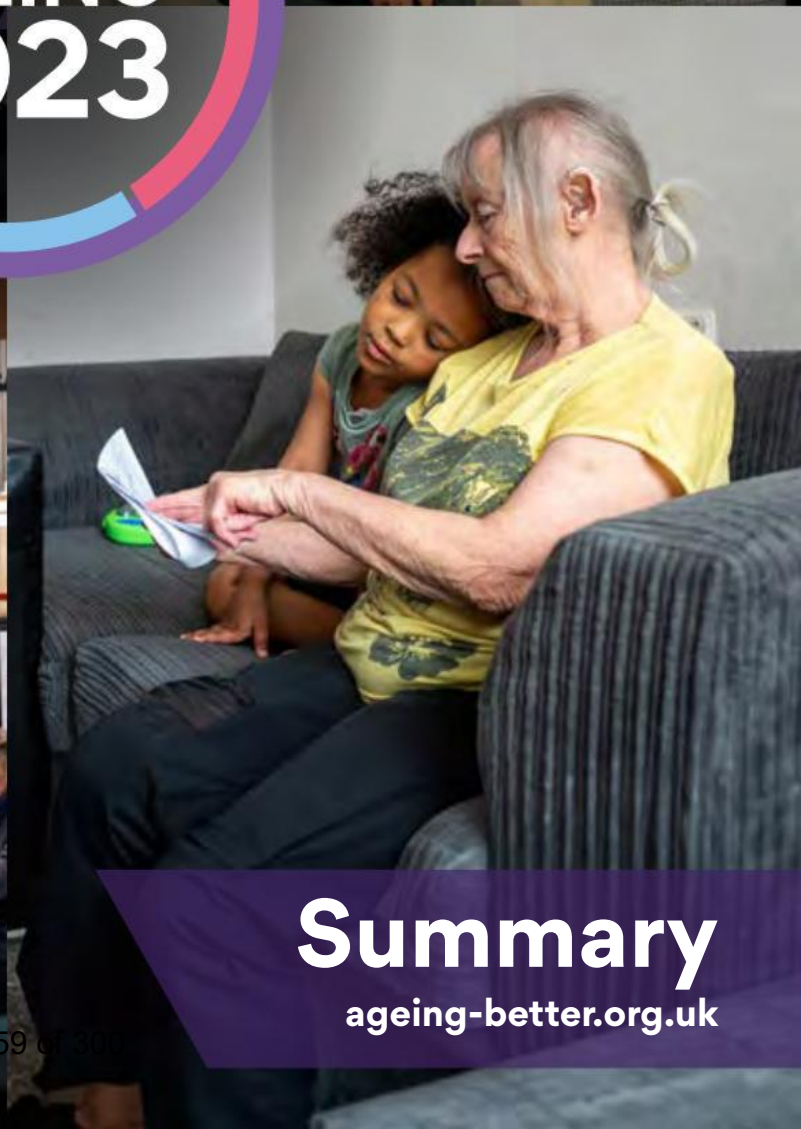
- London is seeking an Older People's Commissioner for England and a Minister for Ageing. Malta, Wales and NI have a Commissioner for Older People. The Wales Commissioner for Older People has £1.1m allocated for Ageing Well support.
- The head of Greater Manchester Ageing Hub is keen to come to Belfast to talk. We need more from short-term funding than long-term funding. They have an older people's task force, Vision for Later Life Report. Need for Housing Planning and Ageing. Barclay's walking football / online banking advert is very good.
- Leeds Age Friendly is another recommended model – They have an ageing, healthy team of 4 people. Age Friendly Alliance, Age Friendly Board (Council and Internal Planning). Funding is from local authorities, research funds, and the Lottery.
- Professor Sir Michael Marmot – meeting the Law Society and is happy to discuss N.Ireland being a Marmot City and support A State of Ageing N.Ireland report. "We live in the best possible world". "Nature of ill-health comes with social deprivation". More medications are offered to older people than talking therapies."
- Age Friendly Communities - Where are we going? Panel speakers brought a unique perspective on leading the development of Age-friendly Communities at an international, national, regional and community level. They shared what progress has been made over the last 15 years since the concept was developed and their view on upcoming opportunities and challenges for the work. Speakers: - Thiago Hérick de Sá: Technical Officer - Age-friendly Environment, World Health Organisation - Helena Herklots - Older Peoples Commissioner for Wales - Paul

3.4

	<p>McGarry - Head of Greater Manchester Ageing Hub - Eunice Campbell-Clark - Age-friendly Nottingham Steering Group member.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ageism Action Day and micro-grants launch in 2024, will see the launch of a national, public-facing campaign to tackle ageism. Applicable for community and voluntary sector to apply. https://ageing-better.org.uk/ageism-action-day-micro-grants-age-friendly-communities
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: Costs covered by the Centre for Ageing Better UK
	Human: Officer time
	Risk Management: Considered in line with relevant Council Policies and Procedures.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the contents of this report.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1- State of Ageing 2023 Report.



**STATE OF
AGEING
2023**





The State of Ageing in 2023



For many people today, living longer is not just a hope but an expectation. Gains in life expectancy in past decades mean that millions more of us are living into our 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond, with record numbers of centenarians recorded this year.

But at the same time, there is a growing divide in experiences of ageing, with the poorest people living shorter lives and spending many more years in bad health. People from minority ethnic backgrounds experience some of the greatest inequalities.

And with increasing diversity among our older population, we are likely to see inequality grow. Disadvantage accumulates across the life course. The gaps in health and wealth between the richest and poorest become greater with age and are actually larger *within* older age groups than they are *between* generations.

Since 2012-13, the number of pensioners living in poverty has steadily increased. But the situation is even worse for those just below state pension age. Contrary to stereotypes about ‘wealthy baby boomers’, people aged 60-64 have the highest poverty rates among adults of any age. Even when this group reaches state pension age, several trends explored in this report suggest that millions will continue to struggle:

- More people are living with major illnesses and disabilities as they get older. For many, especially the poorest people, this is exacerbated by living in homes that pose a serious threat to their health and wellbeing.

- The number of older private renters is at an all-time high, meaning more people will need to cover the cost of rent while living on fixed – and often meagre – incomes.
- Workers in their 50s and 60s are struggling to stay in or return to work, resulting in pensioner poverty and financial insecurity in old age.

There’s no doubt that the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have exacerbated inequality, but the roots of this crisis are much deeper and stretch back decades. As a society, we have been far too slow to adapt to our ageing population, and now we are playing catch-up. This has manifested in huge inequalities and worsening circumstances for millions of older people.

Everyone loses out when older people are prevented from bringing their talents, expertise and experience to workplaces and communities because of avoidable ill health, poverty and discrimination.

We need a clear government plan, backed up by concrete policies, to reduce disparities in ageing. Inaction is ruining lives, putting pressure on public services, and damaging our economy.

We also need a shift in social attitudes so that negative and distorted views of ageing do not undermine efforts to reduce stark inequalities, and to ensure we properly value the contributions of older people to our society.



About this report

This year's State of Ageing report paints the most detailed picture yet of the older population in England, using data from a variety of sources, including Census 2021. We have also spoken to older people about their lives and seen our analysis of the data reflected in their experiences of ageing.

This summary report and [accompanying chapters](#) shine a light on the growth in size and diversity of older age groups and the many ways in which the older population is changing. It highlights stark inequalities, and the need for urgent action to stop them growing rapidly over the coming decades. Such action would enable millions more of us to age well – rather than facing a retirement of financial insecurity and poor health.

Census 2021 provides new insights into the enormous variation in how people from different minority ethnic backgrounds experience ageing. Throughout this report we will highlight the challenges faced by specific ethnic groups. Our accompanying reports published next year will examine other areas of diversity, such as disability and sexual orientation.

Over
21 million
people are aged 50
and over in England –
nearly 2 in 5 people

“I’m struggling now trying to keep my head above water. If it gets worse, I don’t know what to do. I have to limit the time with my grandchildren as it’s too expensive to feed them now and I can no longer give them what they want.”

53 year old Black British woman¹





Our ageing population

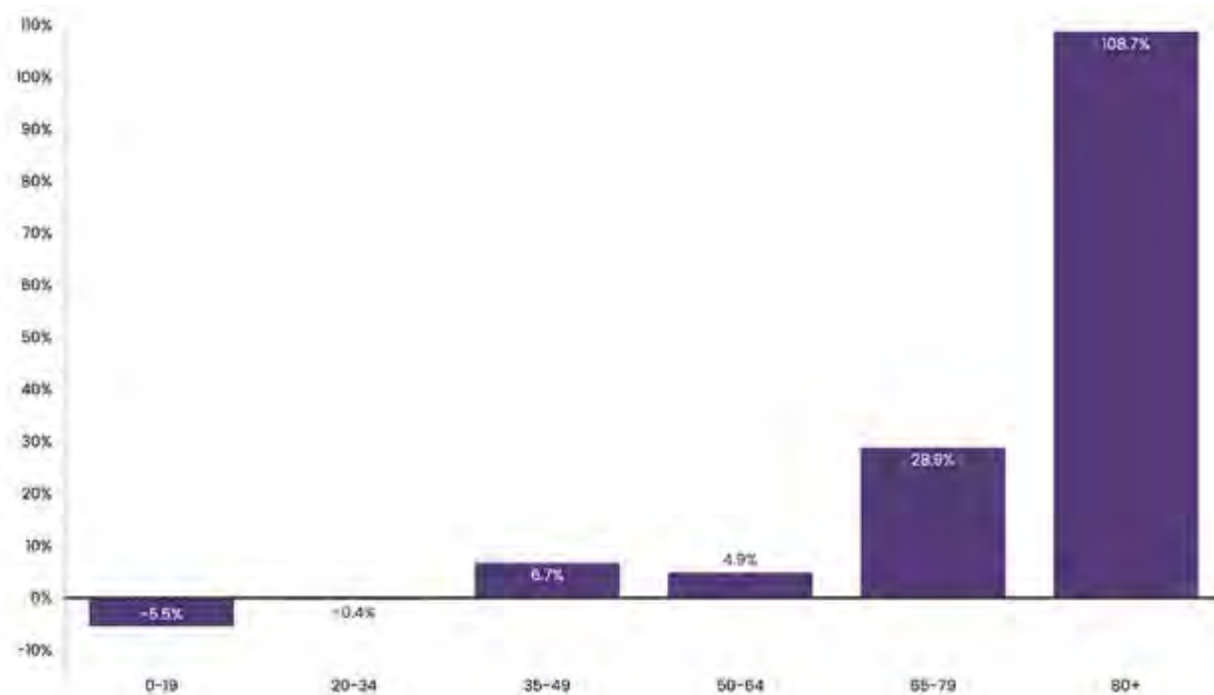
England has an ageing population, with more of us living longer than ever before. Our society and our policies need to change now to keep up with this radical shift.

Our population is older than ever before. Almost 40% of people in England are currently over 50, and almost 20% are over 65².

Since the early 1980s we have seen a huge shift in the age profile of the country. The number of people aged 65 and over has increased by almost 50%, and there are almost three times as many people aged 85 and over as there were 40 years ago.

These trends look set to continue over the next 40 years, with the population aged 80 and over growing most rapidly³.

Percentage change in the population by age group between 2023 and 2063, England

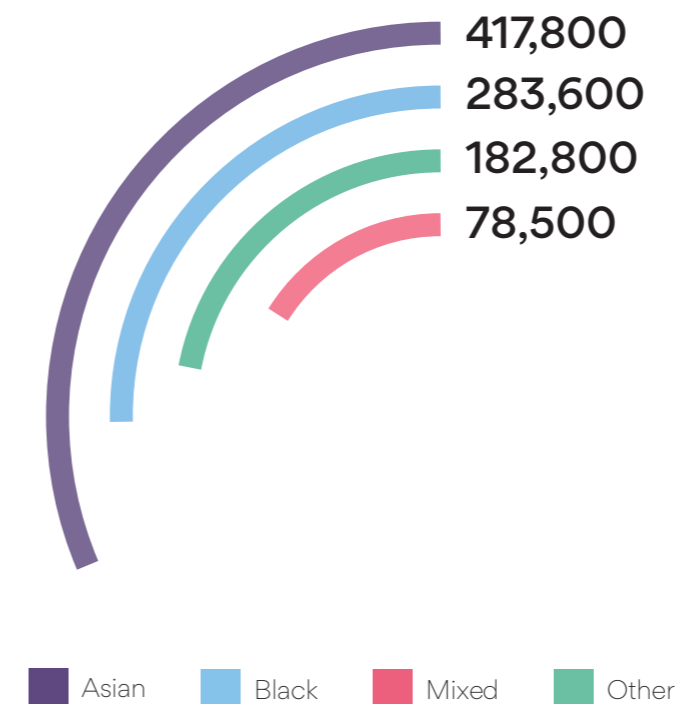


Our older population is more diverse than ever before – in terms of ethnicity, sexuality and the way we live our lives.

It is not just the age profile of our society that is different. Our older population is also much more diverse:

- The number of people aged 60 and over from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds⁴ has increased by 80% since the 2011 Census⁵ (from 0.6 million to 1.1 million). This proportion will increase further over the coming decades as people age. In England there are 2.5 times as many people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in their 40s (1.6 million) as in their 60s (0.6 million).
- Similarly, diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity among older people is set to increase significantly in the next few years. Among people aged 45-64, over four times as many identify as LGB+⁶, and over twice as many identify as trans⁷, as among those currently aged 65 and over.
- The way we are living and our family structures are also more varied. Since 2011, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people who are divorced or have never married, and in those living alone. For example, the number of people aged 50 and over who have never married has almost doubled in 10 years⁸. Changes to family structures will have implications for the future care and support needs of our population.

Increase in number of people aged 50 and over from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds between 2011 and 2021



The number of people aged 80 and over is set to more than double from 3 to 6 million in the next 40 years



Older people have never been a homogenous group – and this is the case now more than ever.

As our older population becomes more diverse, it is likely to become more unequal. The negative impact of structural inequalities accumulates throughout people's lives, meaning that gaps in wealth and health are greatest in later life.


Without drastic action, these inequalities look set to grow rapidly. And the gulf between those who are able to enjoy later life and those who struggle through it will widen.

In 2023, a significant percentage of the population face a bleak experience of ageing. But this is not inevitable. With a fundamental change in approach, we can enable millions more people to live a good later life.

The first step is for the UK government to appoint a Commissioner for Older People and Ageing for England. A Commissioner would act as an independent champion for ageing in policy-making and give a voice to the groups and issues currently neglected and marginalised.

Once appointed, a Commissioner should work with the government to develop an ageing society strategy that responds to the needs of older people and plans for the long-term implications of our ageing population.

This strategy must have a laser-like focus on the older people with the greatest need, be grounded in the data on different communities' experiences of old age, and set out a clear plan to level up the dramatic inequality in the way we experience later life.



“All these challenges are since COVID and the cost-of-living increase. I never had lots of money but could make it stretch further. There’s absolutely no stretch now and my credit card is at maximum and not coming down because of the extra interest rates.”

57 year old Black British woman



Poverty

Millions of pensioners are living in poverty, but a number of trends suggest things could get even worse over the next decade.

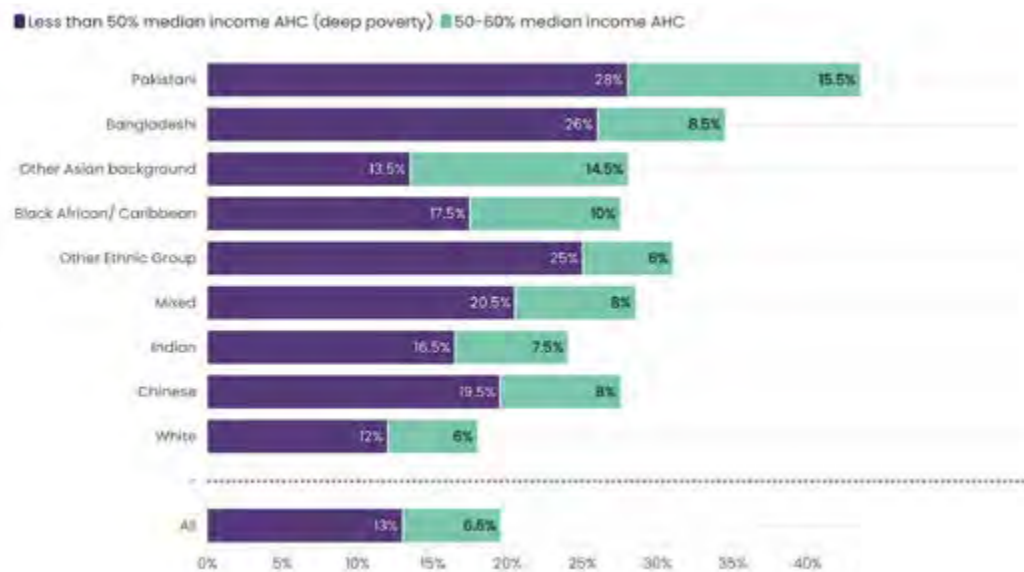
Contrary to the perception that all older people are well off and enjoy a comfortable retirement, the reality is that almost one in five⁹ pensioners are living in relative poverty.

Relative poverty among pensioners was at its lowest at 13% in 2012-13 but has been steadily increasing since then, reaching 18% in 2019-20 – about the same level as it is today.

Inequality arising from histories of low pay, part-time hours and time out of work¹⁰ means that women, Disabled people, carers, self-employed people, and people from some minority ethnic backgrounds¹¹ are more likely to be living in poverty.

People from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds experience the highest rates of poverty and are also most likely to be in deep poverty: around a quarter of people aged 50 and over from these ethnic backgrounds are living in deep poverty.

Rates of poverty and deep poverty after housing costs (AHC), among people aged 50 and over, by ethnicity of head of household and age group, UK, 2021/2022



“I’m living in a crisis. I’m in arrears with the mortgage and I’m worried about losing my home. My children help with the repayments, or else I would have lost the house some time ago. I’ve had to rent out two rooms so that there is some income coming in. The future feels really uncertain. I want to stay in my own home and feel secure.”

57 year old Bangladeshi woman

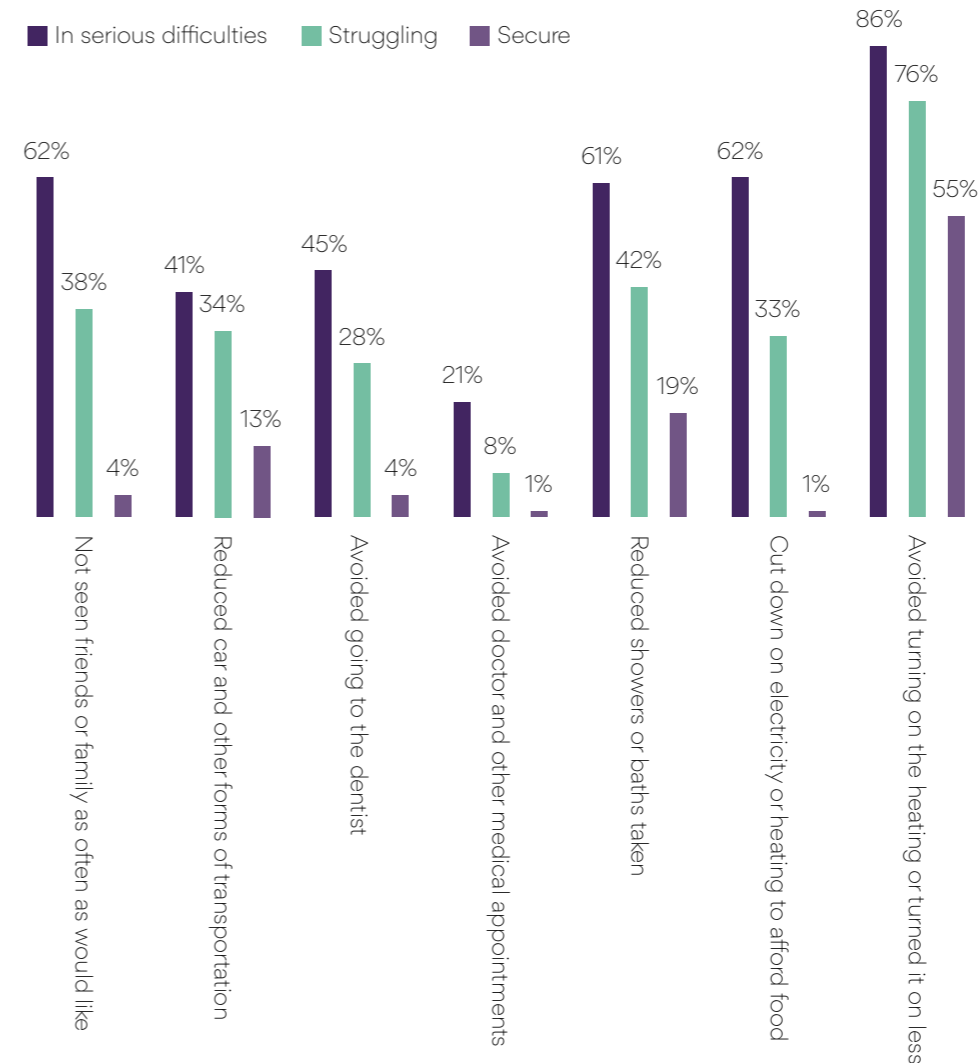
The situation is even worse for those just below state pension age. Among all adults, the highest poverty rates for any age group are for people aged 60-64¹² – a quarter of whom are living in poverty. This is especially worrying because changes to the state pension age mean that these people still have some time to wait before they receive their state pension.

Even when this group reach state pension age, they are still likely to face higher levels of poverty, due to growing numbers privately renting their homes, more people living with major illnesses, and many struggling to stay in or return to work in their 50s and 60s – all of which are explored in more detail below. They are also likely to be more at risk of poverty than younger generations as they have only had a limited number of years to build up workplace pensions through auto-enrolment¹³.

Added to this, the cost-of-living crisis is significantly compounding the financial vulnerability¹⁴ of the poorest in society. A large proportion have cut back, but the least well-off have been hardest hit. For example, almost nine in ten people aged 50-69 who are in serious financial difficulties have avoided turning on the heating. Two-thirds have taken fewer baths or showers. And a similar proportion haven’t seen family and friends as often.

The current crisis is also likely to exacerbate the pension gap by affecting younger individuals’ ability to save into a pension. This will have repercussions for their financial wellbeing as pensioners and will lead to greater financial inequalities over the long-term.

Percentage of households headed by someone aged 50 to 69 who have taken the actions shown because of concerns about cost, by financial wellbeing category, UK, April to May 2023



People aged 60-64 experience the highest poverty rates of any adults – 1 in 4 live in poverty



Wealth and health

There are shocking health inequalities relating to our ethnicity, our wealth and where we live.

Our analysis of self-reported health data from Census 2021 reveals huge health inequalities by wealth, ethnicity and geography.

The best health is seen in the South East¹⁵ and the worst in the North East. But there are huge variations even within the same city. In London, for example, rates of bad or very bad health among people aged 65 and over range from just 7% in the City of London to 35% in the neighbouring borough of Tower Hamlets – a difference of 28 percentage points.

Much health inequality is linked to ethnicity and levels of wealth. Differences between ethnic groups¹⁶ in self-rated health can be seen as early as age 25. And because the negative impact of disadvantage accumulates with age, these disparities become larger as people grow older. For example, the proportion of Bangladeshi women aged 50-64 who report being in poor health (22%) is the same as for White British women aged 85 and over – a gap of 30 to 35 years.

The picture is similar for disability, with levels of disability among people in their 50s in the poorest areas¹⁷ of the country similar to those of people in their early 80s in the most well-off parts.

Not only are the poorest people the most likely to have a disability, they are also more likely to experience wider challenges such as living in a poor-quality home. This means their disability will often have a more profound effect on their daily lives. The percentage of Disabled people aged 50-69 who are limited a lot by their disability is twice as high in the poorest areas¹⁸ as in the most well-off areas. The poorest are also twice as likely to need help with daily activities because of their disability, and the least likely to receive it.

“The cost of living has affected us in so many ways, that is, we can no longer afford a balanced diet.... We’re not managing at all. We’ve already reduced our budget sticking to the very basic: rice, to keep us going. We feel this difference in our bodies more than anywhere else. People will notice we’re no longer as healthy as we used to be.”

73 year old Black African man





Homes

Millions of older people are living in homes that pose a serious threat to their health and wellbeing.

The social determinants of health – non-medical factors that influence health outcomes – are well documented. But despite the strong association with health and wellbeing, the condition of our homes is largely absent from policy-making on housing or health.

For many older people, especially those already in bad health, the combination of poverty, rising energy prices and living in a poor-quality home creates a fine line between life and death.

Overall, half of the 3.5 million non-decent homes in England¹⁹ – those that fail to meet basic decency criteria as defined by the government – are headed by someone aged 55 and over (49%). A third are headed by someone aged 65 and over.

Most (76%) of the unsafe homes headed by someone aged 55 and over are owner-occupied – that is, approximately 1.3 million. Despite owning their home, many older people are unable to make vital repairs as they have low incomes and little to no savings.



49%

of non-decent homes are headed by someone aged 55 and over

“In the winter, when it was extremely cold, my husband said don’t put the heating on and that was a shock. It was like ice cold in the house....and it was like you’d frozen on one place on the sofa and you don’t feel like doing anything. I told my husband, I said it, I can’t deal with that, I can’t live without heating.”

59 year old Pakistani woman

Although smaller in overall numbers, the private rented sector has the highest proportion of non-decent homes. This means older private renters are likely to live in poor-quality homes, often at the mercy of an underregulated rental sector and without the ability to repair their homes or find more suitable accommodation.

While most people aged 50 and over live in owner-occupied homes²⁰ (16 million people), the number of older private renters is at an all-time high. The number of people aged 50 and over who privately rent their homes has doubled in the past 20 years – from one to two million.

This is crucial, as those who rent privately are much more likely to live in poverty and struggle with debt and money worries. In fact, almost 40% of pension-age people living in the private rented sector are living in relative poverty²¹.

This is compounded by the fact that many of these people will be on fixed low incomes, unable to pay rent hikes, and unlikely to be in a position to negotiate the changes to their homes that they need to live safely and comfortably.

Once again, there are stark disparities between ethnic groups. People aged 50 and over from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be private renters²² than the national average. And while only 3.5% of White British people aged 50 and over are living somewhere that’s overcrowded, has no central heating or is in shared accommodation²³, this is the case for 36% of Bangladeshi, 29% of Black African and 27% of Pakistani people in this age group.

57% of White British people and

50% of Indian

people aged 50 and over own their own home outright compared with

8% of Black African

and

19% of Bangladeshi

people in this age group.



Work

Older workers are being shut out of the labour market, driving pensioner poverty and financial insecurity in old age.

The workplace does not look the same as it did 20 years ago – and neither does the workforce. Today, there are almost 11 million workers aged 50 and over²⁴ in the UK. That's a third of all workers and four million more than 20 years ago.

However, progress on increasing employment rates for older age groups, which were steadily on the rise in the two decades before the pandemic, has now stalled. Despite a complete recovery in employment rates for those aged 35-49, recovery for 50-64 year olds has been slower and the employment rate is still below its pre-pandemic peak.

The stalling of employment rates for people aged 50 and over is partly the result of the pronounced increase in the number who have become economically inactive due to long-term sickness since the pandemic. Those with higher incomes are much more likely to leave paid work early by choice; those on lower incomes are more often forced to leave due to health issues.

But this is not the whole picture. Many of those who fall out of the labour market in their 50s and 60s would like to return, but struggle to do so because of caring responsibilities, a lack of flexibility in the workplace, age discrimination in hiring practices, and employment support services that do not meet their needs.

There are
11 million
workers aged 50 and over
4 million
more than 20 years ago

This risks pushing people into poverty, both during their working lives and in retirement, as they are unable to build up financial resources and save into a workplace pension. It also undermines the government's ambitions to extend working lives, raise the state pension age, grow the economy and boost productivity. None of this will be possible until the labour market works for older workers.

There's a 15 percentage point gap²⁵ between the employment rate of 35-49 year olds (86%) and 50-64 year olds (71%). But, due to factors including discrimination and poor health, there is also significant variation in employment rate by ethnic group²⁶. Among men aged 50-64, the ethnic groups with the lowest employment rates are Bangladeshi (65%) and Black Caribbean (68%), while the lowest rates for women are seen in Pakistani (29%) and Bangladeshi (20%) ethnic groups.

There's a
15
percentage point
gap between the
employment rate of 35-
49 year olds and 50-64
year olds.

“When you're working, but on a low income, no one is helping you. Sometimes it's so hard and you want to cry out in despair, as people don't understand.”

57 year old Black British woman





Attitudes to ageing

Older people's value and contributions to society are undermined by ageism.

People aged 50 and over are most likely to volunteer, vote and provide unpaid care, alongside the contributions they make to the economy through working and as consumers.

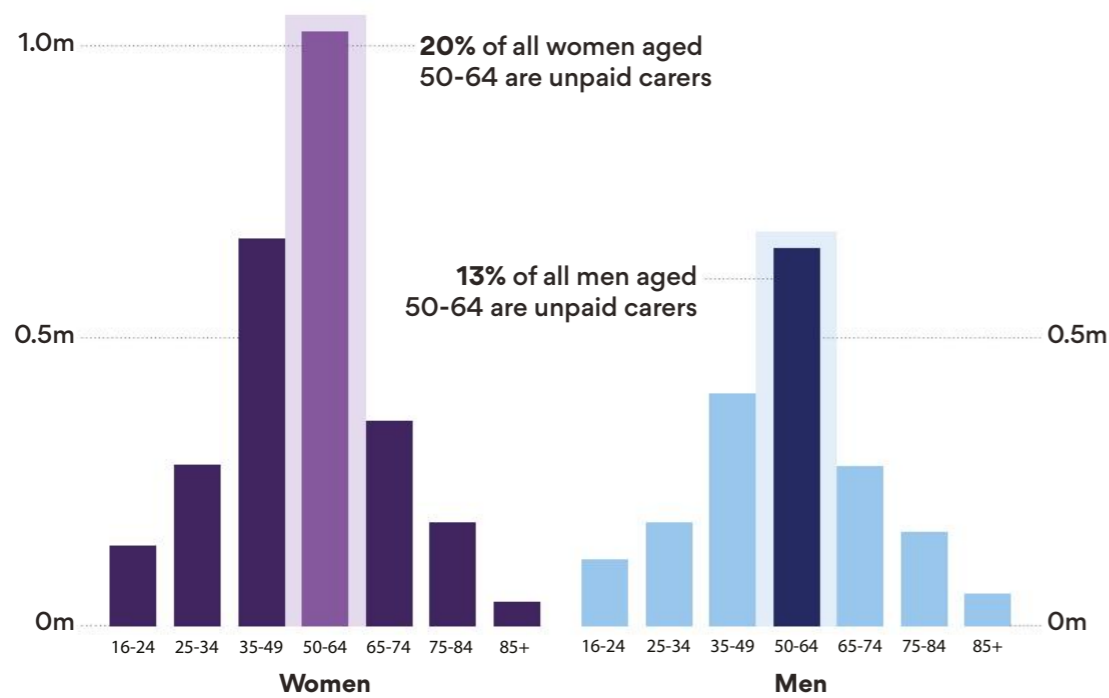
Despite this, negative attitudes towards older people remain rife in the UK. One in three people has experienced ageism²⁷ and the UK media has been found to be the most ageist²⁸ of the 20 English-speaking countries analysed.

Older people contribute hugely to society, in many different ways. People aged 50 and over, and particularly those aged 65-74, are the most likely to volunteer²⁹, whether formally or informally. Almost three million people aged 50 and over are unpaid carers³⁰, with women in their 50s most likely to be providing unpaid care.

Older people who already face challenges because they live in poorer areas, or are disabled, are more likely to be unpaid carers. And older women from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds³¹ – the ethnic groups that report the worst health – are particularly likely to provide high levels of unpaid care.

Older people spend more time than other age groups in their immediate neighbourhoods. As we age, we need age-friendly environments – including accessible public spaces and transport – that enable us to remain active and maintain connections.

Number of unpaid carers aged 50 and over



Almost 3 million people aged 50 and over are unpaid carers

20%

of all women aged 50-64 are unpaid carers

While the digital world opens up new connections and possibilities for many, this is not the case for all. One in three people aged 65 and over³² either do not have, cannot afford, or do not use the internet at home, and many of these people are disabled, poorer or from minority ethnic backgrounds. Where possible, offline services need to be preserved – not just because many older and Disabled people face barriers to using digital services – but because they also maintain the human connection we all need.





What the government needs to do

1. Establish a Commissioner for Older People and Ageing to give a voice to the groups and issues currently marginalised, and ensure that policymaking across government considers the long-term needs of our ageing population.

2. Deliver an ageing society strategy that sets out a clear plan to reduce inequality in later life.

3. Tackle growing ethnic inequalities through a new race equality strategy that complements work on an ageing population with plans to reduce ethnic inequalities across the life course.



Financial Security:

- 4. Pause proposals to raise the state pension age** until there is a plan in place to ensure that any changes do not push significant numbers of people into poverty. For this to be the case, it must be matched with a considerable improvement in access to work for people in their 60s.
- 5. Increase the uptake of Pension Credit** and ensure the poorest pensioners are not missing out on benefits they're entitled to.



Health and wellbeing:

- 6. Reduce the huge gap in healthy life expectancy** through a Bill of Health. This should require building a healthier nation to be a priority across all policy areas and support the building blocks of health, like stable work and safe homes.
- 7. Invest in local public health services** that tackle health inequalities and reduce costs and pressures on the NHS. Reverse cuts that have seen the public health grant fall by 26% over the past eight years.



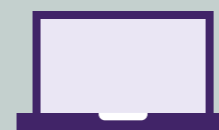
Homes:

- 8. Develop a national plan to fix cold and dangerous homes** that are damaging people's health.
- 9. Make all new homes accessible** so that Disabled and older people can live in a home that enables them to live independently and with dignity.



Communities:

- 13. Create local communities where people can age well** by empowering local government to respond to demographic change. Ensure that every local authority has the resources it needs to become an Age-friendly Community, and can appoint an elected councillor for ageing and older people.



Work:

- 10. Help older workers return to employment and boost labour supply** through a programme of employment support targeted at people aged 50 and over.
- 11. Enable people to plan for later life** through mid-life reviews that encourage them to evaluate their job, health and wealth in their mid-40s to 50s whether they are currently in work or not.
- 12. Support carers to stay in work** by giving them the legal right to at least ten days of paid carer's leave per year, and up to six months of unpaid carer's leave.



Data:

- 14. Close the ethnicity data gap** and develop data that improves our understanding of ethnic inequalities. Make ethnicity data reporting mandatory in all official and statutory statistics and data monitoring. Ensure the experiences of individual communities are made visible by reporting on specific ethnic groups rather than broad categories like BAME.



Acknowledgements



We would like to thank the following people and organisations for their contribution to this report:

- Jabeer Butt from Race Equality Foundation for his advice and support in the production of our analysis and report
- Members of the Centre for Ageing Better's Experts by Experience network for sharing their insights and experiences
- Staff and community members at Third Age Partnership in Camden, and Wai Yin Society in Manchester for their support in organising, hosting and participating in community conversations
- The Manchester BME Network and University of Manchester (MUARG) for a joint workshop exploring the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on older Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in Greater Manchester, and to all attendees who shared their insights, experiences and ideas
- Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group (MUARG), University of Manchester, for access to and use of qualitative data from their cost-of-living crisis research
- abrnn Financial Fairness Trust for permission to use data from the 8th wave of their Financial Fairness Tracker (see Technical Report for full reference)
- The team at the University of Bristol (Jamie Evans, Sharon Collard and David Collings) who conduct the analysis of the Financial Fairness Tracker data for the abrnn Financial Fairness Trust, for sharing the data for further analysis and for their advice as to its presentation
- The National Centre for Social Research for their insight and direction related to additional data analyses that they conducted of publicly available data sets and data from the Financial Fairness Tracker.



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Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.

Let's make ageing better.

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The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone, including challenging ageism and building an Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes.

Access the State of Ageing report here:



Report on	Update on Concept for lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera
Date of Meeting	10th January 2023
Reporting Officer	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
Contact Officer	John Howard, Open Spaces & Outdoor Recreation Development Manager

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 note the report provided by Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI) on a concept for lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera that focuses on the potential development of lands between Mullagh Road / Tobermore Road as an outdoor recreational green space for the Maghera area.
2.0	Background
2.1	In April 2021, Members approved a proposal to appoint a suitable qualified consultancy team to carry out a feasibility study into the development of lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera. (minute reference: D065/21)
2.2	In October 2021, Members were made aware that following a procurement process, ORNI were appointed to carry out a feasibility study into the development of lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera (minute reference: D187/21) with a further update report presented to Development Committee in February 2022 (minute reference: D032/22).
3.0	Main Report

3.1	<p>The report enclosed within Appendix A provides an overview of the process including consultation, desk based research, options refinement and draws on expert knowledge from similar projects and studies. Based on this, recommendations included within the report include proposals for works, estimated costs and potential next steps to develop the lands at Mullagh Road to provide a community recreation and biodiversity resource.</p>
3.2	<p>Members will be aware that these high level concepts were put forward as part of an aspirational funding application and during 2023, Council were informed that their application to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) was successful in relation to the Maghera Regeneration Project.</p> <p>https://www.midulstercouncil.org/business/investment-and-regeneration/urban-regeneration/maghera-regeneration-project</p>
3.3	<p>The proposals within the enclosed report have therefore been progressed to a high-level concept design stage only and serve mainly to provide background context to inform future decision making regarding the approach to any proposed development of the site. Concept design is the broad outline of initial ideas without any technical detail or specifications – this process usually follows at detailed design stage, once feasibility options have been explored in line with available resourcing and budgets to inform the eventual capital development.</p>
	<p>As such, in relation to the recreational element, there is further work, assessments and technical surveys to be undertaken before any eventual project can be delivered on the ground. This may mean certain elements within the enclosed report may be amended in line with available resourcing and budgets to inform the eventual project delivery approach.</p>
3.4	<p>As approved via the Environment Committee in September 2023, to meet the funding offer objectives, an Integrated Consultancy Team (ICT) were appointed and their main brief is to further develop the overall scheme detail including site surveys, to carry out further stakeholder engagements, to seek the necessary statutory approvals and help get an Integrated Supply Team (IST) to deliver the scheme and adhere to the March 2025 funding deadline.</p>
3.5	<p>An ICT project programme has been produced by Graham Construction, which includes the completion of a draft feasibility study to RIBA Stage 2 for the development of lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera. The recommendations from this will be consulted on with key stakeholders. It is planned that the following consultation sessions will be held:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week commencing 29th Jan 2023 – a number of sessions will be held with the following groupings being invited to attend at a specific date/time - statutory and non-statutory stakeholder groups, DEA Members, town forum and planning department. • Week commencing 29th Jan 2023 – in person public consultation session (open to all) <p>Dates/times may be subject to change – invites/advertisements will be published in due course.</p>
3.6	<p>As the ICT team progress with the feasibility assessment and project design, matters relating to this project including any approvals required will be reported via future Environment Committees.</p>

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: Costs reported previously and within existing capital programme budget allocations.
	Human: Existing staff resources will work alongside appointed consultancy team.
	Risk Management: Considered in conjunction with Council policies and procedures. Non-delivery of any element of the project will impact the grant offer. Through robust project planning and adequate resources Council will help mitigate financial and reputational risks associated with failure to deliver or loss of funding.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: Will be developed as part of the project and in conjunction with Council policies and procedures.
	Rural Needs Implications: Will be developed as part of the project and in conjunction with Council policies and procedures.
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the contents of this report.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix A: Lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera

Lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera - MASTERPLAN

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI on behalf of

Mid Ulster District Council



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This study provides an overview of the process behind the Masterplan, including consultation, desk-based research, options refinement and draws on expert knowledge from similar projects and studies. Based on this, recommendations included works required, estimated costs, next steps and a timeframe to develop the lands at Mullagh Road to provide a community recreation and biodiversity resource.

As part of Council's Maghera, 2017 – 2030, A Physical Development Framework and Action Plan - lack of public, green and play space were identified as constraints as part of the consultation process for the plan. The creation of outdoor recreation space was identified as a theme for potential development, and initiatives for this included:

- Developing walking / cycle trail, and
- Potential development of Walled Garden, Rectory site and environs as recreation / amenity hub

Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) has recently acquired circa 37 acres of lands between the Mullagh Road / Tobermore Road for economic and recreational development purposes. A significant portion of the land is identified for the provision of recreational green space, to include habitat creation for biodiversity, natural play and a network of community trails, in response to the need for additional outdoor recreational facilities in the Maghera area.

The Site

The lands at Mullagh Road are located north of the A6 Glenshane Road and west of the Mullagh Road, Maghera. The site is currently used for pastoral farming. Within the site are four land parcels separated by field boundaries, as well as several water courses, namely the Largantogher Burn, Milltown Burn, Black Burn and the Mullagh River (or Back Burn). Two small parcels of semi-mature woodland are also present on site.

The lands at Mullagh Road are owned by MUDC and are for consideration within this Masterplan. See Figure 1 for site boundary. There is currently no formal or informal recreation taking place on site. There are currently three access points to the site for agricultural purposes only.

Pedestrian access is currently not permitted. The site does not have a suitable and accessible car park.

The vast majority of the study area is within the flood plain. PPS15 'Planning and Flood Risk' states that 'Floodplains and other land important for flood storage, adjacent to settlements can often form important strategic networks of green spaces commonly referred to as green infrastructure. These areas are often important in terms of **biodiversity**, providing meadowlands and wildlife corridors. They can also be used for **leisure and recreational purposes**. Therefore, the safeguarding of these areas not only offers economic benefits by avoiding flood risk but also delivers benefits in terms of health, social wellbeing and the environment'.

The Need for Development

In summary, the following key learnings can be taken from the public engagement process:

- **Community Support** – There is strong support for the proposal to develop a green space on the lands at Mullagh Road. However, there is a portion of the community which has collaborated under the banner of Maghera Park Action Group who have a deep connection with the site of the Former Maghera High School and therefore are unlikely to support proposals for the lands Mullagh Road. However, Council should continue to engage with this group to ensure they have up to date information of proposals.
- The site should offer the opportunity to exercise, relax and unwind and spend time in nature. Therefore a **balance between recreation and nature connection is important**.
- **A family offering should be incorporated** – particularly for those with pre-primary and primary aged children
- **An offering for those with reduced / limited mobility is important**
- **Increased car parking capacity is essential**
- **Linkages to other parts of Maghera are important**
- **The key components identified by the public engagement process should be considered where appropriate** – see Section 3.3.2

Development proposals

A unique set of considerations and challenges presented themselves for the lands at Mullagh Road. These were carefully considered individually and in combination, in order to gain an understanding of the opportunities present on site. Options were then considered that would allow the site to be maximized in terms of its potential as a community biodiversity and recreation resource. One of the key considerations within the Masterplan, is that the majority of the site sits within a floodplain, and only certain kinds of development are permitted within this landscape e.g. for the purposes of leisure

and recreation, which are sympathetic to the functions and conditions of a flood plain. Options considered included do nothing, partial development and full development (see Table 10).

Biodiversity

With regards to what could be realized on site in terms of a biodiversity resource, additional expert knowledge was sought from relevant NGOs. RSPB NI advised that the habitats present on site could be restored to natural habitats that would typically be found in an unaltered river floodplain. Restoration of the site could be achieved by amending elements of its hydrology by damming drainage channels and using earthworks to create a series of pool complexes, resulting in water being retained on site and being allowed to seasonally fluctuate. These actions will create a biodiverse mosaic of habitats such as pools, wet grassland and wet woodland. Hydrological and ecological surveys (beyond the brief of this project) are required to confirm the detail of the biodiversity proposals.

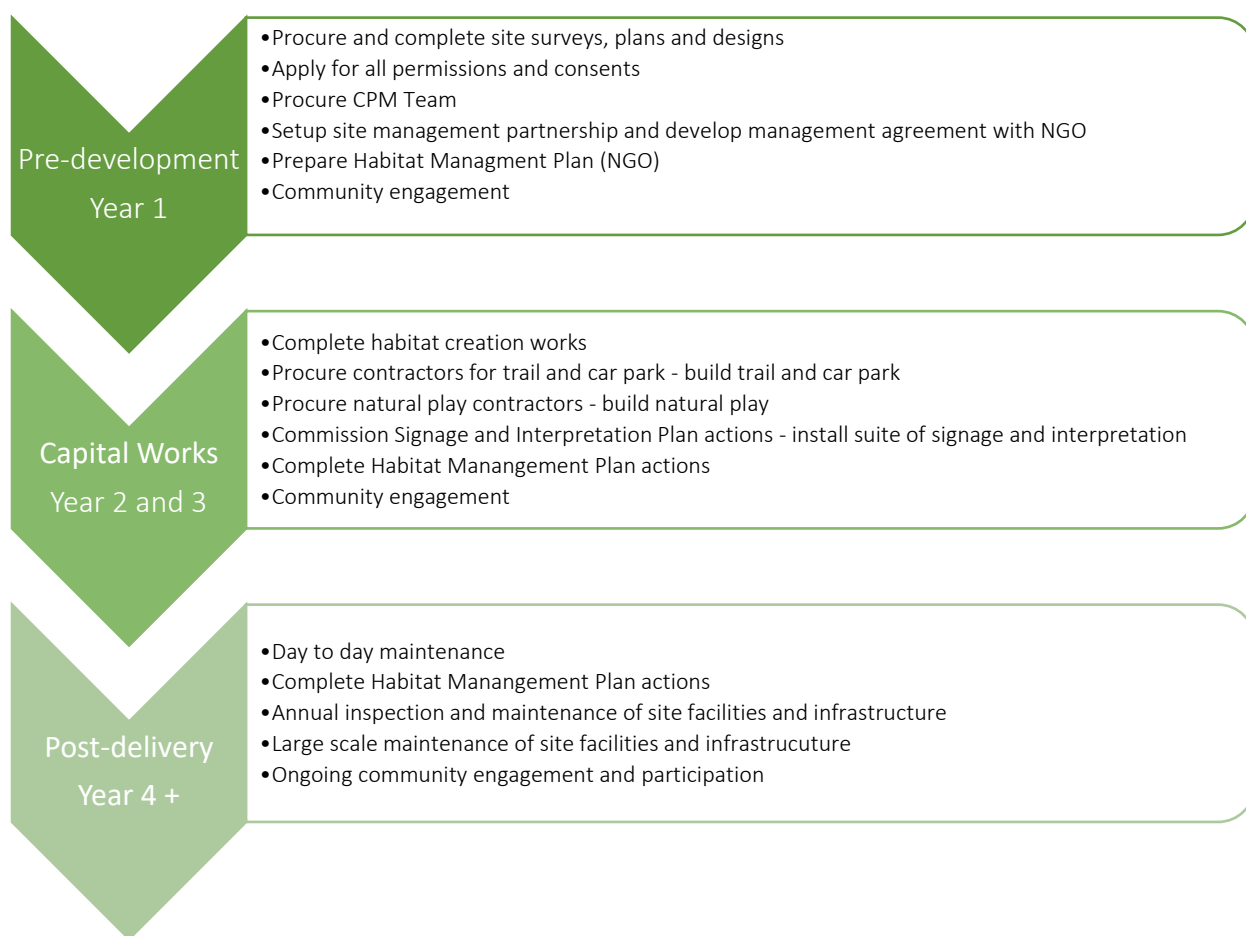
Recreation

In terms of the recreation potential of the site, there is an opportunity to work with the natural functions of the site to provide a valuable community recreational resource. Additional consideration has been given to ensure that all proposed options are suited to being located within a flood plain and hence are likely to be seasonally inundated. Appropriate development and construction techniques are considered to ensure the lifespan of the recreational infrastructure, in this regard. Key elements that are recommended for the site include an accessible path network, suitable play and education facilities, development of linkages to the site, additional car parking infrastructure and a suite of bespoke signage and interpretation.

Summary

Consideration of all options suitable for the lands at Mullagh Road, resulted in proposed biodiversity and recreation resource in the form of 'Maghera Wetland Park'. It will facilitate access to nature and provide recreation infrastructure to support the physical health and mental wellbeing of the local community.

Development proposals reflects the assessment of need and high-level technical feasibility. The pre-development phase is proposed to start in year 1 and habitat creation and visitor infrastructure delivered across year 2 and 3. The recommendations for full development are shown in Figure 1 and are summarised as follows:



Costs

An overview of the indicative costs required to deliver the recommendations put forward in the Masterplan is presented below. Also included are costings for partial development of the site, but the recommendation of the Masterplan is for the full development option. For a detailed breakdown of costings, see Table 10. For annual post-development revenue costs, see Table 11.

Element	Development Options	
	Partial Development	Full Development
Pre-development		
Consultancy services	£87,670	£112,610
Capital Works		
Preliminaries	£134,174	£179,024
Path network	£199,000	£319,000
Access	£340,995	£366,995
Natural Play	£200,000	£300,000
Habitat Creation	£141,000	£149,000
Additional facilities	£3,000	£27,000

Signage	£10,500	£31,500
Subtotal	£1,028,669	£1,372,519
Total (Pre-development + Capital)	£1,116,339	£1,485,129
Contingency (15%)	£167,451	£222,769
Inflation to Q1 2024 (8.6%)	£110,406	£146,879
Total Cost	£1,394,196	£1,854,778

Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan

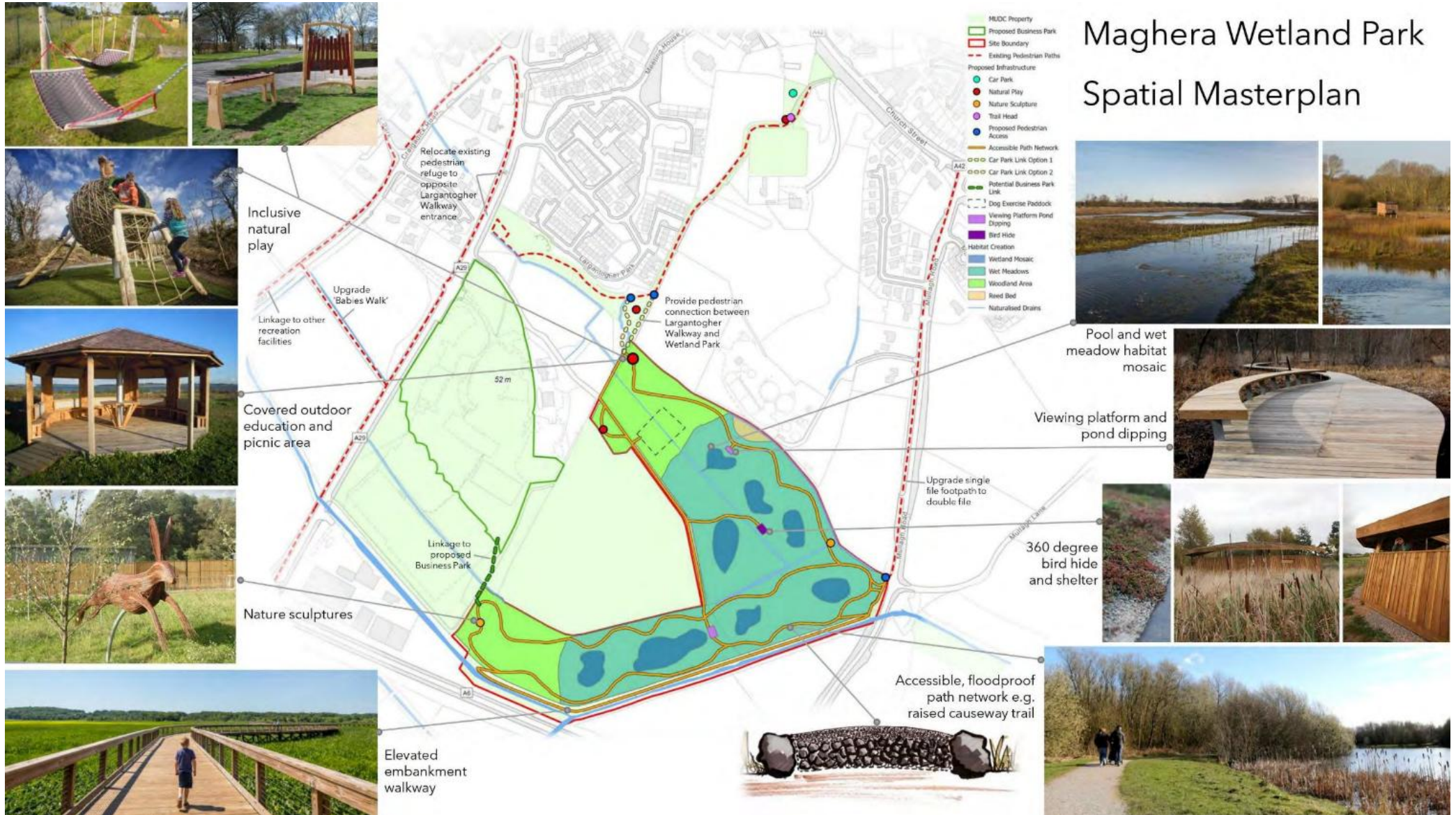


Figure 1 Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan

CAVEATS

The Masterplan proposals have been progressed to a high-level concept design stage only, in order to inform future decision making regarding the approach to development of the site.

Concept design is the broad outline of initial ideas without any technical detail or specifications – this follows at detailed design stage, once Council has decided which elements of the project to take forward for capital development. As such there is further work, assessments and surveys to be undertaken before any recommended projects can be delivered on the ground.

Two versions of the site boundary have been considered in this Masterplan. During the desk-based research and local community engagement stages of the plan, a larger site boundary (including a link to the Tobermore Road and an additional field) were included. Due to changes in MUDC's requirements, this site boundary was amended to remove these elements. The recommendations for the Masterplan are thus based on the amended site boundary. See Figure 3 for detail.

PART 1//

1 INTRODUCTION

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) was appointed by Mid Ulster District Council (hereafter referred to as 'Council' or MUDC) to complete a Masterplan for the development of lands adjacent to Mullagh Road, Maghera. The aim was to -

'Complete a Masterplan that will provide an indication of the proposed works required to fully develop the aforementioned lands as a local outdoor environmental resource and recreational hub. This will be a site developed primarily for the local community to include a range of outdoor recreation and environmental products, accompanied by appropriate visitor servicing'.

This Masterplan provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to develop the Lands at Mullagh Road as an environmental and recreational resource.

1.1 Scope of study

To achieve this aim, the study was divided into two stages –

STAGE ONE - OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- Carry out a desktop review of existing strategies applicable to the region
- Consult with agencies/stakeholders, local community, as well as staff and Councillors to ensure incorporation of ideas and feedback into the scoping study
- SWOT Analysis
- Identify sustainable land management and environmental opportunities best suited to the site
- Explore a sustainable balance between the economic, environmental and social functions of the site
- Current infrastructure and condition audit. This will include detailed mapping using GIS.
- Explore the opportunity for linkages and routes within and external to the site. Explore how the site offers access to the town, local landscapes and other neighbouring visitor attractions
- Identify any potential barriers to development
- Determine what is currently available within the wider area for outdoor recreation, to include visitor data, and explore what capacity there is within the site to accommodate further outdoor recreation and educational activities
- Present options paper for approval

STAGE TWO - DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- Identify phased, viable and sustainable recreational, educational and social activities which could be delivered within the scope of the Development Plan. Proposals should aim to enhance user/visitor experience, whilst supporting biodiversity and local heritage
- Explore potential local business/social economy options to use the site
- Recommendation and Actions
- Detailed Development Plan costs and profiled timetable of expenditure
- Identify suitable funding streams and timetables

1.2 Methodology

The study was completed by ORNI using the research method outlined in Fig.1 and detailed in APPENDIX A.

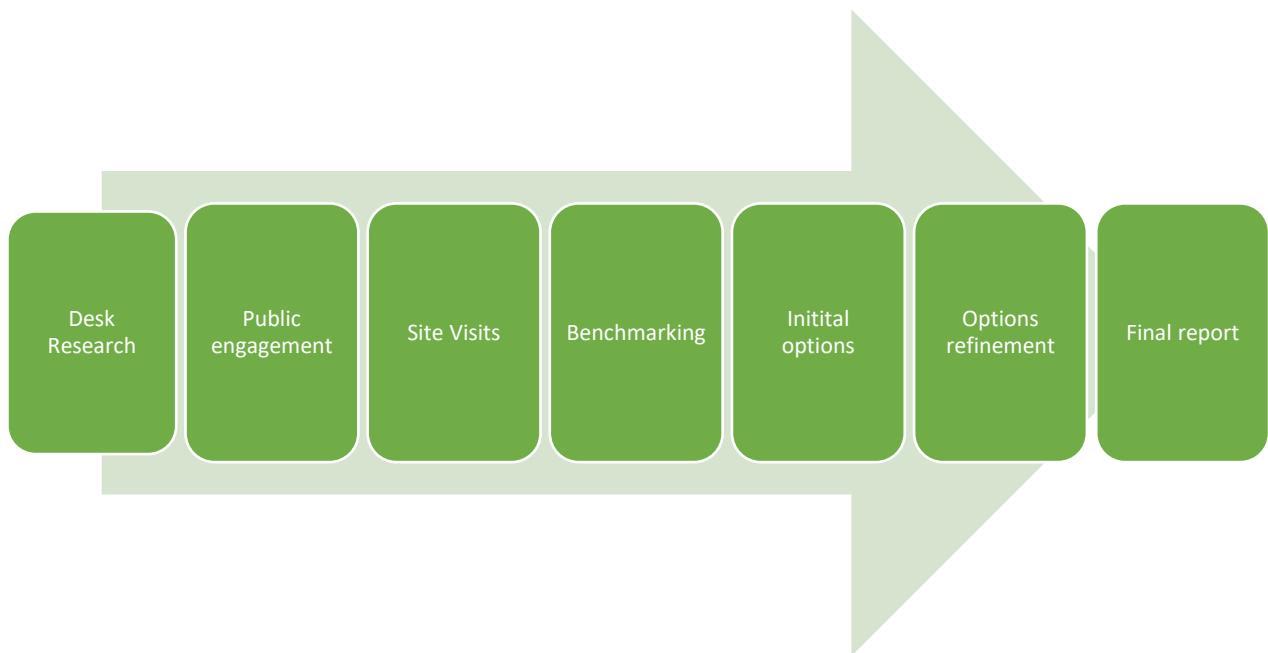


Figure 2 Overview of Methodology Employed

2 The Site

The lands at Mullagh Road are located north of the A6 Glenshane Road and west of the Mullagh Road, Maghera. Within the site are four land parcels separated by field boundaries. Also within the site are several water courses, namely the Largantogher Burn, Milltown Burn, Black Burn and the Mullagh River (or Back Burn). See Section 4.4 for further detail. Two small parcels of semi-mature woodland are also present on site.

2.1 Landownership

The boundary of the study area, plus known landownership of neighbouring and adjoining sites can be seen in Figure 3. All lands shown within the red dashed line, are owned by MUDC and are considered within this Masterplan. The solid red line shows the boundary of the site that was used during the desk research and local community engagement stages of the plan, but which was subsequently amended due to a change in MUDC's requirements. Other relevant lands owned by the Council are also shown.

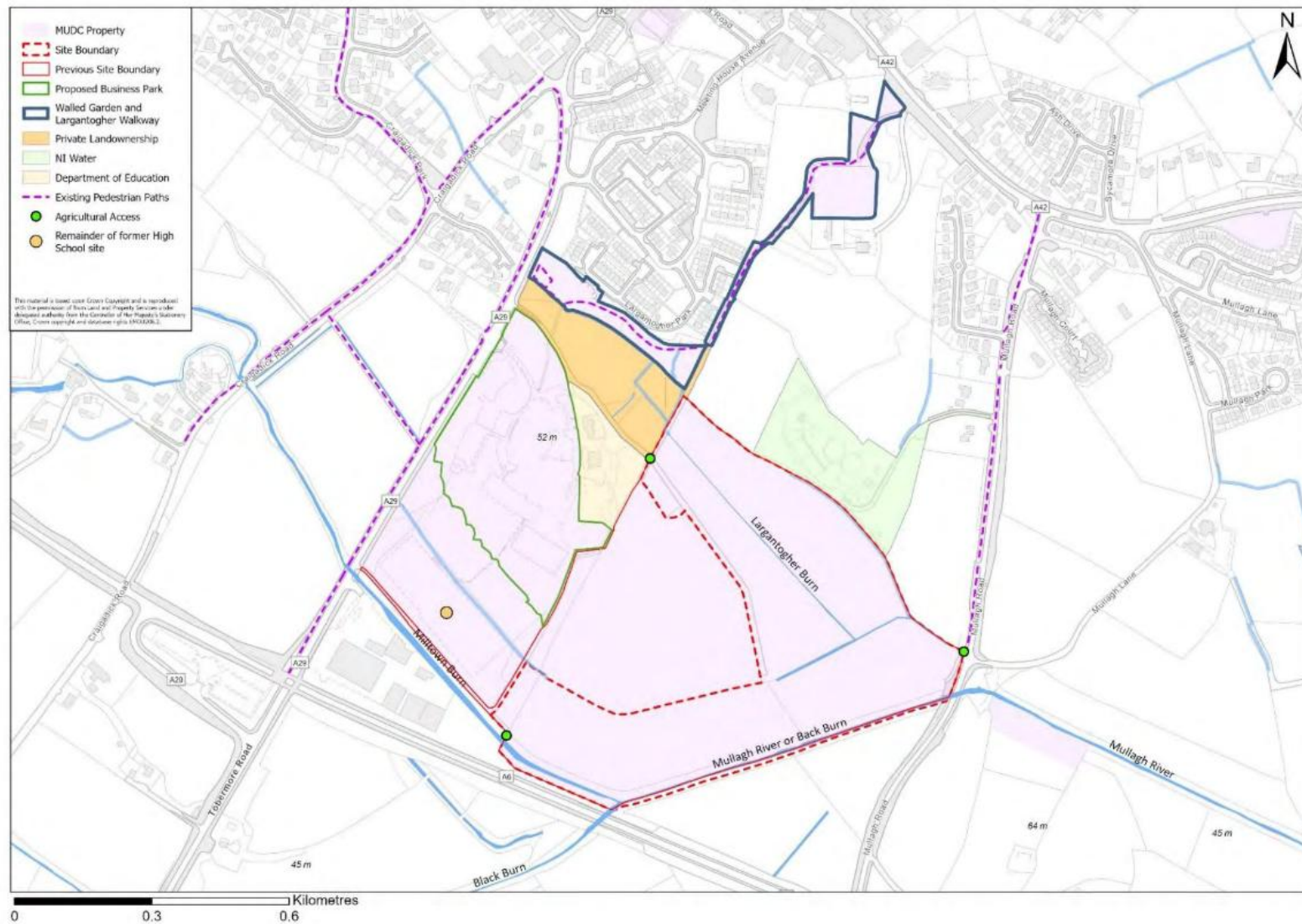


Figure 3 Study area and neighbouring landownership

2.2 Vehicular Access

There is a short access laneway at the east of the site, opposite the entrance to Mullagh Lane and the Council owned Mullagh car park and picnic site. This is used by agricultural vehicles to access the site from the east. This is considered within the study as a potential access point for visitors to the site.



Figure 4 Access point at the east of the site from the Mullagh Road

Two additional laneways provide access to the site; however, Council has advised these are not to be considered as potential access options. These are:

- i. A gravel surfaced laneway to the west of the site that links the site to the A29 Tobermore Road. This laneway is used by and only suitable for off road/ agricultural vehicles to access the pastoral farmland within the site.
- ii. A gravel surfaced laneway to the west of the site that is used to provide access from the A29 Tobermore Road to a Department of Education storage facility. This access point is also used for agricultural vehicle access via a laneway that travels north to south through the site.



Figure 5 Access laneways i and ii leading from Tobermore Road

2.3 Pedestrian Access and Usage

There is no formal pedestrian access to the site, therefore any access is currently informal in nature and typically gained via the aforementioned vehicular access points.

Figure 6 shows pedestrian usage of roads and paths within the vicinity of the site. Figure 6 shows this visually, via Strava heat maps¹. It should be noted that the data presented is for pedestrian usage only i.e. including running and walking.

Level of pedestrian usage	Roads and paths
High	Tobermore Road Largantogher Walkway
Medium	Mullagh Road Lower Sports Pitch (Former Maghera High School Site)
Low	Northern end of Former Maghera High School Site Babies Walk

Table 1 Existing paths and level of usage

There is pedestrian usage on all sides of the proposed site and therefore the provision of a facility for off-road walking would provide a more positive user experience and reduce the interaction between pedestrians and vehicles.

¹ Visual representation of routes logged by Strava users, via GPS. Does not represent users who have not logged their route using this platform.



Figure 6 Strava heat map showing pedestrian routes in the locality of the site²

2.4 Linkages

The existing pedestrian paths in Maghera in relation to the site are as follows (see Figure 3):

- The A29 Tobermore Road which has a footpath on both sides of the road when traveling south, as far as the entrance to the former Maghera High School site. The footpath then continues south on the western side of the road.
- A footpath on the western side of the Mullagh Road, which ends at the farm access point on the Mullagh Road. This footpath narrows to single file at this point, due to lack of footfall and vegetation encroachment.
- An agricultural access laneway, linking the Craigadick Road to the Tobermore Road, is known locally as 'Babies Walk'. See Figure 7. This route is used informally for walking in the vicinity of

² Purple = high levels of activity, orange = lower levels of activity

the study area and provides linkages to the western side of Maghera between the Tobermore Road and Craigadick Road.



Figure 7 Babies Walk, and car parking and open space at the Walled Garden

2.5 Car parking

The lands at Mullagh road currently do not have a dedicated car park. In the vicinity of the site, there is parking nearby at the Mullagh Road picnic site, at the Craigadick Park and Ride, to the north of the Walled Garden and along Church Road. See Section 4.5.2 for detail.

2.6 Cycle access

There are no National Cycle Network routes near the study area. There is a local on-road cycle route 'The Swatragh Cycle Route' which passes through Maghera town but does not directly pass the study site.

2.7 Other activities

No activities, other than agricultural activity, are known to occur on site.

3 Assessment of need

This section identifies how the site can deliver benefits to local residents and contribute to meeting the objectives of relevant National and Council strategic plans.

3.1 National strategic plans and research

Outdoor recreation plays a vital role in Northern Ireland, bringing benefits to society by contributing to a wide range of areas including improving health and wellbeing, protecting the environment, tackling inequality, and enhancing education and learning. The benefits of outdoor recreation are widely evidenced, this includes Space to Thrive (2020)³, covering 385 studies on the benefits of parks and green spaces for people and communities.

Research carried out by ORNI in 2022, 'People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland (POMNI)'⁴ showed that 70% of adults spent time outdoors at least once a week. Over three quarters of participants (78%) stated that time outdoors was good for wellbeing, making them feel calm and relaxed. The physical health benefits of spending time outdoors were also important with two in three participants taking visits for exercise or fitness reasons (67%).

The availability and quality of local green and blue spaces, paths and trails can also influence frequency of visits to the outdoors with a clear correlation between frequency of time spent outdoors and the perceived proximity of places to visit. While around a quarter of the population (27%) stated that their nearest green or blue space was within a 5-minute walk of their home, a similar percentage stated that their nearest green or blue space would take more than 20 minutes to reach on foot (20%).

Also, while approximately three in four Northern Ireland residents agreed that their local greenspaces were of a high enough standard to want to spend time there (76%), approximately a quarter didn't agree. Satisfaction with local greenspaces and paths and trails tended to be lowest amongst women, unemployed people, disabled people and residents of rural areas.

An overview of relevant national strategies is provided in Table 1.

Strategy/ Policy	Description
NI Draft Programme for Government (2021)	The following outcomes within the Draft PfG relate to outdoor recreation: - We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives;

³<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/insight/research/space-thrive>

⁴<http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POMNI-March-2022-Report.pdf>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment; - Our children and young people have the best start in life; and, - People want to live, work and visit here.
<p>Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland</p>	<p>Outcomes under some of the key Strategic Environmental Outcomes within the strategy include:</p> <p><i>SEO 1 - Excellent air, water, land & neighbourhood quality</i></p> <p>‘An environment with high water environment standards which supports biodiversity and contributes to health and well-being and a living and productive landscape.’</p> <p><i>SEO 2 - Healthy & accessible environment & landscapes everyone can connect with & enjoy</i></p> <p>‘People, places and nature are connected through nature rich routes.’</p> <p>‘Everyone is enabled to connect to the natural environment, each other and their local services through a network of sustainable quality off-road green routes and spaces.’</p> <p>‘Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality outdoor...infrastructure.’</p>
<p>Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework</p>	<p>Improving access to, participation in, and connection to nature is key to achieving the following targets outlined in the Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivering measurable and population-wide improvements in wellbeing, focusing on educational, social and economic benefits associated with the connection between people and their environment; - Developing natural green connectors and corridors across cities, towns and landscapes, connecting people and their environment.
<p>The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland</p>	<p>This Plan has the vision of creating 'a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland.' The aim of this Plan is to create a place where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are increasing opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone in outdoor recreation; - There are accompanying benefits to local communities, especially those who are socially excluded in terms of health, social inclusion, cohesion, equality and economic development; and,

	- People enjoy the outdoors and show a high degree of responsibility for themselves, towards others and towards the environment they are using, and play their part in maintaining, supporting and enhancing our environment and heritage.
Passion, Our Place NIEA Strategic Priorities 2012 - 2022	Under the 'People and Places' priority, a strategic goal of NIEA is to give 'extensive opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the natural and built environment'.

Table 2 Overview of Strategic need in relation to the Mullagh Road site

3.2 Relevant MUDC Plans and Reports

The table below gives an overview of how the development of a recreation resource at Mullagh Road would help deliver relevant MUDC plans and reports.

Plan/ Report	Description
Local Development Plan 2030 – Draft Plan Strategy	Recognises that 'outdoor recreation provides many cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits and contributes positively to physical and mental health and a better quality of life. Everyone should have easy access to open space and the opportunity to participate in sport and outdoor recreational pursuits'.
Our Community Plan 2017 -10 year plan for Mid Ulster	Several of the key outcomes of the Plan reflect those of the PfG such as 'valuing and enhancing our environment' and 'being better enabled to live longer and healthier lives'. Under the Health and Wellbeing Theme, the Plan promises to deliver a recreation and active lifestyle plan which will provide formal and informal recreation and play opportunities.
MUDC Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan (2017)	This Plan recognises, that although the wider MUDC area has a high-quality natural resource base, there is significant opportunity to further increase the outdoor recreation opportunities available. There is an overwhelming demand for a formal network of Community Trails to be developed across the area, and this is a key recommendation of the Plan.
MUDC Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2019 - 2024	Two formal play areas exist in Maghera for the enjoyment of children. There are no formal or informal natural play areas in the town. The Plan noted that the Walled Garden in Maghera should be considered by Council with regards public park and play, to improve Maghera town centre. Recommendations for inclusive play were also included as well as a recommendation for a risk-benefit approach to play, ensuring challenging play opportunities are developed.

MUDC Pitches and Condition Survey and Strategy 2022 (Draft)	<p>Specific to the audit of facilities and clubs of five key sports (football, gaelic games, hockey, lawn bowls and rugby), and is focused on potential developments at Council owned sites that provide for these sports. One key action is that Council should look to offer recreational opportunities and activities to complement sport at their pitch sites.</p>
Maghera, 2017 – 2030, A Physical Development Framework and Action Plan	<p>Lack of public, green and play space were identified as constraints as part of the consultation for the plan. The creation of outdoor recreation space was identified as a theme for potential development, and initiatives for this included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing walking / cycle trail • Potential development of Walled Garden, Rectory site and environs as recreation / amenity hub

Table 3 Overview of MUCD plans and reports in relation to the Mullagh Road site

3.3 Public engagement and Visitor Profile

The brief for the Masterplan is to develop the site for the local community, therefore it was of paramount importance the local community was offered the opportunity to influence the outcome. Local community engagement was undertaken via:

- Online survey - 161 responses
- Online workshop – 25 attendees
- In person workshop – 16 attendees
- One-to-one engagement with 8 local community organisations (see list within APPENDIX B - Consultees)

3.3.1 Maghera Park Action Group

Maghera Park Action Group are ‘...the community's voice to advocate for the reuse of the former Maghera High School site as a public park for all’⁵. The group is opposed to the Council’s proposal to develop the site of the former Maghera High School site as a new mixed-use Enterprise Centre and Business Park. At the time of writing the planning application for this proposal is under consideration by the Department for Infrastructure Strategic Planning Division (DFI Planning).

⁵ <https://magherapark.good.do/>

Whilst it is not within ORNI's brief to consider proposals for the former Maghera High School site, a commitment was made to the group during the local community engagement that their views would be included within the engagement outputs.

It is ORNI's assessment that the group has a strong emotional and legacy connection to the former Maghera High School Site. In summary, this formed by:

- Many of the group either attended the school or utilised the swimming pool or attended summer schemes which ran cross-community participation programmes. It is understood the school was operational from the 1960s until it closed in or around 2009/2010. The Council acquired the site, and the buildings were subsequently demolished.
- It is also understood that between the closure of the school 2009/2010 and 2017, the site was accessible and therefore utilised for informal recreation and community events. However, it was not managed by the Council as a formal recreation site.
- In 2017, the site was fenced off by the Council, however, unpermitted public recreation use continued. Anecdotal evidence indicates the volume of use increased from March 2020 as the community sought local green space during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. This in turn introduced the site to some members of the community for the first time.

In turn, the group is opposed to the proposed development of the lands at Mullagh Road as it cannot replace their deep connection with the former Maghera High School site. The group's key arguments are presented via three strategic emails which were generated from the group's campaign website.⁶

To generate an email the sender was required to enter their name and email address to indicate their support to a pro-forma email. ORNI received 192 emails during the public engagement period. It is noted that many senders generated emails on more than one email topic, therefore 192 reflects the number of emails rather than the number of senders. The detail of each email is provided within Appendix C and excerpts of key points are summarised verbatim in Table 4 below:

⁶ <https://magherapark.good.do/>

Date Received	Submissions	Key Points
18/02/2022 – 02/03/2022	61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mullagh Road Masterplan process is deeply flawed in that it does not include the former Maghera High School Site • The Mullagh Road Masterplan must be weighed against the part it plays in realising the concurrent plan by the same developers (MUDC) to destroy existing mature woodlands and recreational space in the neighbouring former Maghera High School site. • For many Maghera residents it is the view that this master plan is simply another in a long line of attempts by Council to push through the industrialisation of existing open and green space. • It makes no environmental or economic sense to destroy this vital amenity (Former Maghera High School site) to attempt to replicate it anew on agricultural lands bereft of biodiversity. It would take many decades to replace the mature trees and habitats of the High School Site. • The Former Maghera High School site is an important part of our natural heritage and place which holds a deep connection for many in our community.
04/03/2022 – 08/03/2022	27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The allocation of land (lands at Mullagh Road) to economic activity, and what form this may take, has not been clarified. • Funding of the site is likely to require huge financial commitment from the Council. • Early estimates put costs at around a minimum of £2M. Framing the funding as staged and in need of outside funding opportunities shows a lack of firm commitment from the Council. • Our town already has an easily accessed recreational site which has been used for generations of families across the whole town. I believe developing this natural wood/parkland would be a better of ratepayers' money.
08/03/2022 – 11/03/2022	104	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would raise objections to the site being offered as the most suitable site in public ownership for community recreation and educational needs in our town, and in particular, the wetlands proposal as an environmental focus for development. • The site is otherwise devoid of any ecological interest or variation. Proposals to utilise the site's majority floodplain status as a potential wetland area will further limit the opportunities to enhance any woodland environment and places a minimally landscaped area, utilising walkways and boardwalks, • The vision of a wetlands development on the Glenshane/Mullagh lands will be prohibitively expensive and dependent on a consistently reliable source of water • Developing these barren fields at Mullagh to make them suitable for recreation would require an economically unrealistic investment and, critically, time, as identified against the urgent need for green provision in Maghera, which will not be fully realised for several generations at least. • Our children and our children's children will be disadvantaged by the huge environmental loss if this proposal enables the destruction of the woodland legacy that forms our High School site. Any suggestion that like-for-like can be provided on Mullagh is simply providing greenwashing to a proposed ecological and community catastrophe to enable the successful progress of Mid Ulster District Council's industrial planning applications, currently with the Dept. for Infrastructure.

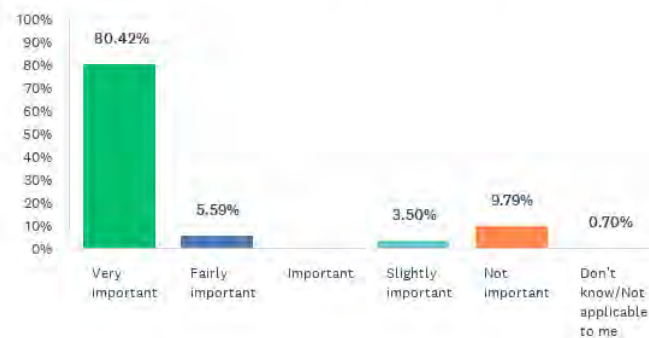
Table 4 Overview of email submissions received

3.3.2 Engagement Findings

Importance to the local community

In contrast to Section 3.3.1, the broader community engagement demonstrated strong support for the proposal. Over 80% of survey respondents stated development of the proposed Mullagh Road Green Space is 'very important' to the local community. This was further supported by one-to-one engagement with a theme amongst respondents being the 'best of both worlds' i.e. the lands at Mullagh Road will provide vital green space for recreation and nature connection whilst the proposed mixed-use Enterprise Centre and Business Park will provide local employment.

Q15 How important do you think the development of the proposed Mullagh Road Green Space is to the local community?



Demographic

The online survey highlighted the local community would primarily visit the site with other members of their family (70%), with their children (56%), by themselves (44%), or with their friends (35%).

The importance of a family offering was also identified through the online survey as respondents indicated they had children in the following age categories - post-primary (24%), primary (32%) or secondary (21%), this was further supported by NISRA statistics outlined in Section 3.3.4.

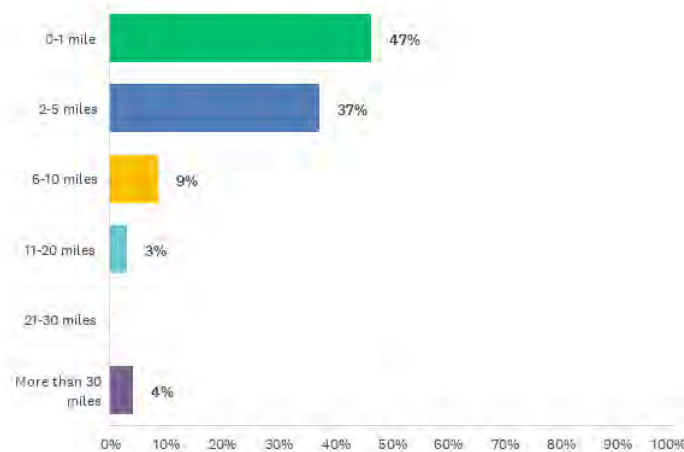
Another key consideration is that 22% of respondents stated that they or someone in their household has reduced / limited mobility.

Access

As the online survey was promoted locally, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents (84%) live within 5 miles of the site. However, the proximity is a useful guide as to how the community will access the site i.e. those living within one mile are more likely to access by foot and those living between 2-5 miles by a vehicle.

This is supported by a separate question in which 48% of respondents stated they were most likely to access the site by foot and 44% by car / van/ minibus.

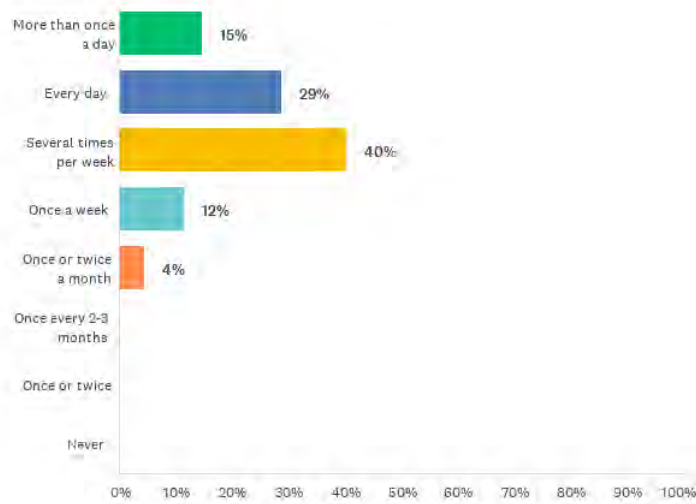
Q8 To the nearest mile, how far from the proposed Mullagh Road Green Space do you live?



Engagement with the outdoors

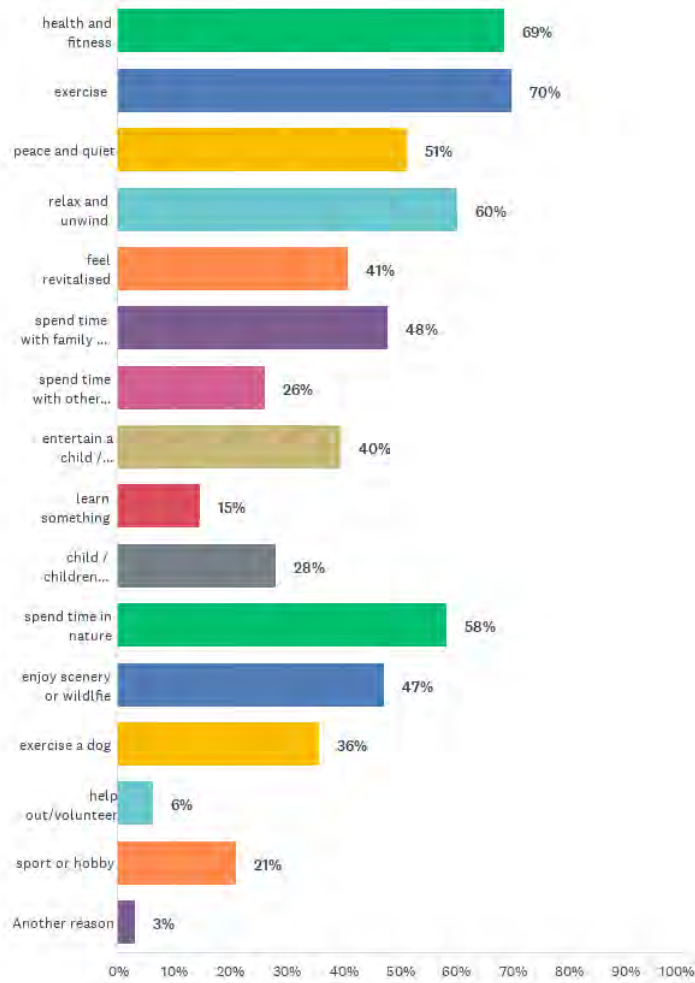
The online survey, supported by face-to-face engagement highlighted a strong connection with the outdoors with 40% of respondents spending leisure time out of doors, away from their home several times a week, a further 29% every day and 15% more than once a day.

Q9 Thinking about the past 12 months, how often, on average, have you spent your leisure time out of doors, away from your home?



When asked for the key reasons to best describe why they made their last visit to the outdoors, the top responses were – exercise (70%), health and fitness (69%), relax and unwind (60%), and to spend time in nature (58%).

Q10 Which of the following reasons, if any, best describes why you made your last visit to the outdoors?



Specific Requirements

The online survey supported by face-to-face engagement provided the opportunity for the local community to highlight the importance of key components to the enhancement of the Mullagh Road Green Space. Table 5 shows the key components that were identified as being ‘absolutely essential’ or ‘very important’ by the online survey.

Components	Absolutely Essential / Very Important
Walking Trails	85 %
Environmental Improvements	85 %
Toilets	70 %
Picnic Facilities	72%
Wildlife Watching	70 %
Formal Car Parking	66 %
Wayfinding	62 %
Formal Play	62 %
Environmental Activities e.g. pond dipping	59%

Table 5 Key components identified via online survey

The survey and face to face engagement also provided the opportunity to suggest other components / ideas. These included:

- **A preference to develop the site of the former Maghera High School.** The argument for this is outlined in Section 3.3.1. Within the online survey this sentiment was made by -
 - 9 of the 142 (6%) respondents to a question asking ‘How important are the following components to the enhancement of the Mullagh Road Green Space?’
 - 32 of the 78 (41%) respondents to a question asking ‘If you have any other comments on the Mullagh Road Green Space, please share them here’
- **Sport Pitches / areas for ball games** – Several sports clubs including GAA and Cricket highlighted the lack of availability to pitches for training and matches. In addition, other requested space for informal ball games.
- **Dog Exercise area** – those engaged stated there was little opportunity to exercise dogs off their leads.
- **Linkages** – those engaged highlighted it was important the site was connected via linkages to other parts of Maghera and other community facilities such as Watty Graham’s GAC
- **Outdoor event space** – those engaged highlighted a desire for a covered space to host small events e.g. community gatherings, group activities, picnics etc.

3.3.3 Public Engagement Key Learnings

In summary, the following key learnings can be taken from the public engagement process:

- **Community Support** – There is strong support for the proposal to develop a green space on the lands at Mullagh Road. However, there is a portion of the community which has collaborated under the banner of Maghera Park Action Group who have a deep connection with the site of the Former Maghera High School and therefore are highly unlikely to ever support proposals for the lands at Mullagh Road. However, Council should continue to engage with this group to ensure they have up to date information of proposals.
- **The site should offer the opportunity** to exercise, relax and unwind and spend time in nature. **Therefore a balance between recreation and nature connection is essential.**
- **A family offering should be incorporated** – particularly for those with pre-primary and primary aged children
- **An offering for those with reduced / limited mobility is essential**
- **Increased car parking capacity is essential**
- **Suitable car parking capacity for user groups such as families and those with limited or reduced mobility, is essential**
- **Linkages to other parts of Maghera are important**
- **The key components within Table 5 should be considered**

3.3.4 Population Statistics

The majority of the urban area of Maghera is located within the Super Output Area (SOA) of 'Maghera', which is ranked the 256th most deprived SOA in NI (in top 28% of most deprived), in terms of living environment domain which identifies the prevalence of shortcomings in the quality of housing, access to suitable housing, and the outdoor physical environment⁷.

The NISRA 2020 mid-year population estimates⁸ provides data for the number of residents within Maghera SOA. For the age group 0-15, 711 residents fell within this category, out of a total number of residents of 2861. This means that 25% of residents in the SOA were aged between 0-15. Compare this with the equivalent data sets for the whole of Northern Ireland, where 21% of residents were aged 0-15, it can be said that Maghera SOA has a higher than average percentage of residents who are children.

⁷ NISRA Statistics 2017

⁸ NISRA 2020 Mid-year Population Estimates

3.4 Summary

It is clear that there are significant benefits to accessing quality green space on a regular basis. Considered and appropriate development at the Mullagh Road site will play a key role in achieving this as well as helping Council address targets and deficiencies presented in its relevant outdoor recreation plans and reports.

4 Considerations and challenges

Proposals must take account considerations challenges that may affect development on site. These are discussed in more detail below.

4.1 Magherafelt Area Plan 2015

Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 was used to lay out the land use proposals that guides development decisions within the District between 2000-2015. Although 7 years out of date, the Plan still takes precedence, given that a new plan has not yet been published. The emerging new Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030 for the District is currently in preparatory stage and holds draft status. This was previously discussed in Section 3.2.

Figure 8 shows the lands at Mullagh Road are within the MA13 Local Landscape policy Area. A small section of the site is also classified as 'a major area of existing open space'.

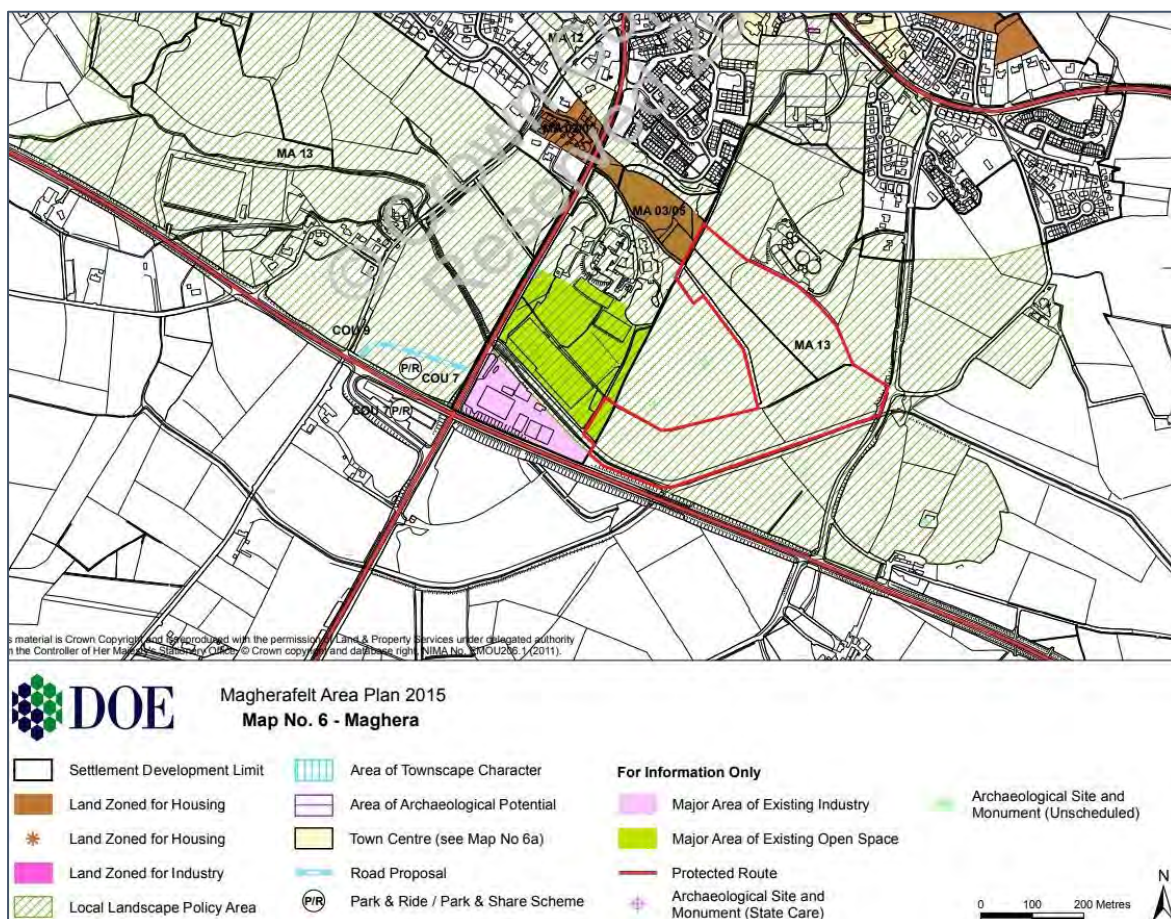


Figure 8 Magherafelt Area Plan 2015, plus available lands (outlined red)

Those features and areas that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of MA 13 are listed below:

- An area of distinctive landscape comprising the slopes to the south of the town and the river floodplain, historically used and transformed in various ways. It combines farmland with mature designed landscaping.
- Attractive green slopes and a significant wetland landscape characterised by streams and associated vegetation define the hilltop setting of the town and provide distinctive views from the A6 Road;
- The stream corridor and associated wetlands are important as a wildlife corridor and for its landscape, wildlife and heritage interest.

There are also two known archaeological records present adjacent to the site to the west, as noted in Section 4.3. The area of land where the current car park is located adjacent to the Walled Garden is located within an 'area of archaeological potential'.

Development in a LLPA is not precluded, provided it does not adversely impact on the intrinsic qualities that the designation is seeking to protect.

4.2 Natural Heritage

The natural heritage of the site can be divided into two areas. The first is an area of wet meadow interspersed with drainage ditches (one of which is identified as the Largantogher Burn) and hedgerows with tall trees. The second area is the channel of the Milltown Burn and where it merges with the Black Burn, the Mullagh River (or Back Burn), plus the adjacent embankments and vegetation corridors.

None of the study area is formally designated for its natural heritage interest. The Back Burn is a tributary of the Moyola River which is hydrologically linked to the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar, ASSI and SPA sites. Sections of woodland around the Walled Garden leading south towards the Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW), are identified as being a Priority Habitat (woodland) and are listed in the NI Ancient Woodland Inventory and classified as long-established woodland.

To date, the study area has not been included within any ecological studies to record the natural heritage interests on site. Lands to the west of the study area, at the former Maghera High School (MHS) site where a separate planning application is currently active, have been included within ecological studies. These studies found badger setts along the boundary between the current study area and the former MHS site. ORNI found badger footprints within the study area during a site walkover. Badgers and their setts are protected under the Wildlife Order (Northern Ireland) 1985 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, and any proposals will

need to be cognisant of the presence of this protected species. Japanese Knotweed is also noted to be present in the northern corner of the site. This species is highly invasive, and it is an offence to plant or encourage it to grow (as would occur if cut and removed from site). It is the responsibility of the landowner to manage the plant, either through biosecurity measures or eradication through specialist treatment or licensed disposal.

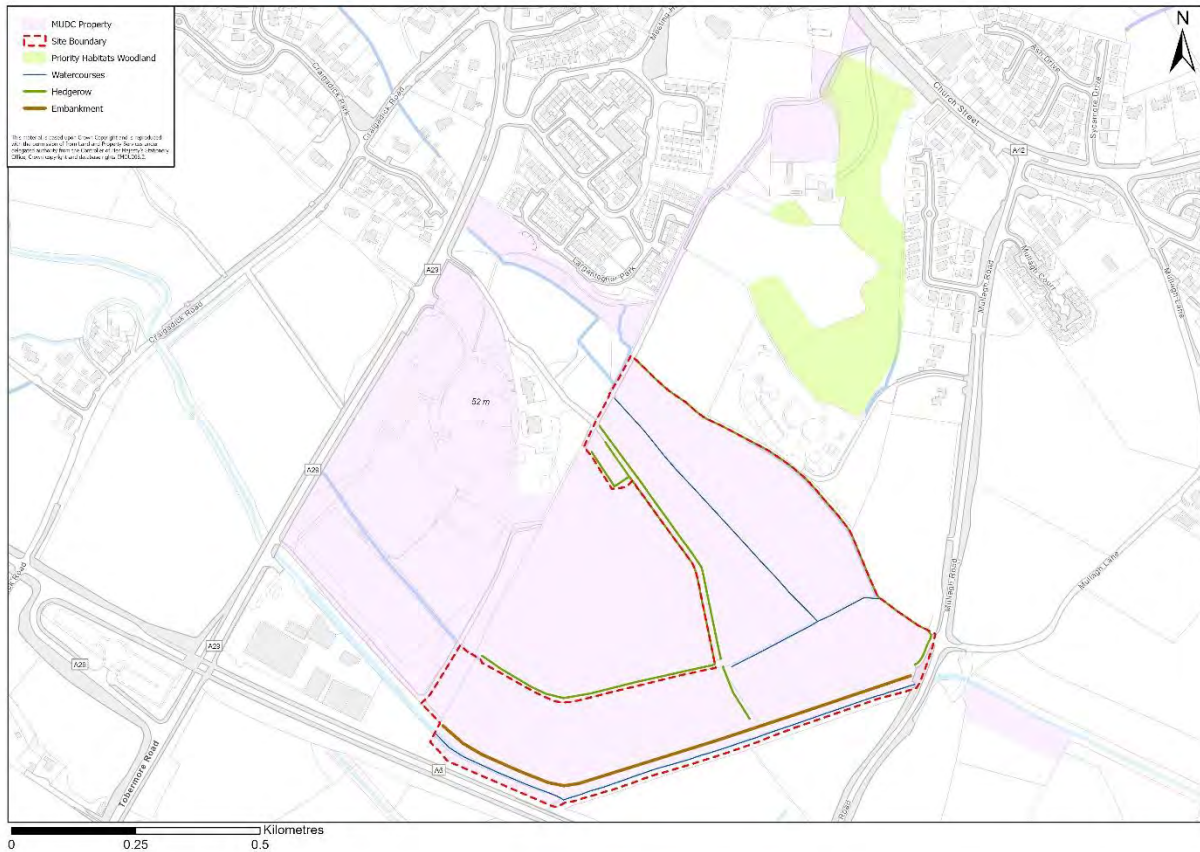


Figure 9 Natural heritage interest within and around the site

4.3 Built Heritage

There are no scheduled or unscheduled built heritage records within the proposed site. There are two locations adjacent to the study area that are listed on the Built Heritage Sites and Monuments record. These are detailed below and can be seen in Figure 10, along with the historic design of the landscape from 1860 and 1905.

SMR	Site Type	Details	Grid reference	Condition
LDY036:034	A.P Site	Cropmark	H8528099600	No visible remains, all above ground features removed. Identified by aerial photograph in harvested field.
LDY036:033	A.P Site	Tree ring	H8518099520	No visible remains, all above ground features removed. Identified by aerial photograph in harvested field.

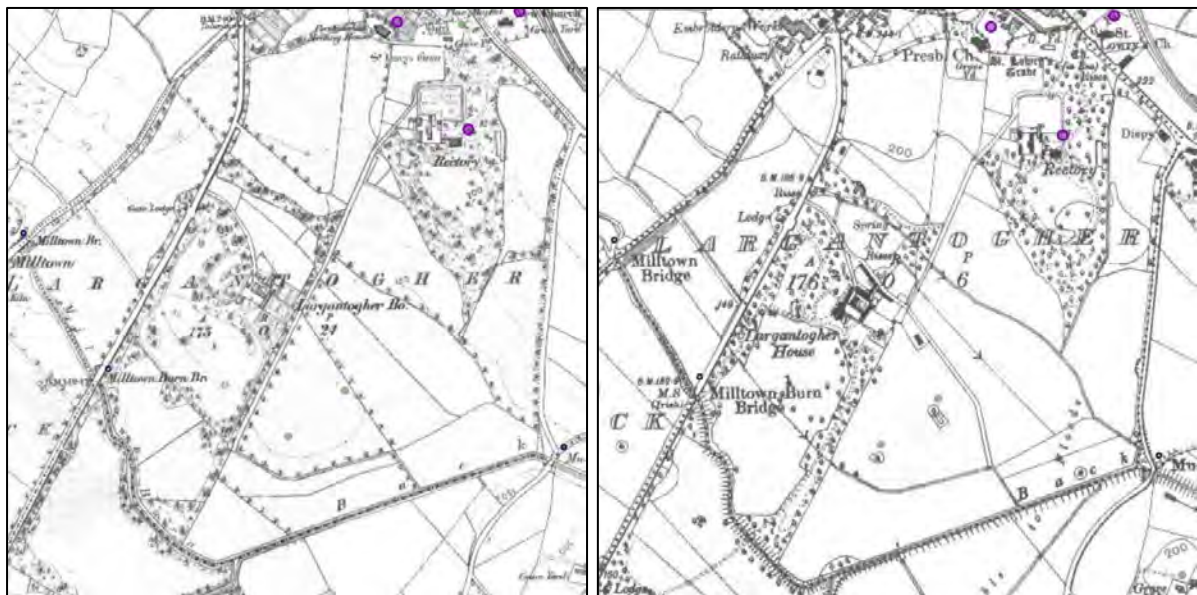


Figure 10 Historic maps of the study area from 1860 and 1905

Figure 10 shows that the land use of the study area has not changed over time i.e. that it has historically been used for agricultural purposes. The presence of a historic access lane to Largantogher House, from the Rectory SW towards the Milltown Burn is noted. The presence of drainage channels, hedgerows and the channelised Back Burn, are all in the same location that they were pre-1860.

4.4 Hydrology

4.4.1 Overview

There are several watercourses on site, namely the Largantogher Burn, Milltown Burn, Black Burn and the Mullagh River (or Back Burn). These watercourses and their direction of flow can be seen in Figure 11.

The vast majority of the study area is within the flood plain. PPS15 'Planning and Flood Risk' states that 'Floodplains and other land important for flood storage, adjacent to settlements can often form important strategic networks of green spaces commonly referred to as green infrastructure. These areas are often important in terms of **biodiversity**, providing meadowlands and wildlife corridors. They can also be used for **leisure and recreational purposes**. Therefore, the safeguarding of these areas not only offers economic benefits by avoiding flood risk but also delivers benefits in terms of health, social wellbeing and the environment'.

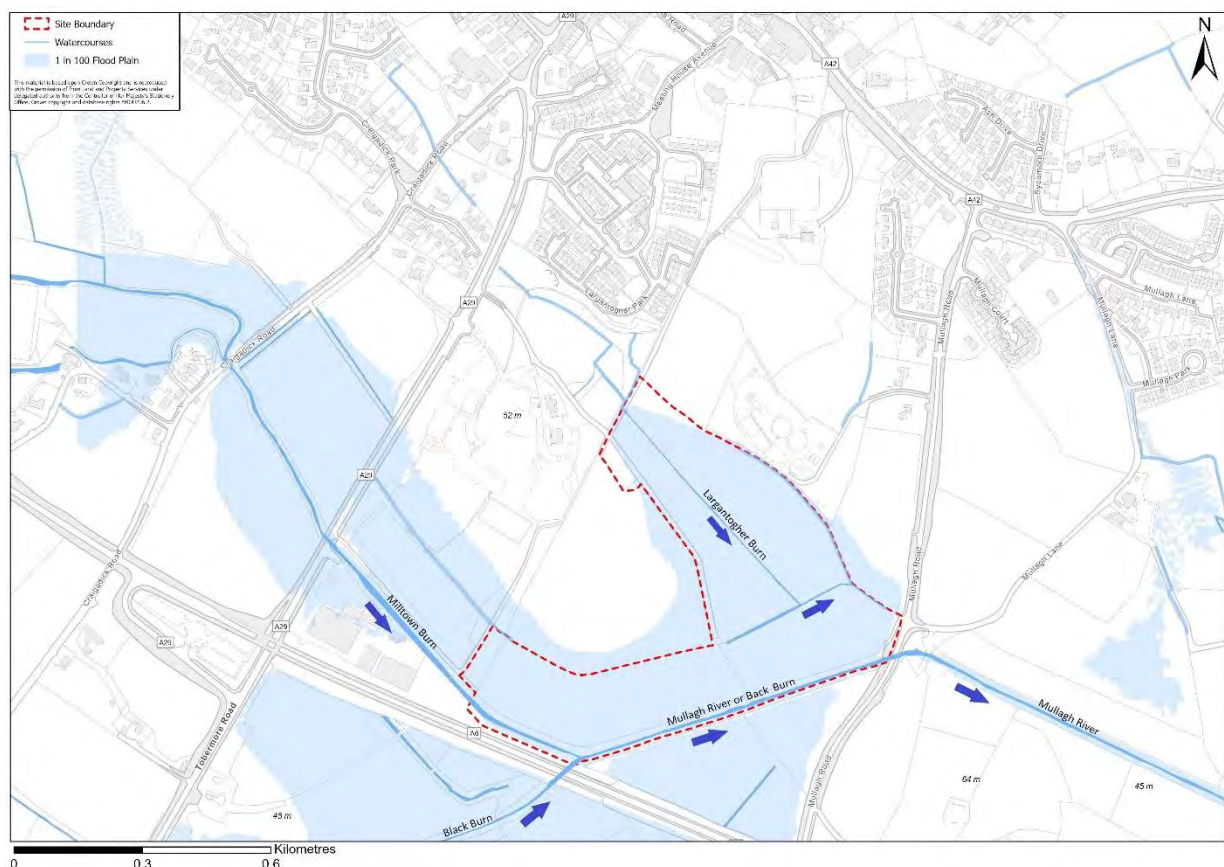


Figure 11 Flood plain location in relation to study area

DfI Flood Maps NI (Floods Directive 2nd Cycle) states that a historical flood event occurred in October 1990. Flooding on site is anecdotally known to occur on an annual basis, the image that can be seen in Figure 12 shows a flood event that occurred in January 2022.



Figure 12 Flooding at the Mullagh Road site in January 2022

4.4.2 Case Study: Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve

The Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve is a 50 hectare wetland nature reserve beside the River Great Ouse at Old Wolverton, Milton Keynes. It was formerly an area of pasture turned into a quarry and restored to the grassland flood plain of the River Ouse. It is now managed as a Nature Reserve and public park by The Parks Trust and was opened to the public in 2016.

Restoration –

After quarrying extraction ceased, materials on site were landscaped in order to form a mosaic of channels, islands and bars, that would work with the natural flooding functions of the site. As well as the new channels and islands, the re-formed landscape included a number of isolated pools and ponds designed to fill through ground water or occasional inundation rather than subject to flowing water.

The fluvial flows from the river combined with the seasonally fluctuating ground water levels means that water levels in the site are uncontrolled and dynamic. No control structures or hard-engineered erosion prevention measures were installed.

Key Issues –

Extensive consultation was undertaken on the project, but the proposal was locally controversial given the site's long-established pastoral character and status as a Linear Park, which some local people felt incompatible with the proposal. However, the Parks Trust developed a strong case for the project, including highlighting the local and national biodiversity action plan targets the project would deliver. Public communication about the natural processes that happen on site and appropriate design of recreation infrastructure have been key to ensure public buy in and stewardship, as well as long term sustainability.

Partnership working –

The Parks Trust obtained the backing of a range of statutory and non-statutory environmental and conservation organisations. The RSPB, Natural England and the Forestry Commission all provided support to the Parks Trust in the development of the nature reserve.

Public Benefits –

The Reserve is freely open to the public with trails, boardwalks, bird hides and site interpretation. It is now a major amenity asset and wildlife attraction in the Ouse Valley Linear Park as is readily accessible by the local population. It provides a valuable green space for people on the northern border of Milton Keynes.

A further public benefit is the increased capacity and more natural functioning of the river floodplain, helping to reduce the risk of flooding to downstream urban areas.



Figure 13 Images from the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve, before and during a flood event

4.5 Access and Car Parking

4.5.1 Access

Several options have been considered to provide formal pedestrian and vehicular access; the latter also requires consideration of formal car parking – see Section 4.5.2. Table 6 discusses and Figure 14 shows the access points considered.

Access Point	Current Use	Future Use	Notes
Tobermore 1 Gravel laneway linking southwest of site to Tobermore Road	Agricultural Vehicles Informal pedestrian access (modest)	N/A	MUDC has advised this is not a viable option
Tobermore 2 Currently used to access the Department of Education storage facility	Agricultural Vehicles Informal pedestrian access (modest)	N/A	There is currently a planning application (LA09/2022/03777/O) lodged for this site (including the laneway), comprising of 33 residential units. Primary pedestrian and vehicular access to the site is not conducive alongside these proposals. Secondary pedestrian access to the site may be conducive and can be investigated with the property developer in due course.
Mullagh Road Gravel laneway linking eastern side to Mullagh Road	Agricultural Vehicles Informal pedestrian access (modest)	Formal Pedestrian Access	A public footpath links this access point, northwards along the eastern side of the Mullagh Road to the junction with Church Street. The footpath outside the 30mph zone leading to this access point is single file only. In order for this to be an accessible access point, the footpath should be widened to accommodate double file usage.

			Challenges relating to car parking at this point are outlined in section 4.5.2
Via Proposed Business Park	N/A	Formal Pedestrian Access	MUDC has advised vehicular access will not be possible via the proposed business park. Plans for the proposed business park include a pedestrian walkway starting from the entrance on the Tobermore Road. When developed this will provide a pedestrian linkage to the proposed Wetland Park.
Via Largantogher Walkway	N/A	Formal Pedestrian Access	The preferred primary access point to the site is at the northern most corner of the site, adjacent to the Largantogher Walkway. There is currently no linkage between the site and the Largantogher Walkway. The land between the two locations is in private ownership and permission to develop a linkage here is critical in order to proceed with designing and developing a recreational space within the site. By developing this linkage, the existing Largantogher Walkway can be used to link to existing and potential car parking opportunities at the Walled Garden. This is further outlined in section 4.5.2

Table 6 Overview of current and future access

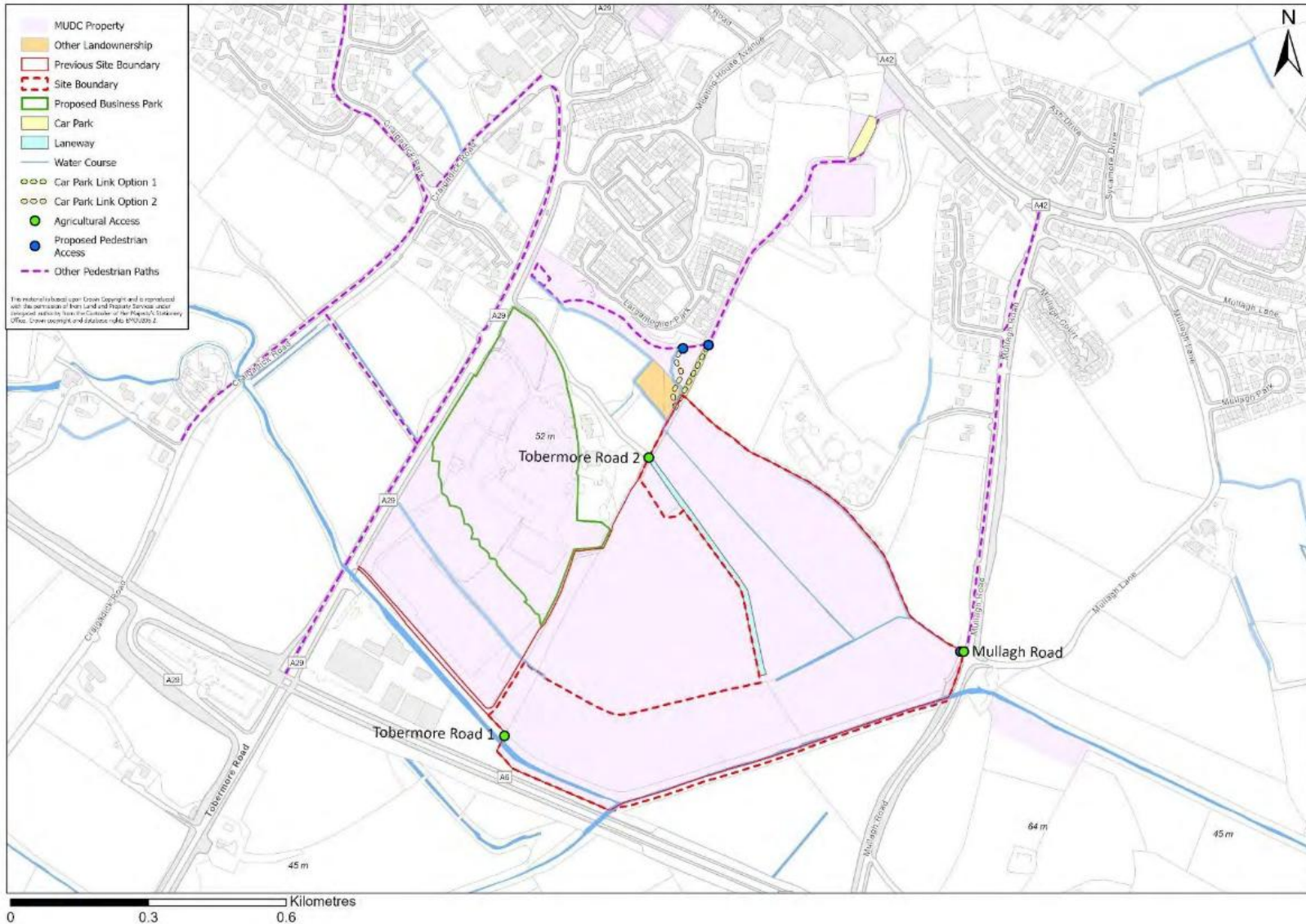


Figure 14 Existing and proposed access to the site

4.5.2 Car parking

The presence of the flood plain covering the majority of the site means the development of a car park within the site is not a viable option. As outlined in Section 4.5, options for car parking are restricted to those outlined in Table 7 below.

Location	Description	Future Use	Notes
Mullagh Road Picnic Site	Approx. 8 spaces, no dedicated disabled parking Bitmac, not marked out	N/A	Requires visitors to cross the Mullagh Road in a 60mph zone, with compromised visibility of traffic due to bend in the road i.e. a crossing point is not viable
Craigadick Park and Ride	123 spaces, inc. 4 dedicated disabled spaces Bitmac	Additional parking	Could be used as an additional/ secondary parking option if accessing the site from the pathway within the proposed Business Park. Not suitable to be the main parking option given its distance from the site.
Walled Garden	Approx. 6 spaces, no dedicated disabled parking	Formal Car Park	As referred to in Section 4.5 above, the preferred primary access point is via the Largantogher Walkway and parking in the vicinity of the Walled Garden to facilitate this. A new pedestrian access point will need to be developed between the Largantogher Walkway and the site, if this car park is to be a viable option to service the site. Existing car parking at this location is limited to 8 spaces with no dedicated disabled parking spaces. Additional parking is available on Church Street (approximately 45 spaces); however, these are typically at capacity. Therefore, enhanced parking facilities are required at the Walled Garden in order to facilitate a wide range of users within the community. Opportunities for this can be seen in Section 6.8

Table 7 Overview of local car parking opportunities

4.6 Summary

The considerations and challenges in relation to the lands at Mullagh Road have been noted and discussed. It is the aim of this Masterplan to recognise and address these through the master planning process, in order to define options that can deliver a valuable green space for recreational use by the local community. None of the constraints or considerations preclude development within the space and considered planning can support and improve factors which may have previously been viewed as a limitation on site.

5 Lands at Mullagh Road, SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Existing network of pedestrian links to the wider community
- 'Blank slate' in terms of development
- Urban fringe location - rural feel but adjacent to urban location for accessibility purposes
- Good views across the entire site
- Low gradients present with the majority of the site being flat, allowing for the development of trails accessible to all
- Hydrological functionality present on site to allow for rewetting and restoration of the floodplain

Weaknesses

- No current formal access for pedestrians
- No dedicated car parking
- No existing recreation infrastructure
- Results of hydrological and ecological studies required before detailed design can occur
- The majority of the site is located within a flood plain - additional considerations required regarding development

Opportunities

- Wider community support for site-appropriate development/enhancements
- Interest from local community for participation in development and maintenance
- Development of community trail network and associated visitor infrastructure, suitable for all members of the community
- Upgrade existing pedestrian linkages to the site
- Enhancement of biodiversity value
- Increase community value and involvement
- Increase educational value and opportunities
- Restore natural hydrological processes of the watercourses and floodplain on site
- To provide a space to reconnect with nature for physical health and mental well being purposes
- For partnership working and sharing of expertise with appropriate NGO
- Co-operative initiatives and community involvement, linking with Walled Garden
- Define and highlight the natural and cultural significances of the site through community engagement and interpretation
- Potential to position as a good practice example of Wetland Park creation in Northern Ireland

Threats

- Opposition to the proposal by a local action group 'Take Action for Maghera Park'
- Perception that proposed development is compensatory for the loss of the High School site
- Perception that any development within a flood plain is precluded
- No existing linkage to Walled Garden car park - permission to access private land required
- Rivers Agency operations to be considered
- Planning permission required
- Poor public awareness of the site
- Partial development of the site resulting in not realising the full potential of the site

PART 2//

6 Recommendations

This section outlines the key recommendations for development within the site with the aim of realising its potential as a community resource in terms of both recreation and nature.

6.1 Context for recommendations

The starting point for all development within the lands at Mullagh Road is to recognise the value of the natural landscape, in the form of working with natural ecosystem services and processes such as permanent inundation and seasonal flooding, and utilising this previously marginalised land to create a biodiverse recreational resource for the local community. Given the constraints that the presence of the flood plain presents, standardised or non-bespoke recreational development and infrastructure will not gain the necessary permissions to be developed on site, and will not have the longevity that a site that experiences seasonal inundation, will require.

Viewing the perceived constraints and natural functions of the site as opportunities rather than challenges, frames the proposed recommendations as progressive and holistic. This approach to development has the potential to position the site as pioneering within Northern Ireland. The site has the potential to be an example of best practice to show how flood plains along the Moyola River (and other similar waterways in Northern Ireland) can be restored to more than a series of embankments and pastoral grazing of a habitat that is lacking in species diversity.

It is imperative that future development should not detract from the site; it must be carried out sensitively and underpinned by principles of sustainability. In this respect the future management of the site should adhere to the ethos that nature and recreation are equal in terms of priority at the site, one should not be at the expense of the other.

In broad terms, recommendations for development should address the objectives below –

- Embrace the existing natural functions of the site
- Enhance the future natural functions site
- Create a quality recreational space for the local community

Several NGOs were engaged with as part of the external engagement process of this Masterplan. The Ulster Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Conservation Volunteers NI were not in a position to be able to offer resources or advice on one or more of: the design, development or ongoing maintenance of the site.

RSPB NI are the largest nature conservation charity in Northern Ireland and their priorities are focused on the recovery of nature by prioritising species, habitats and sites and setting clear objectives for each. RSPB NI are passionate about working in partnership with a range of landowners, managers and partners to support these priorities. Providing suitable access and education are important elements of their work, which aims to 'give nature a home'. RSPB NI are currently working in partnership with MUDC on several other recreation and habitat projects just as the recently completed boardwalk at The Strand - Lough Beg, Bulrush site at Newferry and Toners Bog outside Bellaghy.



Figure 15 Boardwalk across wet grassland habitat at The Strand, Lough Beg

Within RSPB NI, an internal department titled 'Countryside Land Management Services', is tasked with working with partners to enhance marginalised sites, both in an advisory role and by providing advice and construction-based solutions e.g. habitat design options, provision of specialist machinery suited to working on waterlogged sites etc. They work closely with colleagues in GB to share best practice and expertise regarding habitat creation and management at a nationwide level.

RSPB NI undertook a visit to the lands at Mullagh Road in order to gain an understanding of the site's potential and what the priorities might be for the site in terms of habitat development.

All recommendations put forward in the Masterplan with regards habitat design, creation and future maintenance, are based on discussion with and advice from RSPB NI staff, namely: Seamus Burns - Area Manager, Gareth Bareham - CLMS Conservation Officer and Mark Smart Senior - Project Manager (Ecology and Land Management (GB)).

All recommendations for the path network, supporting infrastructure, play and signage, are those of ORNI. Car park design and costings have been provided by RPS Consultant Engineers.

6.2 Options

Table 8 below shows the options considered for the lands at Mullagh Road. All options (apart from do nothing) require intervention in the form of hydrological and ecological studies, to inform site design and soft engineering (earthworks) in order to make the space available useable for recreational purposes. Section 7.2 and 7.3 show the detail and differences between partial and full development.

Option	Results
Do nothing	No provision of a biodiversity and recreation resource for the local community. Opportunity missed to deliver on key targets as identified in Section 3.1 and 3.2.
Partial development	Provision of a unique biodiversity and community recreation resource, that partially utilises the potential of the site. Options to develop a full path network, additional play and education facilities, upgrade of linkages to the town and overflow carparking are not explored.
Full development	Provision of a unique biodiversity and community recreation resource, that fully utilises the potential of the site, through a progressive ecosystems-based approach to development. A fully considered biodiversity and recreational resource is developed that includes an accessible path network, suitable play and education facilities, development of linkages to the site, additional car parking infrastructure and a suite of bespoke signage and interpretation.

Table 8 Options for development

Following on from this, key recommendations for the Lands at Mullagh Road are as follows –

6.3 Habitat Creation

Enhancing biodiversity through habitat creation within the site is a key factor in developing the site as a quality green space. This will be achieved by embracing the natural functionality of the site and enhancing it, so the optimum mixture of habitat types can be provided to encourage wetland species to thrive.

All public bodies have a statutory duty ⁹ to protect, maintain, enhance, restore and promote understanding of biodiversity. This is recognised in the MUDC Biodiversity Action Plan which commits Council to the following actions:

⁹ Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland), 2011

- Develop initiatives at a number of sites, to enhance their value for wildlife
- Develop partnerships to assist in the delivery of River Basin Management Plans (e.g. investing in wetlands to help prevent flooding, addressing pressures caused by modifications to natural flow of rivers)
- Support...other organisations within the Mid Ulster area to enhance wetland habitats and species¹⁰

The next steps with regards the existing and potential habitat on site, is to carry out an ecological assessment of the site from which key detailed recommendations on how best to enhance biodiversity can be made. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal will provide a baseline ecological study of the site and assess the site in terms of ecological features present or that could be potentially present. It will then make recommendations for any further surveys required e.g. mammal survey (bats, badgers etc), invertebrates and others. This should be completed in tandem with the hydrological study and flood risk assessment to help understand the natural functions of the site and to put forward appropriate designs accordingly. Until an ecological assessment can be completed, the following general recommendations can be made –

- Habitat enhancement
 - Re-establishment and reprofiling of existing ditches by clearing, reprofiling and expanding existing ditches
 - Enhancement and reprofiling of the Mullagh Burn embankment including the creation of pools and bankside vegetation
 - Enhancement and expansion of wet grassland
- Habitat creation
 - Pools – a series of simple pools from shallow to deeper, (incorporating shelves) along with appropriate planting.
 - Scrapes - shallow ponds of less than 1m depth, with gently sloping edges and bare earth which hold rain or flood water seasonally and which remains damp for much of the year.
 - Wet grassland
 - Traditionally a habitat maintained by grazing but can be maintained by mechanical methods

¹⁰ Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan, 2014-17

- Important for wading birds and invertebrates
- Suitable hydrological conditions required - seasonal
- Reedbed area to buffer WWtW
 - Transition habitat between land and wet habitats – fringe vegetation
 - Can be used for screening and filtration purposes
 - Suitable hydrological conditions required
- Native deciduous woodland areas
- Planting larger trees along the Mullagh Burn boundary to help shield site from A2
- Invasive species removal
- Leaving areas of grass uncut and reducing the frequency of cutting – pathways can be mowed through these to give a manicured effect and temporary signage installed to inform the public.
- Use interpretation to educate users about biodiversity

The images in Figure 16 below show the type of habitats that can be created on site:



Figure 16 Wetland mosaic – pools, scrapes and wet grassland, newly planted woodland and reed bed habitats

6.4 Path network

A quality walk trail network is essential to allow visitors to fully explore a site, to experience nature and engage with carefully considered and designed positive control points. In consideration of this, a concept design for a new sustainable trail network has been recommended as part of the Masterplan. The trail concept will require detailed design once the ecological and hydrological surveys are completed and have informed the habitat creation design stage.

The aims of the trail network are as follows –

- Provide access to the site
- Cater for, and appeal to a range of users and abilities
- Bring users in close proximity with the natural wetland habitat
- Sit sensitively within the landscape
- Address the challenge of providing recreation opportunities within a flood plain

6.4.1 Rationale for Walk Trail Network

The proposed walk trail network (see Section 7.2.) is comprised of a linear trail originating from the proposed trailhead and car park adjacent to the Walled Garden. It then follows the existing Largantogher Walkway to a newly formed link between the walkway and the proposed new pedestrian entrance point at the north of the site. From here a looped trail network provides accessible routes around the boundary of the site as well as via various other trail options through newly created wetland and planted areas or to positive control points¹¹. All trails within the network are classified as Category 1 or 2 multi-use trails. This means that the trails are suitable for users with limited mobility, pedestrians, and children on bikes. The trail network will not be suitable for adult cyclists.

Table 9 shows trail lengths and categories for the proposed trail network. A detailed description of trail categories can be found in Appendix C.

Proposed Trail Network						
	Trail section	Linear or looped	New build or existing	Surface	Category	Length (m)
1	Car park link	Linear	Existing	Bitmac	1	321
2	Largantogher link	Linear	New build	Compacted gravel	1	85
3	Boundary trail	Looped	New build	Compacted gravel raised causeway	1	2028
4	Elevated walkway	Linear	New build	Recycled plastic boardwalk	1 and 2	630
5	Trails to nature viewing areas	Linear	New build	Recycled plastic boardwalk	1 and 2	160
6	Business Park link trail	Linear	New build	Compacted gravel	1	100
7	Other linking trails	Linear	New build	Compacted gravel raised causeway	1 and 2	334
Total						3558

Table 9 Trail lengths and categories

6.4.2 Trail surface

In terms of trail surface, several factors have influenced the recommendations in Table 9.

¹¹ Feature or point of interest present on site

- Bitmac

The Largantogher Walkway is an existing, accessible public footpath in an urban area and as such is surfaced using bitmac. This is a highly durable surface suited to its location, but bitmac is not recommended for the proposed trail network due to its visual impact not being suitable for use in a natural setting and its non-porous surface increasing runoff in an existing flood plain.

- Compacted gravel

This trail surface is recommended for trail development in a natural setting, which is **not** located within the floodplain. An example of this in the recommended path network is in the wooded area linking the site to the Largantogher Walkway. This surface is recommended here due to being more visually suited to its surroundings and not generating additional runoff due to being porous in nature. There is leeway here to have this section surfaced with bitmac for consistency with the surfacing of the Largantogher Walkway, depending on Council’s preference.

- Compacted gravel – raised causeway

A raised causeway trail constructed from compacted gravel, is recommended for the majority of the path network. This trail construction type is suitable for sections of the path network within the flood plain due to it being raised above ground level, the use of rock as anchors on the retaining edges, a geotextile layer to prevent subsidence and the binding surface layer which when combined with rain or flood water, will bind the trail tightly together - providing a robust, accessible and visually acceptable trail.

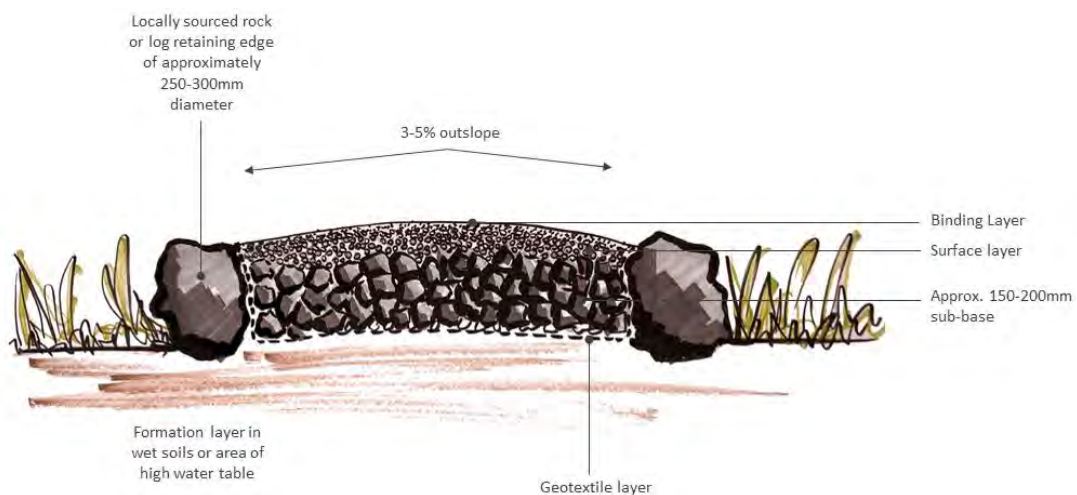




Figure 17 Raised causeway path construction and example

- Recycled plastic boardwalk

Recycled plastic boardwalk trail is recommended for sections of the trail network where the ground surface is likely to be permanently inundated with water. This includes areas crossing naturalised drains or leading to nature interaction points over water such as pond dipping or bird hide locations. Boardwalk is also recommended as the trail construction type for the elevated walkway on the embankment, due to the need for an anchored structure to be placed here as opposed to a gravel path.

Handrails are only required where the boardwalk is likely to be a height off the ground e.g. the elevated walkway.

Recycled plastic boardwalk is recommended as opposed to wooden boardwalk due to the lack of ongoing maintenance required and its longer product lifespan. If wooden boardwalk is visually preferred, recycled plastic can be used for the portion of the structure (piling) that is likely to be permanently submerged in water, with wooden sections being used as the path's surface.



Figure 18 Boardwalk examples

6.5 Play provision

6.5.1 Overview

Natural play areas are designated spaces providing opportunities for children to engage and play creatively in a natural setting. There are two main options to developing such an offering –

1. Formal – designated areas with bespoke play pieces designed to blend with the environment
2. Informal – minimally developed play zone, largely using the natural landscape to provide play opportunities

Option 1 is the approach recommended for the lands at Mullagh Road. This is due to:

- the site's location adjacent to a population centre (Maghera town). Structures and surfacing need to be robust in order to ensure durability and an appropriate level of maintenance in the long term.
- the site formerly being grazing pasture and therefore there is a lack of natural resources present on site to facilitate informal natural play. In order to develop informal play, external material will need to be imported onto the site.

It should be noted that PPS15 states that playgrounds for children are not permitted within a floodplain due to potentially exposing a vulnerable group (children) to flood risk, meaning that any formal play provision needs to be outside the floodplain.

Any play developed should be suited to the scope and scale of the site i.e. a local nature reserve, not a tourist facility.

6.5.2 Benefits

Developing a formal, bespoke natural play area has several advantages -

- Promotion of creativity and imagination
- Provision of a different type of stimulation to that of 'standard' play
- Design of bespoke, site specific play structures which promotes adventure, builds confidence and teaches responsibility
- Allows for themed play structures to be developed, that are designed to reflect the landscape and habitats where they are located thus providing a sense of place and education opportunity
- Allows for the development of play opportunities that are inclusive to all e.g. those with limited mobility or with disabilities, those with sensory issues, a wide range of ages etc.

Developing formal and bespoke natural play areas in different locations around the site will form a play trail which will provide the following benefits:

- Encourage wider exploration of the site
- Facilitate longer stays and repeat visits
- Provide a space for outdoor classroom or forest school type activities

6.5.3 Recommendations

It is recommended that the main natural play area should be located at the north of the site, adjacent to the proposed primary pedestrian entrance. This area is located outside the flood plain. This is beneficial as families will be encouraged to walk to the site along the Largantogher Walkway, rather than having the main play area located beside the car park, as most traditional play parks do. The distance from the car park to the proposed play area is not prohibitive (400m), even to young children or children with limited mobility.

Surfacing of the natural play site is recommended to be bonded rubber mulch. This has a natural look to it so will fit visually within the natural landscape, as well as being durable and accessible to all.

The nature sculptures should be located to lead visitors into and around the site and be accessible off the formal trail network. Examples of formal natural play are shown in Figure 19.



Figure 19 Examples of bespoke formal natural play

6.6 Additional facilities

6.6.1 Nature interaction points

Providing opportunities for visitors to interact with nature, is a key objective of the Masterplan proposal and helps to address many of the aims of the strategic plans and reports referenced in Section 3. As well as the trails themselves, dedicated infrastructure to facilitate interaction with nature is recommended as follows:

- Install boardwalk over areas of wetland habitat, with integrated seating and platforms to allow viewing and pond dipping
- Install a bird hide and shelter offering 360 degree views of the wetland habitat. This could be a multipurpose facility in that it provides opportunities to interact with nature as well as providing a covered outdoor classroom location. Its primary function is a bird hide and should be located centrally within the wetland habitat to allow for optimum interaction with nature.



Figure 20 Pond dipping, bird hide, and board walk platforms

6.6.2 Covered outdoor event space and picnic facilities

Local community engagement identified the need for a small covered outdoor event space. This could be used for shelter by all visitors but would be of particular use for school groups and when hosting small outdoor events / gatherings in bad weather. The location and design of such a facility requires careful consideration to ensure its use is maximised. For the purposes of the Masterplan, it is

recommended that the covered space/ picnic area is located adjacent to the main play area at the primary pedestrian entrance at the north of the site.

The size of the site combined with the considerations outlined in Section 4, means that it is not possible to provide outdoor events space for anything larger than small group activities.



Figure 21 Covered picnic/ outdoor event area examples

6.6.3 Dog exercise area

Across the UK, dog ownership is growing. An estimated 26% of family homes now have a dog and over half of all outdoor visits to green space include a dog¹². Like all visitors, dog owners want to feel welcome and have their expectations met. The following recommendations aim to reduce the negative impacts, promote the benefits and encourage more visits by this user group.

A balanced approach which supports the benefits of access (i.e. increased visitor numbers) whilst mitigating the potential negative impacts is advised. The best way to achieve this is to have a clear dog policy that is openly communicated in pre-visiting information and displayed at access points, the visitor hub, and reinforced at key locations around the site.

The key issues that a dog policy should address is zoning. This identifies where dogs are permitted or restricted and the behaviour that is expected within each area, i.e. on or off lead. For example, dogs should always be kept separate from traffic, livestock and children's play areas.

It should be noted that whilst the needs of dog owners should be considered, the main objective of the proposed development is to enhance the site for biodiversity, specifically for wading and ground nesting birds. It is recommended that detailed consultation with RSPB NI is undertaken in order to

¹² Kennel Club, 2019

ascertain the correct dog policy. Initial discussions with the RSPB NI indicate that dogs should be kept on a lead when on site. With this in mind, this plan recommends the provision of a fully fenced dog exercise area, where dogs can be off the lead. All other locations on site, dogs should be on the lead. This is due to the presence of habitats designed to encourage wading and ground nesting birds.

It is recommended that this message is put across to visitors to the site in a positive, friendly manner and that staff engage with dog owners on the ground to develop a partnership approach.

It is recommended that a strategic approach is taken to locating dog bins. For the same reason, it is common practice at many UK sites to use general refuse bins for all waste, including dog mess.



Figure 22 Approach to dog policy at RSPB sites

6.7 Signage and Interpretation

Signage and interpretation are essential to enhance the visitor experience and effectively manage their safety. It should make visitors feel welcome and provide engaging information to help people connect with and explore the site. Effective signage also manages visitor flow around the site and informs the visitor of any risks they should consider. All signage, information, interpretation and trail waymarking should be presented in a consistent way.

It should be designed, planned and located with the visitor in mind. It should be vibrant, colourful, fresh, modern and engaging.

A Signage and Interpretation Plan contains a clear set of aims and objectives for the development of a holistic visitor experience. It makes recommendations on how the visitor experience could be enhanced through the development of signage and interpretive facilities. A signage or interpretation

strategy then sets out the processes required to achieve the aims and objectives of the Plan through various solutions which are specifically targeted at different audiences.

In consideration of this, it is recommended a Signage and Interpretation Plan is developed which includes:

- a signage strategy
- an interpretation strategy
- brand guidelines
- roll out of a suite of signage across the site
- enforcement of the standards set in the strategies

6.7.1 Signage

Within the Signage Strategy, the following categories of signage should be developed –

- Welcome signage

The function of this is to create a positive first impression for visitors by delivering vibrant and engaging messages and signalling the site's unique selling points and the activities available within. This should be installed at the main entrance, any additional pedestrian entrances and at the trail head.

- Car park signage and orientation panels

This outlines any parking requirements and provides useful orientation information.

- Trailhead Information Panel

This contains a detailed trail map and descriptions, trail grade specifications and a code of conduct. This should also include an updateable information panel to provide accurate information about any current trail closures, trail conditions, events, etc.

- Waymarkers

Comprised of waymarker posts and discs. Effective waymarking enables visitors to navigate their way around a formal trail system without the use of a map. The waymarker discs should use universally recognisable iconography to depict navigation and visitor safety messages.

- Prohibitory Signage

Designed to discourage behaviour likely to incur or cause danger.

- Warning/hazard sign

Warning visitors of a particular hazard, e.g. deep water

- Exit Signage

Located at the exit of a site thanking visitors for visiting and encouraging them to attend again in the future. The name of the area can also be added along with branding.

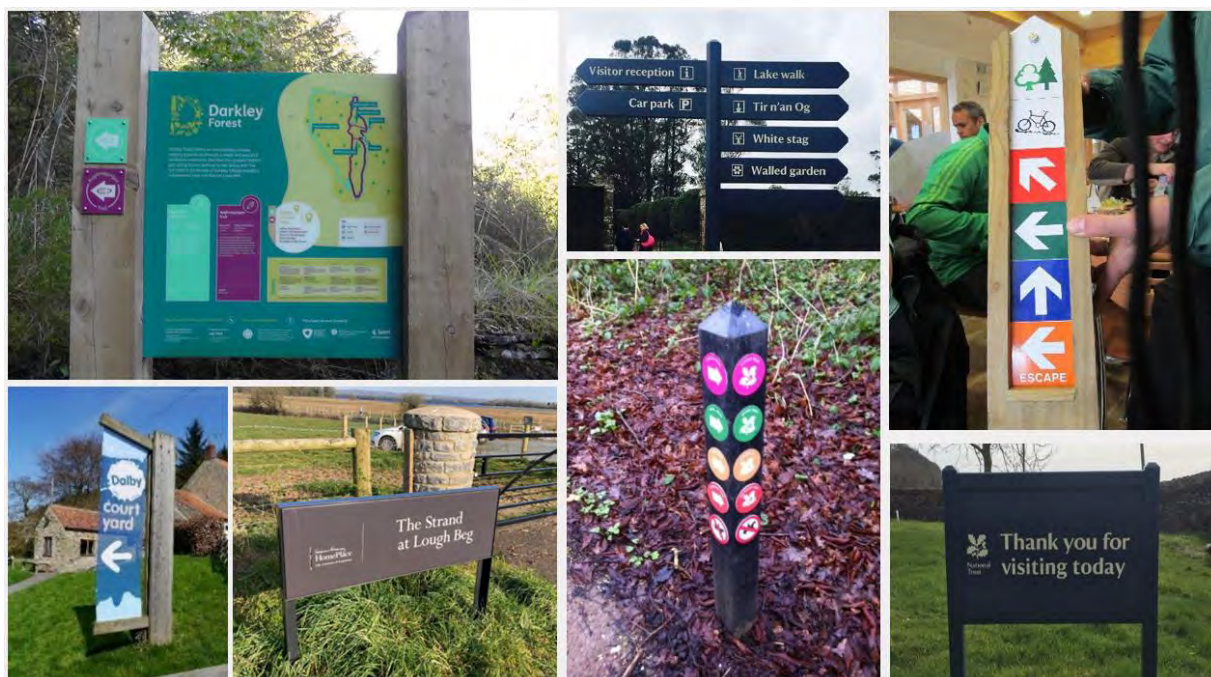


Figure 23 A selection of best practice signage examples

6.7.2 Interpretation

Interpretation is a communication process that helps people make sense of and understand more about a place. It can –

- Bring meaning to the cultural or environmental resource, enhancing visitor appreciation and promoting better understanding. As a result, visitors are more likely to care for what they identify as a precious resource.
- Enhance the visitor experience, resulting in longer stays and repeat visits.
- Enable communities to better understand their heritage, and to express their own ideas and feelings about their local area.

Ideas about what is good practice in interpretation have moved on significantly in recent years to encompass a much wider approach to interpretation than installing lectern style panels with text and images. Figure 24 shows some examples of appropriate interpretation.



Figure 24 Examples of integrated interpretation

6.8 Parking

Current car parking provision adjacent to the Walled Garden, consists of 8 unmarked spaces and a gravel surface – this requires upgrading and expansion to service the proposed park. It is recommended that additional car parking is provided to service the site. Figure 25 shows the design completed by RPS Group for upgraded and additional car parking. This proposal is on land owned by MUDC and includes 18 dedicated parking spaces, of which 3 are disabled spaces. It is recommended that the trail head is situated at this location.

This proposal is being completed in tandem with proposed improvements to the public realm in Maghera and includes the development of a small area of public space with an art installation on Church Street, opening up an area of land that has not previously been accessible to the public.

The car park proposal also includes an overflow parking area (30 no. spaces) to the west of the current car park. It is understood the development of this area is dependent on permission for access being granted by a private landowner.



Figure 25 Proposed design of upgraded and additional car parking

6.9 Management and maintenance

In terms of development and management of the site, it should be highlighted that the proposed Wetland Park will require specific expertise and resources, that may not be currently available within the remit of the Council. Examples of this being habitat design, creation and maintenance.

An option that would address this would be for Council to seek a suitably qualified and skilled partner to deliver these elements. An example being the Council entering into a Management Agreement with an appropriate and experienced NGO, in order to allow the necessary expertise to be brought on board within the management team for the site. It is recommended that this partnership is formed from the outset in order to guide the development of, and decisions regarding the key elements of habitat creation and future management.

Council would retain ownership of the site as well as responsibility for visitor functions and infrastructure such as car parking, path network, play facilities and liability for the site, while the NGO would be a key partner advising on the development of the site in terms of habitats and ecology. The NGO would also undertake responsibility for the maintenance of the site in terms of the habitats present and created, by writing a Habitat Action Plan (HAP). Following this, they would be responsible

for the actions that the HAP recommends e.g. habitat creation and enhancement, vegetation maintenance, monitoring of aims of the HAP etc. This could also involve delivering community events such as ‘walk and talks’ etc.

There are options for either body to accept additional or fewer elements of the ongoing management and maintenance of the site, as required or preferred by either party. The key message is that **the specialist requirements of the habitats created on site will require:**

- **additional expertise within the site management team,**
- **a dedicated and targeted action plan (HAP),**
- **skilled staff and specialised machinery required to deliver actions on an ongoing and annual basis.**

The HAP should be completed by the NGO in Year 1 of development, following on from the completion of the hydrological and ecological surveys. The contents of the HAP will in turn, influence other elements of development such as site and trail design (e.g. inclusion of appropriate access points and access pathways).

The revenue costs associated with these management and maintenance recommendations require consideration. The requirements and responsibilities for the annual management and maintenance of the site are summarised in Table 11.

6.10 Other Considerations

6.10.1 Linkages

The development of a new linkage and enhancement of existing linkages are included in the Masterplan.

The creation of a pedestrian linkage from the Largantogher Walkway to the northern corner of the site, is essential to ensure that pedestrian access to a suitable car parking facility can be achieved. The proposed linkage includes two options, both of which achieve the same end goal of linking the site to the walkway. One option would require the development of a path 72m in length, the other option would require the development of a path 32m in length. See Section 7.2 for detail.

Both options require the use of privately owned land in order to be delivered. Permission to access the private land has not yet been secured and this should be addressed as a priority, in order to allow other recommendations from the Masterplan to be taken forward.

Existing linkages that require enhancement are as follows:

- Babies Walk

- A privately owned agricultural laneway used informally for walking and making a looped walk around Maghera town.
- A Permissive Path Agreement could be set up between the Council and the landowner to formally permit walking here, thus strengthening and formalising an off-road linkage to the western side of Maghera.
- It is recommended the surface of the laneway is upgraded as part of the Masterplan, allowing for sustainable use for agricultural purposes and pedestrians.
- This linkage would provide opportunity for the members of Watty Grahams GAC to link to the Wetland Park, a desire of the club identified during consultation.
- Tobermore Road
 - Following the recommendations for Babies Walk, it is recommended that an existing pedestrian traffic refuge located 80m north of the entrance to the Largantogher Walkway, is relocated adjacent to the Largantogher Walkway (Figure 26). This means that it will serve visitors coming from the north (Maghera town) and visitors from the south (via Babies Walk) to permit safe crossing of the Tobermore Road to access the walkway.
 - This refuge can also be used to service pedestrian access to the proposed Business Park, perimeter trail within the Business Park and the potential link between the Business Park and the Wetland Park, as can be seen in Section 7.2.
- Mullagh Road
 - A bitmac pedestrian footpath is present along the western side of the Mullagh Road. It links the agricultural access point to the site on the Mullagh Road to Church Street.
 - From the 30mph signs south to the access point, lack of footfall has meant that the footpath has narrowed to single file width (Figure 26).
 - It is recommended that the footpath is upgraded to ensure that the surface and the width of the path are suitable to be used as a linkage to the proposed secondary pedestrian access point to the site from the Mullagh Road.



Figure 26 Traffic refuge on Tobermore Road, and narrow footpath on Mullagh Road

6.10.2 Visitor counters

Locating visitor counters at strategic locations around the site is essential to ensure a more accurate indication of numbers accessing the park and using particular facilities. Data captured by counters provides an insight to the level of demand for development and can help justify future funding.

6.10.3 Encouraging participation

Council should encourage and support formal and informal participation programmes aligning with its aims and in partnership with programmes being run locally, for example in the Walled Garden or other nature-based community initiatives such as at Carntogher/ Drumnaph. This can be achieved with limited demand on staff resources or can be delivered in partnership with a suitable NGO e.g. RSPB NI.

Some users and activities could include –

- ‘Green prescription’ - GP health referrals, health walks
- Forest school/outdoor classroom
- Buggy Walks
- Couch to 5k
- Horticulture events in tandem with opportunities at the Walled Garden
- Nature walks e.g. dawn chorus, bird identification, bat monitoring activities and events

For Council staff, a simple approach of engaging with user groups, being welcoming and accommodating and promoting the groups’ activities on-site can encourage participation and grow a feeling of community stewardship.

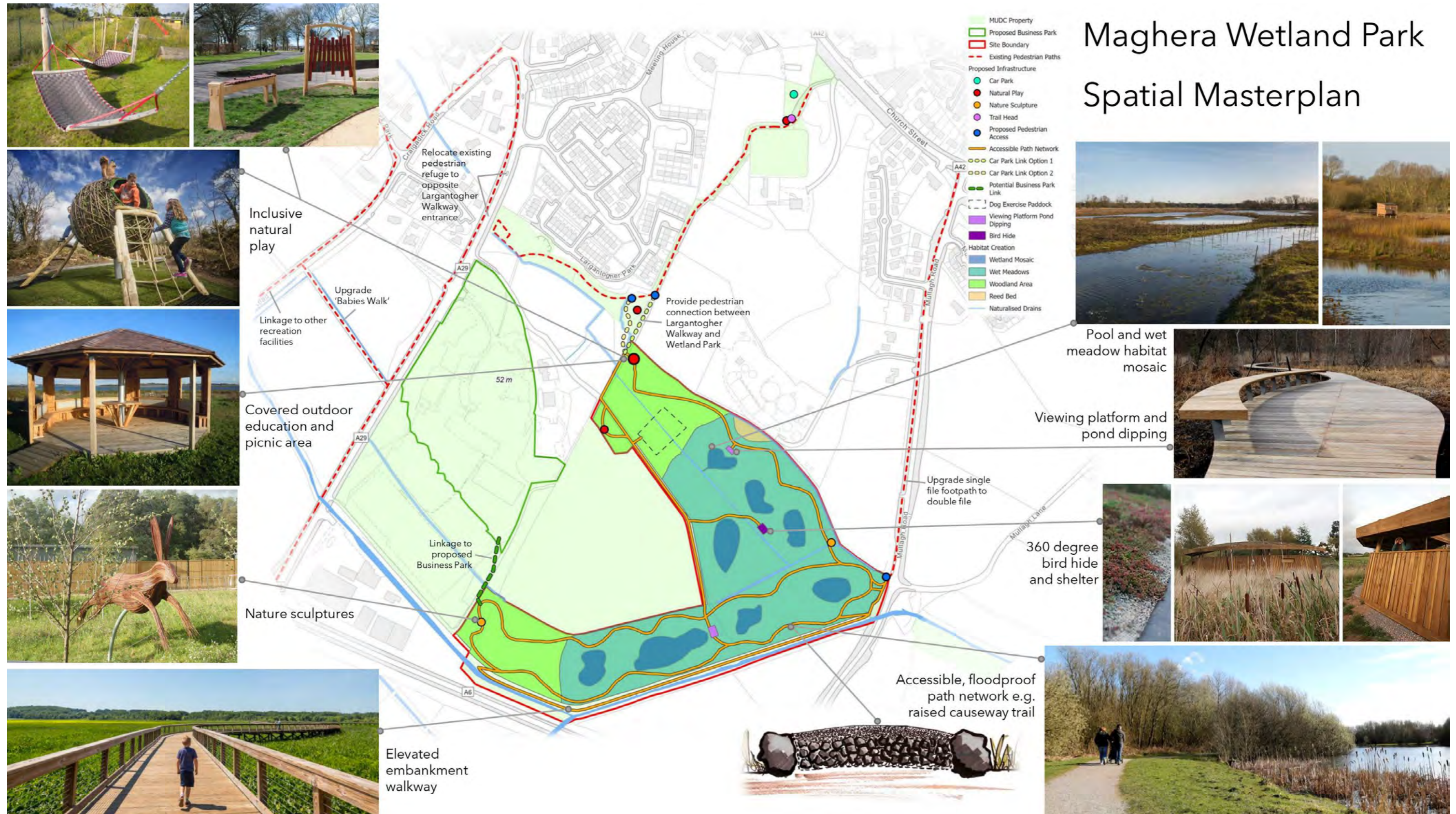
7 Spatial Masterplan

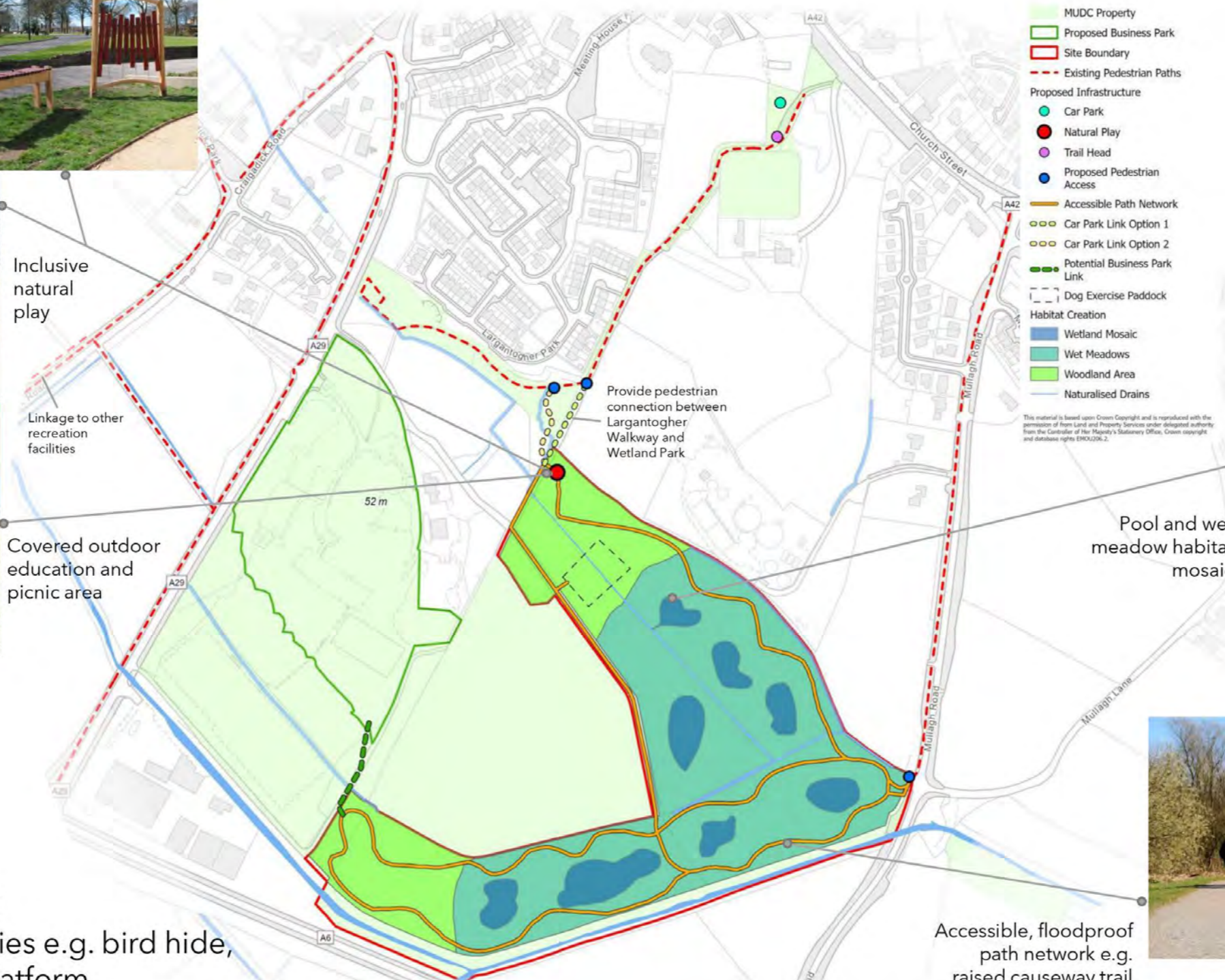
7.1 Context for development of the spatial Masterplan

This Plan sets out the recommended spatial layout of outdoor recreation activities and visitor facilities within the site, taking account the challenges and opportunities highlighted previously within the remit of this Plan.

The Plan is concept only and needs further refinement following completion of recommended studies.

Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan





Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan (partial development)



Scaled back:

- Natural play trail
- Additional facilities e.g. bird hide, pond dipping platform
- Elevated walkway
- Linkage upgrades
- Overflow car park

Accessible, floodproof path network e.g. raised causeway trail

Pool and wet meadow habitat mosaic

Inclusive natural play

Linkage to other recreation facilities

Covered outdoor education and picnic area

8 Costings

8.1 Costs overview

Table 10 includes indicative costs for the development costs in this Masterplan.

Car park design and costing have been supplied by RPS Consultant Engineers.

All costs associated with recreation development, have been informed by ORNI's extensive database of benchmarked costs for similar projects.

All costs associated with habitat creation have been informed by the RSPB and their extensive experience and knowledge of similar projects.

8.2 Development costs

No	Element	Description	Cost (excl. VAT)	Development Options		
				1 Do Nothing	2 Partial Development	3 Full Development
Pre-development						
<i>Consultancy services</i>						
1	Hydrological survey (inc flood risk assessment)	To determine feasibility, final design and costings of hydrological works	£7,000		✓	✓
	Ecological surveys	Phase 1 Habitat, mammals (bats, badgers etc), invertebrates, others	£7,000		✓	✓
	Site design and project engineering plan	Full site design and project planning (to include liaison with relevant statutory bodies, consents)	£10,000		✓	✓
	Trail design	To include detailed trail design prescriptions and planning permission consent	£8,000		✓	✓
	Habitat Management Plan	Plan to manage created habitat over a specified time period	£2,000		✓	✓
	Signage and Interpretation Plan	To include a signage and interpretation strategy considering branding, appropriate themes for the site, consultation and costings for delivery	£7,000			✓
	CPM (6% capital cost)	Manage the project within the constraints of time, budget and quality	See 'Development Options'		£53,670	£71,610
			Subtotal	£0	£87,670	£112,610
Capital Works						
<i>Preliminaries</i>						
1	Preliminaries (up to 15% of capital costs)	Site set up, insurances, mobilisation etc.	See 'Development Options'		£134,174	£179,024
<i>Path Network</i>						
2	Flood proof accessible trail network c. 2.5km	Raised causeway compacted gravel trails, compacted gravel trails, recycled plastic boardwalk	£180,000		✓	✓
	Business Park link trail	Compacted gravel trail	£7,000		✓	✓
	Trail furniture	Benches, bins, gates, pedestrian bridges etc	£10,000		✓	✓
	Embankment raised platform c. 600m	Recycled plastic boardwalk with handrails	£120,000			✓
	Visitor Counter		£2,000		✓	✓
<i>Access</i>						
3	Main car park	Gravel carpark with 18 spaces, including line work, drainage etc	£340,995		✓	✓
	Mullagh Road footpath upgrade c. 260m	Upgrade existing single file bitmac footpath to double file bitmac footpath	£13,000			✓
	Tobermore Road crossing point	Realign existing pedestrian refuge 70m south, to be located adjacent to entrance to Larganess Walkway	£4,000			✓
	Babies Walk upgrade	Upgrade existing surface with compacted gravel trail, suitable for agricultural vehicles and pedestrians	£9,000			✓
<i>Natural Play</i>						
4	Main formal natural play area (up to 0.1ha)	Robust wooden adventure play area to include a variety of options with high play value, to include a covered outdoor classroom/ picnic area. Natural look, wet pour surfacing.	£200,000		✓	✓
	Formal natural play trail	Up to three additional formal natural play locations	£60,000			✓
	Nature sculptures	Up to two nature sculpture locations	£40,000			✓
<i>Habitat Creation</i>						
5	Creation of pools c. 6ha	Based on hydro study - series of simple shallow to deeper, shelving types with appropriate planting. Some suitable for pond dipping/education others purely nature	£36,000		✓	✓

	Creation of hydrological control features e.g. sluices c. 600m	Based on hydro study - re-establishment and re-profiling of existing ditches e.g. clearing, reprofiling edges/expansion etc	£60,000		✓	✓
	Enhancement/re-profiling embankment c. 400m	Enhancement of Mullagh Burn with re-profiling, creation of pools/bankside vegetation etc	£10,000		✓	✓
	Creation of reedbed c. 0.03ha	To screen WWtW	£5,000			✓
	Planting of woodland areas c. 2.5ha	Native woodland creation using tree species suited for wet woodland habitat	£5,000		✓	✓
	Mature trees c.100 no	Additional larger trees along Mullagh Burn southern boundary, along central lane and other site edges as required	£3,000			✓
	Establishment/enhancement of wet meadows c. 5ha	Landscaping and planting for habitat creation and enhancement	£30,000		✓	✓
Additional facilities						
6	Pond dipping platforms x 2		£4,000			✓
	Bird Hide x1	360 degree, covered viewing area	£20,000			✓
	Dog exercise area c. 0.2ha	Securely fenced area for dogs to be off the lead	£3,000		✓	✓
Signage and interpretation						
7	Interpretation	Baseline - Trail head information x1, pedestrian entrances x2, educational panels x3	£9,000		✓	
		Exemplar - suite of bespoke appropriately themed interpretation	£30,000			✓
	Waymarking	Finger post signage at pedestrian entrances x 2, waymarkers posts plus disks x 20	£1,500		✓	✓
Subtotal			£0	£1,028,669	£1,372,519	
Total (Pre-development + Capital)			£0	£1,116,339	£1,485,129	
Contingency (15%)			£0	£167,451	£222,769	
Inflation (8.6%)			£0	£110,406	£146,879	
Total Cost			£0	£1,394,196	£1,854,778	

All costs exclusive of VAT

Please note these are high-level indicative costs to support a masterplan. Further studies will be required to inform detailed cost preparation.

Car park costings have been supplied by RPS Consulting.

All costs associated with recreation development, have been informed by ORNI's extensive database of benchmarked costs from similar projects.

All costs associated with habitat creation have been informed by the RSPB and their extensive experience of similar projects.

Table 10 Costings for partial and full development options

8.3 Revenue costs

Revenue Item	Detail	Resource	Responsibility	Cost (per year)
Site Warden	Duties to include litter picking, general maintenance, vegetation maintenance, other conservation works, community liaison, site inspection and record keeping	2.5 staff days per week	NGO staff	£15,000
Council staff	Duties to include general maintenance, site inspection and record keeping	1 staff day per week	Council	£6,000
Lease for permissive access on private land	Cost of leasing land in private ownership linking Largentogher Walkway to the Wetland Park. Permissive path agreement required, and annual lease cost incurred	N/A	Council	£321.84 ¹³
Habitat Management Plan actions	Annual site and habitat maintenance and enhancement e.g. rotational cutting of wet grassland, rotational clearing of pools and scrapes	Skilled staff plus specialist machinery at time of the as identified by HMP	NGO staff	£20,000
Large scale maintenance	Path and infrastructure upgrade as and when required e.g. path resurfacing, replacement of sections of boardwalk etc	10% of infrastructure capital costs, once every 5 years (post trail development i.e. from Year 3 onwards)	Council	£23,367
Play infrastructure routine and operational inspections	Routine inspections identify any changes since the last routine inspection (last week / yesterday) whilst operational inspections check the working order of the facility at regular intervals throughout the year.	0.5 staff days per month	Council	£960
Play infrastructure annual inspection	This provides an assessment of the overall safety of the facility by an independent inspector	1 day per year	Independent RPII Inspector	£120
			Total	£65,769¹⁴

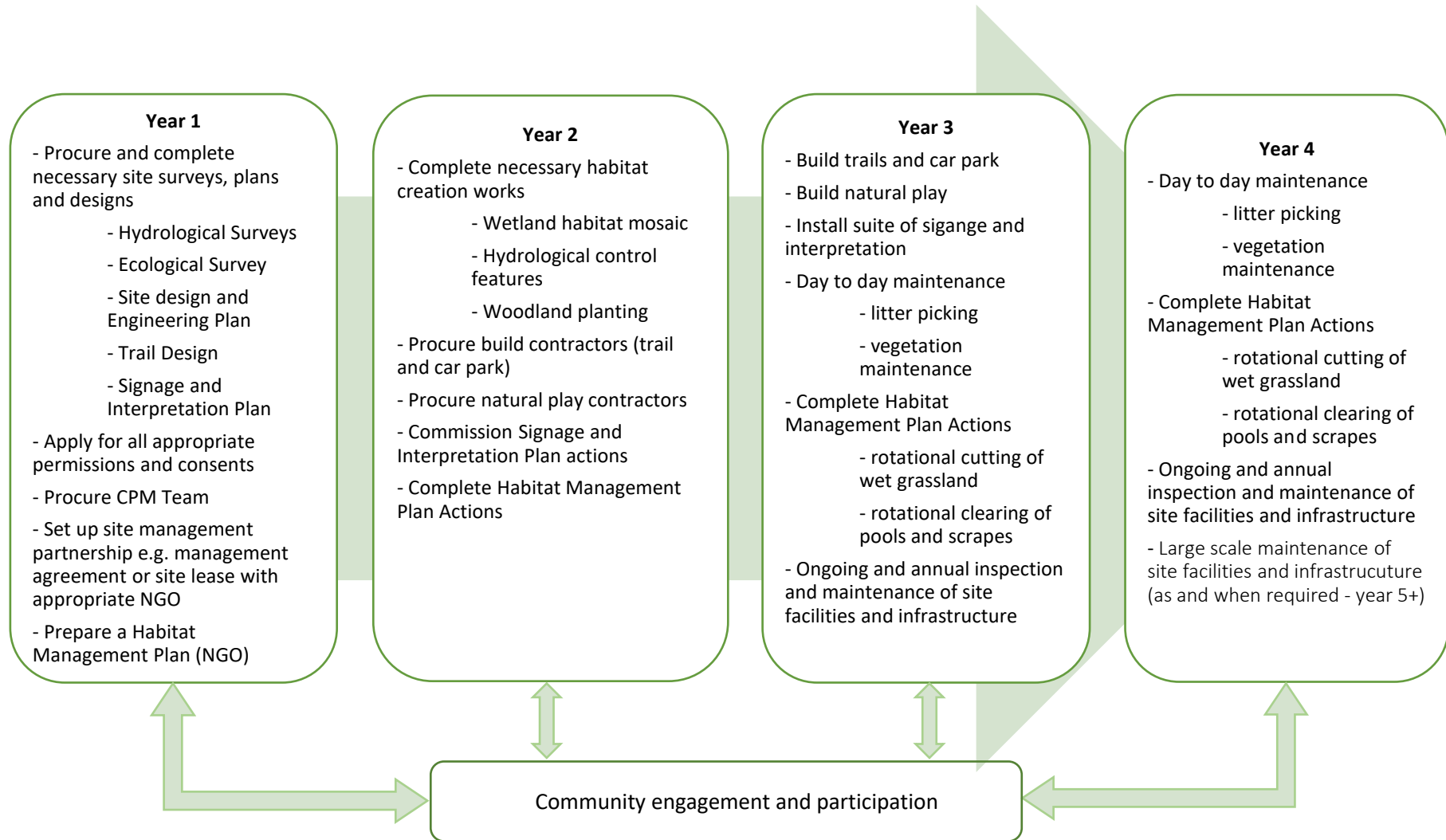
Table 11 Revenue costs associated with Masterplan recommendations

¹³ Cost based on other similar project – true cost unknown until lease agreement is finalised

¹⁴ Revenue costs do not include contingency costs, additional HR costs or inflation

9 Next Steps

9.1 Overview



Category	Item	Pre-development	Development phase	Post-delivery
Habitat creation	Creation of pools	Professional fees for the development of the habitat mosaic Hydrological survey (inc flood risk assessment)	Groundworks and planting where required £36,000	Day to day maintenance Completion of Habitat Management Plan actions
	Establishment and enhancement of wet meadows	Site design and engineering plan Refined cost estimates	Groundworks and planting where required £30,000	Community liaison
	Creation of reedbed	Commissioning of ecological survey(s)	Groundworks and planting where required £5,000	Play infrastructure routine and operational inspections
	Planting of woodland areas		Planting £5,000	Play infrastructure annual inspection
	Additional mature trees	Set up site management partnership e.g. management agreement or site lease with appropriate NGO Prepare a Habitat Management Plan		
	Enhancement and reprofiling of embankment		Planting £3,000	
	Creation of hydrological control features		Groundworks and planting where required £10,000	
Signage and Interpretation	Signage	Professional fees for a signage and interpretation plan considering branding, appropriate themes for the site, consultation and costings for delivery £7,000	Design, production, and installation £1,500	See Revenue Costs Table 11
	Interpretation		Design, production, and installation £30,000	
Trail Network	Preliminaries	Professional fees for the development of the concept new build trails: CPM procurement Trail design Refined cost estimates Application for relevant consents and permissions £79,610	Site set up, insurances, mobilisation etc. £179,024	
	Trail network		New build trail - Category 1 and 2 Raised causeway gravel trail, compacted gravel trail, recycled plastic boardwalk £180,000	
	Embankment raised platform		New build trail - Category 2	

			Recycled plastic boardwalk with handrails	£120,000	
	Business Park link trail		New build trail - Category 1 and 2 Compacted gravel trail	£7,000	
	Trail Furniture		Production and installation	£10,000	
	Visitor Counter		Production and installation	£2,000	
Access	Main car park	Professional fees included above	Gravel carpark with 18 spaces	£340,995	
	Mullagh Road footpath upgrade		Upgrade bitmac footpath	£13,000	
	Tobermore Road crossing point		Realign existing pedestrian traffic refuge	£4,000	
	Babies Walk upgrade		Upgrade gravel surface	£9,000	
Natural Play	Main formal natural play area		Design, production, and installation	£200,000	
	Formal natural play trail		Design, production, and installation	£60,000	
	Nature Sculptures		Design, production, and installation	£40,000	
Additional facilities	Pond dipping platforms		Design, production, and installation	£4,000	
	Bird hide		Design, production, and installation	£20,000	
	Dog exercise area		Installation	£3,000	
Phased Totals				£1,372,519	£1,485,129
			Total (Phased total + Contingency (15%) + Inflation (8.6%))		£1,854,778

10 Appendices

APPENDIX A - Methodology

This study was completed solely by Outdoor Recreation NI using the methods outlined below:

METHOD	PURPOSE	DETAILS
Desk research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gather information about contextual background 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development plans Relevant reports and strategies Internet research – case studies of other sites Engagement of conservation NGOs
Public engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online survey to capture customer profile and usage data One to one – targeted engagement with stakeholders to capture specific information about current provision Online Public Engagement workshop– to inform the local community about the project, capture public opinion and provide an opportunity for the local community to contribute their ideas for development In person Public Engagement event, as above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One to one engagement ongoing throughout project Online public engagement event held 23rd February 2022 In person public engagement event held in Maghera Leisure Centre, 9th March 2022
Site visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial site visit - accompanied by MUDC staff to introduce the project Follow up site visit Other best practice sites – The Strand, Lough Beg Drumnaph NR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial site visit completed 17th January 2022 Follow up site visit completed 24th March 2022 Best practice sites visited in March 2022
Initial options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pull together the findings from site visits, public engagement, desk-based research and ORNI expertise to identify initial options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See details above
Options refinement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present initial options to Council prior to refining final options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation to MUDC 19th May 2022
GIS mapping	To map all current provision of recreation facilities and future development opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See maps contained in report
Final report	To present all findings and recommendations in one concise report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft report issued to Council June 2022.

APPENDIX B - Consultees

Name	Position	Organisation
Anne Reid	Parks and Countryside Officer	MUDC
Davina McCartney	Regeneration Manager	MUDC
Raymond Lowry	Head of Technical Services	MUDC
Gregor Fulton	Senior Outreach Manager	Woodland Trust
Andrew Croy	Nature Reserves Manager	Ulster Wildlife Trust
Robert Shearman	Senior Development Manager	Conservation Volunteers NI
Seamus Burns	Area Manager West NI	RSPB NI
Gareth Bareham	CLMS Conservation Officer	RSPB NI
Mark Smart	Senior Project Manager (Ecology and Land Management (UK))	RSPB NI
		Maghera Park Action Group
		Maghera Community Forum
		Maghera Heritage Society
		Maghera Development Association
		Watty Graham's GAC
		Maghera Residents Collective
		Largantogher Community Action Group
		Maghera Parish Caring Association / Church of Ireland

APPENDIX C – Maghera Park Action Group – Email Campaign

The following emails were generated by the Maghera Park Action Group Campaign website¹⁵ to register their opposition to the proposals for the development a local community green space within the lands at Mullagh Road instead of the former Maghera High School site.

Please note bold highlights on emails are provided by ORNI to highlight the key points of each.

Email 1: 18/02/2022 – 02/03/2022

61 submissions

While we welcome Council's acknowledgment of the dire need for the provision of open space and development of a public park for Maghera, this consultation **process is deeply flawed in its omission of the Former Maghera High School Site**. The Maghera community have clearly and robustly demonstrated its desire for a public park to be developed within this important public amenity and any consultation on green space provision within the town which does not acknowledge can be seen as nothing more than an attempt to subvert the will of the people of the town and facilitate this site's destruction.

Any master plan to develop these agricultural grasslands must be weighted against the part it plays in **realising the concurrent plan by the same developers (Mid Ulster District Council) to destroy existing mature woodlands and recreational space in the neighbouring Former Maghera High School site**. This site, **used recreationally by the local community for decades, with rich and historically significant biodiversity, must be incorporated into any plan to provide meaningful green space for the people of Maghera** and which is to be safely accessible by foot for a majority of residents.

The former High School site is the ideal location for a safely accessible, community centred recreation and educational shared space for Maghera town and no plan which seeks to sincerely provide this could consider its omission. **For many Maghera residents it is the view that this master plan is simply another in a long line of attempts by Council to push through the industrialisation of existing open and green space**. The lands at Mullagh Road were purchased in desperation by a Council hellbent on going against the wishes of our community and over 3000 objections to their business park plan. At every opportunity our community has made our feelings loud and clear for the development of a public park and retention of our open/green space and mature woodlands at the Former Maghera High School site. **On top of the strength of public feeling on the matter, it simply makes no environmental or economic sense to destroy this vital amenity to attempt to replicate it anew on agricultural lands bereft of biodiversity. It would take many decades to replace the mature trees and habitats of the High School Site.**

The Former Maghera High School site is an important part of our natural heritage and place which holds a deep connection for many in our community. It is in use daily as a de facto public park in lieu of provision by our local Council. This plan, without public assurances on its delivery nor consideration of the High School site within its remit, is simply another process to drive through destruction of the last existing significant area of open space within the town and leave a poor replacement in its wake.

¹⁵ <https://magherapark.good.do/>

As a resident of Maghera, I reject this strategy to build consent for an alternative site in order to steal open space away from the community.

Email 2: 04/03/2022 – 08/03/2022

27 submissions

In response to the consultation on Green Space provision in Maghera, I welcome Mid Ulster District Council's commitment to seeking the community's views in developing natural recreational space in our town. When it comes to developing the Mullagh lands, however, I would raise **objections along economic grounds for the following reasons.**

Questions remain on the spending of public money to purchase flood plain lands without any open discussion through public channels. When the land was presented as purchased in Council, its use was described as mixed, both economic and recreational. **The allocation of land to economic activity, and what form this may take, has not been clarified. Any Design considerations relating to the site are therefore compromised unless we as a community are kept informed of how big or small the Council's plans for economic activity are and the impact from any proposed expansion of the adjacent industrial site idea.**

Funding of the site is likely to require huge financial commitment from the Council. Outdoor Recreation NI have stated that the area will be developed as a 'local' park and not classified as a 'strategic' within the district. This does not sit well with early discussions relating to access, wetland development, inclusivity, educational infrastructure and the assertion that Mullagh will be a 'high quality development'. Despite questions around what budget allocations will be made available remaining unanswered, **early estimates put costs at around a minimum of £2M. Framing the funding as staged and in need of outside funding opportunities shows a lack of firm commitment from the Council.**

The Mullagh lands are being proposed as a way to address a shortfall in Council provision for green space in Maghera. **The costs to develop this as being discussed in the ORNI consultation set against the revenue Council will realise from their sale of the High School site simply do not add up.**

Our town already has an easily accessed recreational site which has been used for generations of families across the whole town. I believe developing this natural wood/parkland would be a better of ratepayers' money.

For these reasons I cannot support the development of the Mullagh lands as Maghera's community recreation area and would ask that our High School grounds are returned to the community for this use instead.

Email 3: 08/03/2022 – 11/03/2022

104 submissions

In response to the consultation on Green Space provision in Maghera, I welcome Mid Ulster District Council's commitment in seeking the community's views on developing natural recreational space in our town. When it comes to this consultation on developing the Mullagh lands, however, **I would raise objections to the site being offered as the most suitable site in public ownership for community**

recreation and educational needs in our town, and in particular, the wetlands proposal as an environmental focus for development.

The Mullagh lands are well known in the area as an effective floodwater basin in times of persistent and prolonged heavy rainfall. Levees currently protect lower levels to enable grazing, with the higher level sited beside the town's sewage treatment plant. **The site is otherwise devoid of any ecological interest or variation. Proposals to utilise the site's majority floodplain status as a potential wetland area will further limit the opportunities to enhance any woodland environment and places a minimally landscaped area, utilising walkways and boardwalks,** with a sewage treatment plant dominating the vista to the North and the fastest road in N Ireland according to PSNI (Roads Policing, 2017), the main A26, to the South.

The vision of a wetlands development on the Glenshane/Mullagh lands will be prohibitively expensive and dependent on a consistently reliable source of water. Benchmarking to the Heaney/Homeplace project neglects the importance of both Lough Beg and the River Bann in maintaining such generous floodplains in that project's wetland ecology. **The increasingly sporadic nature of the flood-drought cycle on the Mullagh grasslands will severely challenge the establishment of any wetland flora/fauna, with insect and animal life limited by the availability of sustainable food and shelter.**

Developing these barren fields at Mullagh to make them suitable for recreation would require an economically unrealistic investment and, critically, time, as identified against the urgent need for green provision in Maghera, that will not be fully realised for several generations at least. As we already have an area of outstanding ecological maturity, with a rich network of complex biodiversity, in the publicly owned lands immediately adjacent to the lands in question, it makes no sense to develop these agricultural fields.


Our children and our children's children will be disadvantaged by the huge environmental loss if this proposal enables the destruction of the woodland legacy that forms our High School site. Any suggestion that like-for-like can be provided on Mullagh is simply providing greenwashing to a proposed ecological and community catastrophe to enable the successful progress of Mid Ulster District Council's industrial planning applications, currently with the Dept. for Infrastructure.

For these reasons I cannot support the development of the Mullagh lands as Maghera's community recreation and education area and would ask that our High School grounds are returned to the community for this use instead.

APPENDIX D - Walk Trail categories and Descriptions

Key trail attributes	Category 1 Multi-Use Trail
Description	Category One Multi Use Trails can be described as ‘all ability’, that is trails that can be accessed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By any users including those with limited mobility • At all times • With all users able to use the trails at the same time
Width	Minimum 1.8m wide Maximum 2.0m wide
Surface	Sealed surfaces only, must be even and consistent throughout and can include asphalt and compacted gravel ensuring that users of limited mobility can use the trail.
Gradients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum average gradient - not more than 3% • Maximum absolute gradient - not more than 5% for more than 30m
Lines of Sight	Minimum 20m
Trail Features	Flat or level trails with no trail features Any bridges should be not less than 2m wide with handrails throughout
Suitable for	All users



Key trail attributes		Category 2 Multi-Use Trail
Description	<p>These are trails that are accessible to a wide range of users and abilities but NOT ALL users due to issues relating to trail gradients, trail surfaces and trail features. Users include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrians of mixed abilities including young children and some baby buggies • Cyclists of all abilities other than very young children or bikes with stabilizers or wheels less than 400mm • Equestrian users of all abilities • Category Two Multi Use Trails are not suitable for those of limited mobility or with impaired vision 	
Width	Minimum 1.5m wide Maximum 2.0m wide	
Surface	Consistent sealed surfaces and can include asphalt and compacted stone or gravel	
Gradients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum average gradient - not more than 5% • Maximum absolute gradient - not more than 10% for more than 50m 	
Lines of Sight	Minimum 30m	
Trail Features	<p>Small level changes of not more than 60mm deep and not less than 300mm width.</p> <p>Grade reversals of not less than 10m in length and not more than 1m depth. Bridges must be not less than 2m wide and must have handrails throughout</p> <p>Category Two Multi Use Trails should not include steps.</p>	
Suitable for	All users	
		

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Minutes 14.9.23 2. Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Update 3. NIBSUP / Business Start Up Performance 2023/24 4. Town Centre Spruce Up Scheme
Date of Meeting	10 January 2024
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

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

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>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Minutes – 14.9.23</p> <p>The Mid Ulster LMP was established by Council in October 2021 and aims to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions locally by working through coordinated, collaborative, multiagency partnerships.</p>
2.2	<p>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Update</p> <p>The Council previously agreed to participate in the development and delivery of a Local Labour Market Partnership (LMP) under the Employability NI Programme led by the Department for Communities (DfC). The Mid Ulster LMP aims to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions locally by working through coordinated, collaborative, multiagency partnerships. The LMP provides a unique opportunity to greatly impact Council's priorities for skills and employability ensuring that an appropriate skills pipeline is available to local industry both now and in the future.</p> <p>Following restoration of LMP funding, Council received a Letter of Offer (dated 27 July 2023) for £369,005.21 from the Department for Communities to support delivery of the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2023-24.</p>

<p>2.3</p>	<p>NIBSUP / Business Start Up Performance 2023/24</p> <p>In 2015, following the Review of Public Administration, responsibility for the delivery of business start transferred to the 11 Local Councils. The Department for the Economy (DfE) has responsibility of monitoring performance in relation to the NI Business Start-Up Programme against statutory targets set out in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.</p> <p>From 2015 to September 2023, start up support has been delivered through the 11-Council ‘Go for It’ / NI Business Start Up Programme which was funded 60% from the European Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme (2014-22), 20% from Invest NI with Councils funding the remaining 20% and also the other supporting structure costs (MIS System and programme management resources).</p> <p>Since November 2023, start-up provision across the 11 Councils is funded by monies secured by the 11 Councils from the Shared Prosperity Fund. The application was led by Belfast City Council in conjunction with the other 10 Councils. Enterprise NI have recently been appointed to deliver this new service across Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>2.4</p>	<p>Town Centre Spruce Up Scheme</p> <p>Members will be aware the former Spruce Up Scheme funded by Mid Ulster District Council, has now concluded after a period of four years.</p> <p>Council Officers contacted Department for Communities (DFC) and Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to find out if they would co-finance the delivery of a further Spruce Up Scheme across Mid Ulster, in conjunction with Council.</p> <p>DAERA advised that they were unable to assist with funding at this time.</p> <p>DFC indicated they may consider providing funding towards a scheme limited to the town centre boundaries within Mid Ulster’s four largest towns, namely Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland, where the population of these towns are greater than 5,000. They added that any funding from DFC would be dependent on a successful funding application being made by Council.</p> <p>Council Officers submitted a formal funding application to DFC seeking financial support for a new Spruce Up Scheme to assist businesses in the 4 main towns in Mid Ulster (Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland).</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Minutes – 14.9.23</p> <p>Minutes of meeting of Mid Ulster LMP held on the 14th September 2023 are attached at Appendix 1.</p>

3.2 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Update

To keep Members apprised of the ongoing activity within Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership, the following summary has been provided;

Mid Ulster LMP online presence

Council's web pages for Mid Ulster LMP have been fully updated and are now live with additional information and advice for both residents and employers. The weblink remains the same: www.midulstercouncil.org/midulsterImp

A social media presence is also now active on Facebook and LinkedIn. These channels will allow the LMP to share information both on projects within the Action Plan, as well as general employment initiatives across the area which partner organisations are delivering.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MidUlsterLMP>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/mid-ulster-labour-market-partnership>

Mid Ulster Employability and Skills Register

The Mid Ulster Employability and Skills Register was formally launched on Friday 8 December 2023. A key element of the 2022-23 Action Plan, the comprehensive register has been developed as an information and signposting resource to assist both employers and residents in the area to identify and access local skills support that can help with employment, reskilling/upskilling, career progression or workforce development.

The register is available at:

<https://www.midulstercouncil.org/Impforemployers>

<https://www.midulstercouncil.org/Impforresidents>

Mid Ulster LMP Employment Academies and Programmes 2023/24

Delivery agents have been appointed and are in the process of commencing registrations and employer engagement. Further information regarding all programmes is available at: <https://www.midulstercouncil.org/Impprogrammes>

Academy/ Programme	Delivery Agent	Registration Details
HGV Academy	People 1 st	Registration closed Friday 27 October 2023.
Construction Academy	People 1 st	Registration open via application form from Monday 4 December 2023: https://forms.gle/o3CjknpfK3Y3Xedy7
Health and Social Care/Classroom Assistant Academy	Network Personnel	Registration open via email or telephone from Thursday 14 December 2023: Email: Imp@networkpersonnel.org.uk or telephone: 028 7963 1032
Tourism and Hospitality Academy	Network Personnel	Registration open via email or telephone from Thursday 14 December 2023:

		Email: imp@networkpersonnel.org.uk or telephone: 028 7963 1032
Women Returners Programme	People 1 st	Registration open via application form from Monday 4 December 2023: https://forms.gle/m5GWXhzfWK3RCvqJA
Employer-led Disability Inclusion Programme	Network Personnel	Registration open via email or telephone from Thursday 14 December 2023: Email: imp@networkpersonnel.org.uk or telephone: 028 7963 1032

Mid Ulster Jobs and Apprenticeship Fair

A Jobs and Apprenticeship Fair will be held in the Burnavon, Cookstown on Thursday 8 February 2024 in partnership with the Department for Communities Employer Services Branch. The Fair will allow employers from across the district to publicise current job vacancies as well as promoting Apprenticeship opportunities.

The event, which will be held during Apprenticeship Week 2024, provides employers with a platform to encourage those who would like to upskill or re-skill to consider an apprenticeship following the removal of age limit restrictions announced by the Department for the Economy in September 2023.

Mid Ulster LMP Celebration Event

A Celebration Event was held at the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on Wednesday 15 November 2023 to recognise and celebrate the achievements of participants who completed LMP employment academies or programmes in 2022-2023, as well as local businesses and support agencies who have assisted individuals with their journey back into meaningful employment.

Through the various programmes, participants have gained accredited qualifications as well as receiving employability support and mentoring, with over 140 individuals securing employment as a result. Other participants have continued their journey by re-entering education to gain additional skills before seeking employment. During the event, a number of participants spoke about the positive benefits of taking part in the programmes and the change to their daily lives.

3-year Mid Ulster LMP Strategy

Following guidance and advice from the Department for Communities, Mid Ulster LMP is now in the process of developing a 3-year Strategy with year-on-year Action Plans. This will enable the partnership to consider key issues and priorities over a longer term to achieve greatest impact. It is anticipated that a draft Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan for 2024-2025 will be submitted to Council for approval circ. March 2024.

3.3 NIBSUP / Business Start Up Performance 2023/24

In December 2023, as part of their audit of the Business Start Up Programme, the Department for the Economy (DfE) issued communication to Councils (**see**

	<p>Appendix 2) regarding the performance for the first 6 months of the financial year (April-Sept 2023) which are also the final 6 months of the GoForIt Programme. The letter confirms that the overall programme performance exceeded its 6-month statutory target of 785 jobs with 890 jobs created for 2022/23.</p> <p>In Mid Ulster during this period, the number of jobs created was 80, exceeding the statutory target of 77 by 3.</p> <p>3.4 Town Centre Spruce Up Scheme</p> <p>Following approval at November 2023 Committee, Council Officers have been in liaison with DFC and have submitted a funding bid seeking financial support from the Department to assist Council deliver a new Spruce Up Scheme in Mid Ulster's four largest towns.</p> <p>DFC's role is to support towns with a population size greater than 5,000 people. In Mid Ulster, this translates to the district's four largest towns; Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland.</p> <p>Council is now in possession of a Contract for Funding from DfC (Appendix 3) and this will now allow Council Officers to work at pace to progress to procure the services of a professional Independent Chartered Architect, who will have overall management responsibilities to oversee the scheme delivery from start to completion. Council Officers will then liaise with the appointed Architect to agree the application pack and assessment criteria. The appointed Architect will independently assess all applications.</p> <p>The scheme will be advertised early in the new year with applications issued, returned and assessed and offers made to the successful property/business owners to commit funds by 31 March 2024.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial</p> <p>Town Centre Spruce Up Scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful funding bid to DFC securing funding of £200,000 to deliver a Spruce Up Scheme (for Mid Ulster's 4 largest towns). • Council to procure and provide funding for the services of an Independent Chartered Architect to be paid from Council's Economic Development budget. <p>Human Officers time.</p> <p>Risk Management</p> <p>Town Centre Spruce Up Scheme</p>

	The scheme has a tight turnaround and will have to be advertised, applications issued, returned and assessed and offers made to the successful property/business owners to commit funds by 31 March 2024.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Minutes – 14.9.23 Note minutes of the meeting of Mid Ulster LMP held on 14 September 2023.
5.2	Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership Update Note update on Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership activity.
5.3	NIBSUP / Business Start Up Performance 2023/24 Note letter from the Department for the Economy re: NIBSUP/business start-up performance from April to September 2023.
5.4	Town Centre Spruce Up Scheme Note correspondence from Department for Communities (DFC), dated 6 December 2023, providing a Contract for Funding for delivery of a Town Centre Spruce Up Scheme confined to the town centre boundaries within Mid Ulster’s four largest towns of Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland. The funding contract was signed by Council’s Chief Executive and returned to DFC, as delegated authority was granted at the Development Committee in November 2023.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix 1 - Minutes of Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership - 14.9.23 Appendix 2 - Letter from DfE (7.12.23) re MUDC’s NI Business Start-up Programme Performance for 2023/2024 Appendix 3 - Contract for Funding Mid Ulster Towns Business Spruce Up Scheme 2023-2024



Minutes of Meeting Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP)

Date: Thursday 14th September 2023

Time: 10.00am

Venue: Via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Industry	Damian Power, LMP Chair (Engineering) Julie McKeown, LMP Vice Chair (Construction) Sinead McErlain (Manufacturing) Jill Robb (IT/Creative Services & Online Retail)
Education Sector	Catherine McHugh (St. Patrick's College, Dungannon) Cheryl Lane (Northern Regional College) Anna Egner (Northern Regional College) Padraig McNamee (South West College) Fintan McCann (CAFRE)
JBOs	Lorna Currie (Cookstown Jobs & Benefits Office) Gemma Devlin (Dungannon Jobs & Benefits Office)
Public Sector	Joanne Fitzgerald (Department for Economy) Cathy Lavery (Southern Health Trust) Lindsey Taylor (Northern Health Trust) Darran Long (Invest NI) Ciaran O'Kane (Invest NI)
Community Sector	Fintan McAliskey (STEP NI)
Elected Members	Cllr Dominic Molloy (Mid Ulster District Council) Cllr Deirdre Varsani (Mid Ulster District Council)
Trade Union	Paula Kelly (Trade Union)

In Attendance:

MUDC Officers	Marissa Canavan (Director of Organisational Development, Strategy & Performance) Paul McCreedy (Strategic Programmes Service Manager) Martina Totten (Social Inclusion Manager) Shelly Grimes (Labour Market Partnership Manager) Catherine McMenamin (Labour Market Partnership Administration & Finance Officer)
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Apologies:	<p>Frances Herron (Dungannon Jobs & Benefits Office) Amanda McFarland (Dungannon Jobs & Benefits Office) Angela Givan (Emerson) Ethna McNamee (Invest NI) Cllr Dan Kerr (MUDC) Fiona McKeown (MUDC) Celene O' Neill (MUDC)</p>
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1. Welcome & Apologies

D Power welcomed everyone to the meeting.

D Power acknowledged that a number of key stakeholders had updated their representative on the board and invited new members to introduce themselves.

2. Conflict of Interest Declaration

None declared.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 10th March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2023 were proposed by F McAliskey and seconded by Lorna Currie.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting dated 10th March 2023.

5. Manager's report

S Grimes shared a short explainer video to Mid Ulster LMP and advised that the video along with two shorter videos would be used for promotional activity going forward.

She updated the board on funding for LMPs in Northern Ireland. S Grimes thanked everyone who responded to the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on DfC's proposed plans for budget cuts and advised that 189 responses were submitted to the department with the majority being in relation to the potential cuts to LMP funding for 2023/24. As a result, funding was reinstated in late July 2023. She reported that Council received a letter of offer from the department on 28 July 2023 for £369,005.21 to support delivery of the 2023-24 Action Plan.



S Grimes reported that the LMP team have commenced procurement for delivery of the 2023/24 academies and programmes.

She provided an overview of the employment outcomes to date for the 2022-23 Action Plan:

- **Sector Focused Employability Academies- 51**
- **HGV/Transport Academy- 21**
- **Employer Led Disability Inclusion Programme- 12**
- **Registered Childminder Academy- 5**
- **Jobs Fair Events - 25**

S Grimes highlighted how positive it is to have 114 people back into the labour market and the impact that Mid Ulster LMP's work is having on the local employment rates.

She reported that the Mid Ulster Employability and Skills Register has been developed by the LMP team and is near to final sign off. This register details a comprehensive range of regional and local employability and skills delivery organisations and initiatives to provide stakeholders, including employers and residents with a complete understanding of the existing support landscape for employers, the unemployed, economically inactive, or those who are employed but wish to reskill/upskill to access better quality employment.

Once sign off has been received, the document would be circulated to all staff and made available to all residents and businesses via a download option once LMP web pages have been updated. The document will be kept up to date on a quarterly basis and used to signpost individuals.

S Grimes provided an overview of the programmes to be delivered under the 2023/24 Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan:

- ***Sectoral Academies in following sectors:***
 - Construction
 - Health and Social Care/Classroom Assistant
 - Tourism and Hospitality
 - HGV Academy
- Employer Led Disability Inclusion Programme
- Women Returners Programme
- Employer Engagement Programme

S Grimes stated that all the programmes would aim to improve employability outcomes and labour conditions at a local level.

S Grimes updated on other ongoing activity and advised that three local Jobs Fair that have taken place with the JBO offices in Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon. She also advised that a large regional Jobs Fair event is scheduled for early 2024 with details to be confirmed.



S Grimes reported on the 'Tech for Future Event' to be held in South West College in Dungannon on 4th October 2023. This event is aimed at post primary school pupils and their parent/s to avail of advice and guidance in relation to the need for IT roles in the Construction, Manufacturing and Engineering sectors in the district and asked that board members encourage participation of both businesses and students.

D Power asked if there were any questions.

S McErlain queried if the All-Age Apprenticeships would have an impact on LMP programmes. In response S Grimes advised that a huge impact is not anticipated as the LMP Sectoral Academies are shorter qualifications and there is sufficient demand for individuals to participate in LMP support programmes.

S McErlain welcomed the report and the positive outcomes from all programmes.

D Power discussed the positive outcomes to date from the 2022/23 LMP Programmes and acknowledged that we can now see the tangible benefits of supporting and moving local residents into employment that may otherwise not have been able to.

6. Multiply Project

S Grimes stated Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership along with all other LMPs in Northern Ireland have been approached by Department for Economy (DfE) on behalf of Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to potentially deliver a 'Multiply Programme'.

S Grimes highlighted a key element in all of this is timescales, with less than two years to design and deliver any interventions. DfE recognise the need to work in partnership with local government and, as such, have identified LMPs as an ideal vehicle through which Multiply could be delivered in Northern Ireland.

S Grimes shared a list of possible Multiply initiatives with meeting members and advised that all initiatives must be numeracy based as part of the conditions stipulated by DLUHC:

- **Maths for speakers of other languages** – for non-English speakers, this award would provide a qualification or place individuals on pathway to improving numeracy and language skills.
- **Engaging Mature Learners - Making It Count** – Target specifically over 40's, who have some of the lowest numeracy skills in Northern Ireland, with pastoral and additional support structures to complete informal training or to gain a numeracy related qualification.
- **Counting on you - Industry Upskilling** – Numeracy classes in the workplace with additional support to gain a qualification or informal recognition of numeracy learning.



- **Numeracy Boot Camps** – Short term numeracy learning through real life issues (nutrition, household finances, sport, pensions etc). Short courses, informal recognition, sign posting to formal qualifications.
- **Bring your grown up** – Numeracy programme through community and educational settings for children and parents to learn numeracy together.
- **Multiply officers** – to promote and engage with community groups and employers to take advantage of existing and new numeracy provision.
- **Numeracy champions** – Appoint, train and support numeracy champions across the community and voluntary sector, to lead on multiply schemes, managed through local government.

S Grimes reported that programme development is very much at planning stage but requested agreement in principle from the LMP Board to participate in the delivery of a potential Multiply Programme in Northern Ireland.

F McAliskey stated that councils leading Multiply using the LMP as a delivery mechanism is a good idea. He also highlighted that there is a need for financial literacy in local areas and these initiatives would benefit a large number of residents.

C Lane highlighted that the Strategic Alliance Group deliver similar programmes so it would be important to ensure there are no discrepancies and or duplication.

C McHugh mentioned to F McAliskey about the 'Money Matters' programme which is implemented through Young Enterprise which may be of use to some of STEP NI's service users. She agreed to forward details to F McAliskey.

D Power proposed the Multiply Programme to the LMP Board members and asked for approval.

D Power asked if anyone was against this motion. No objections therefore motion carried through.

S Grimes advised that full Council Approval would be required to participate in the delivery of Multiply and an update would be provided at the next meeting.

7. Membership Review

P McCreedy reminded the partnership that it is a departmental requirement to complete an internal audit on the LMP every year. He reported that an audit completed in June 2023 gave a 'satisfactory' assurance in terms of governance, risk management and control and acknowledged the work of the LMP team.

P McCreedy further advised that an earlier audit in 2022 recommended that membership is reviewed and updated in line with each council term or as and when needed in the interim. He reported that following the local elections in May 2023, several new councillors have been nominated to the LMP board and there have also been some changes in representatives of member organisations.

P McCreedy reported that an updated membership spreadsheet would be issued to members to review in terms of any potential gaps in representation. He stated the



importance of the LMP being reflective of Mid Ulster in terms of the public, private and community sectors and an update would be provided at the next meeting.

8. Any other business

S Grimes advised if members have any questions regarding topics discussed today or any other matters to contact the LMP Secretariat.

She also mentioned that the LMP annual report 2022/23 and Summary Action Plan 2023/24 would be available on the Council's website.

9. Date of next meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting in person in November 2023.

D Power thanked everyone for their participation and attendance at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 10.50am.

Mr Adrian McCreesh
Chief Executive Officer
Mid Ulster Council
adrian.mccreesh@midulstercouncil.org



Adelaide House,
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD
02890 257439
email: richard.leeman@economy-ni.gov.uk

Date: 7 December 2023

Dear Mr McCreesh

Mid Ulster Council NI Business Start-up Programme Performance 2023/24

As you are aware the Department has the responsibility of monitoring performance in relation to the NI Business Start-Up Programme against statutory targets set out in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The GoForIT programme has now ceased with the new 'Go Succeed' service launched in November 2023. The Department is therefore only monitoring the Council GoForIT performance up until 30 September 2023. New performance targets along with a new monitoring process are currently being developed and agreed with the Councils. I am writing to confirm your audited performance for the first 6 months of 2023/24, which represents the last 6 months of the GoForIT programme.

2023/24 Performance

The overall programme performance has exceeded its revised statutory 6-month target of 785 jobs created with 890 jobs created, in the period leading up to 30 September 2023. This is a noteworthy achievement given the effects of the transition to a new Go Succeed service, and reflects very well on the collective work of councils to promote support for business start-ups in their areas over the period.

10X

DECADE OF
INNOVATION



In relation to your own performance, the figures for 2022/23, along with your statutory target are set out below.

Statutory Jobs Target	Total Jobs Created 2022/23	Target Variance
77	80	+3

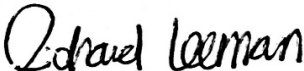
Future Development of Performance Indicators and Standards

DfE will engage with councils on how the new Go Succeed Service, is to be monitored under the 2015 Order, with effect from 13th November 2023.

If you have any queries about any matters referred to here, please contact my team by email at DfE-Entrepreneurship@economy-ni.gov.uk.

We wish you the best with the Go Succeed service.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Leeman
Head of Entrepreneurship Branch

Copied to:
Ms Fiona McKeown
Director of Economic Development
fiona.mckeown@midulstercouncil.org

NORTH WEST DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Mr Adrian McCreesh
Chief Executive
Mid Ulster District Council
76-78 Burn Road
Cookstown
BT80 8DR

Telephone: (028) 82 55516

Email: Sharon.mcgowan@communities-ni.gov.uk

Our ref: NWDO/W/RV/MU/01/23

Date: 06 December 2023

Project Reference No	NWDO/W/RV/MU/01/23
Project Applicant	Mid Ulster District Council
Project Title	Mid Ulster Town Business Spruce Up Scheme 2023/2024
Amount of Grant	£200,000.00
Period of Grant	06 December 2023 – 30 September 2024
Financial Systems & Controls Assessment rating (If appropriate)	Governance Statement Declaration in place.

Dear Adrian

1. Award Approval

The Department for Communities (“the Department”) is pleased to inform you that your application for Grant funding towards the above project/service has been successful.

Your application is approved on the basis of the details set out in the application form, which you completed on 04/12/2023 and any other detail provided throughout the assessment process prior to the date of this letter. Specifically, Grant is offered on condition that the project delivers its aims and produces the agreed performance targets/outputs and pattern of expenditure set out in this Contract for Funding. Approval is subject to your acceptance of all the conditions set out in this letter.

2. Definitions

In this Letter:-

“the Organisation” means Mid Ulster District Council.

“the Project” means Mid Ulster Town Business Spruce Up Scheme and as further defined under capital items below.

“the Grant” means a sum up to a maximum of £200,000.00 (see Section 19 – Breakdown of Grant Award) of which:

“capital items” means an amount up to £200,000 towards a MUDC Town Business Spruce Up Scheme, to include (but not limited to) External Works, to include power washing, painting, repairs to guttering, windows, doors, signage and shutter art; and Internal Works, to include reconfiguration to improve public accessibility.

“the project start and completion date” means the day by which the project must start and be completed so as to achieve the performance outputs as specified in paragraph 3 below.

“the performance outputs” means the performance outputs specified in the Schedule hereto (see section 18);

“the equality legislation” means the statutory provisions from time to time in force in Northern Ireland in relation to discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, sexual orientation, gender or political opinion;

3. Funding Period and Termination

The Organisation shall not commence the Project before 06 December 2023 and shall end the Project no later than 30 September 2024.

The Organisation should carry out and complete the Project in order to achieve the Performance Outputs by 30 September 2024. The final claim for payment should be submitted as soon as possible after the project end date.

The Department shall be under no obligation to make payment on foot of any claim received after the expiry of a period of 3 months from the Project completion date in the case of revenue and equipment Grants, or in the case of construction and refurbishment Grants, the expiry of a period of 12 months from the project completion date.

The Department reserves the right to terminate this Contract for Funding at any time by giving 3 months written notice to the Organisation of termination. Any liabilities properly incurred or earned before the date of termination will be payable by the Department in accordance with the terms of this Contract for Funding.

4. Preconditions

Prior to the release of the Grant under this Contract for Funding the Organisation shall:

- 1) Ensure that all aspects of the programme are procured in accordance with agreed guidance.

5. Default

If:-

- (i) any information provided by the Organisation or any representative of the Organisation in connection with or for the purposes of this contract and whether before or after the date of this letter is misleading or incorrect in any material respect;
- (ii) the Organisation is in breach of any obligation on the part of the Organisation contained in this letter and such breach is incapable of remedy or if capable of remedy remains unremedied for a period of 30 days after written notice by the Department;
- (iii) an order is made or an effective resolution is passed for the winding up of the Organisation or a Receiver is appointed over the undertaking or a material part of the undertaking of the Organisation;
- (iv) the Organisation is unable to pay its debts within the meaning of Article 103 of the Insolvency (NI) Order 1989;
- (v) an administration order is made in respect of the Organisation,

then in any such event or events the Department shall be under no obligation to make any payment or further payments of the Grant and the Organisation shall forthwith on written demand by the Department repay the whole of the amount of the Grant paid under this letter or such lesser amount as the Department may at its sole discretion so determine. Furthermore in the event of the Organisation defaulting under section 5 (i) of the contract, criminal proceedings may be instigated against the Organisation under Article 4 of the Social Need Order (NI) 1986 as the Department may at its sole discretion so determine.

6. Grant Conditions

- (i) The Grant (a breakdown of which is set out in the Schedule hereto) shall only be made in response to claims in writing using the Department's official claim form.
- (ii) Claims for the Grant to the extent that they relate to expenditure by the Organisation on equipment, goods and services shall be accompanied by original receipts or paid invoices identifying such equipment or goods by reference to model or serial number or such other evidence as is acceptable to the Department for such expenditure.
NB The only exception to supplying original receipts with the Claim for Payment is where it has already been agreed with the Department that vouching will be carried out during verification visits.
- (iii) The Grant towards agreed revenue or capital items may in exceptional circumstances be made in advance and claims in respect of such items shall accordingly be accompanied by an estimate of the expenditure on such items which the Organisation expects to incur during the period (which shall not exceed 3 months) to which the claim relates. Where payment is made in advance, original invoices in respect of actual expenditure incurred must subsequently be sent to the Department within agreed timescales. The Department will then make adjustments as necessary to the next claim. All further claims shall also be accompanied by verified evidence acceptable to the Department including **original** receipts and invoices for expenditure on such items during the immediately preceding claim period.
- (iv) Grant shall only be payable in respect of goods or equipment which are new, unless prior written consent from the Department is obtained.
- (v) Grant shall not be payable in respect of VAT recoverable by the Organisation.
- (vi) A dedicated current account must be maintained for the disbursement of all project expenditure. Details of the account must be provided on the

form provided with this letter. The Grant will be paid directly into this bank account. The bank account should be identified as a Departmental funded project account and must be maintained by the Organisation for the purposes of the Project.

- (vii) Organisations involved in the delivery of multiple projects may already have a financial system using cost centres rather than multiple bank accounts. Such organisations may wish to negotiate with the Department to retain this system for the purposes of managing the project. These negotiations will require the Applicant to demonstrate to the Department's satisfaction that the systems in place guarantee a clear audit trail with regard to all aspects of the project finances. Should subsequent system checks reveal that the Department's requirements are not being met in this respect then the use of a dedicated bank account will become mandatory.
- (viii) The Department will make every effort to pay claims promptly but accepts no liability in respect of loss attributable to delay in the payment of claims or to any suspension, reduction or cancellation of Grant.

7. General Conditions

The Organisation shall:-

- (i) **grant use** - apply the Grant solely for the purposes of carrying out and implementing the Project;
- (ii) **changes** - immediately inform the Department in writing of any circumstances which will or may affect the ability of the Organisation to carry out the Project; (Examples include: major changes to the project; the potential failure to meet agreed outputs/targets; posts becoming vacant through sickness; Maternity Leave; and any change in the financial relationship with any other funder, including cessation or reduction in other funders' awards; This list is not exhaustive)

- (iii) immediately inform the Department in writing of any proposed change to the overall expenditure for the project or profile amounts for each category of expenditure as set out in the Breakdown of Costs/ Expenditure Schedule. *Organisations should note that the Department will only consider re-profiling in exceptional circumstances and transferring of funds, secured with the agreement of the Department, will be restricted between similar categories of expenditure;
- (iv) not without the prior written consent of the Department vary or alter the Project; its use, financing or ownership; start and end dates;
- (v) **constitution** - not alter or vary its memorandum or articles of association without the prior written consent of the Department;
- (vi) **assignment** - not without the prior written consent of the Department assign or in any way encumber this contract for funding or any benefit derived or to be derived by the Organisation under it;
- (vii) **duplicate funding** - not seek, or make any application for or accept any financial assistance from any other Government Department, Agency or other funding body in respect of the expenditure for which Grant is or may be payable under the terms of this letter; provided always that the provision shall not apply to financial assistance which may be payable by another funding body but the Department shall be entitled to reduce the Grant available under this letter by an amount if equal to such financial assistance;

You have confirmed to the Department that the following funding is in place for this project;

1. £20,000 contribution from MUDC
(£15,000 Independent Architect / £5,000 Marketing & Promotion)
2. A 20% contribution from successful applicants to the scheme.

You must advise the Department immediately if there are any changes.

- (viii) **insurance** - insure any items of an insurable nature which have been obtained with the benefit of the Grant to the full replacement value thereof and furnish the Department with copies of all relevant policies of insurance on demand by the Department;
- (ix) insure in the name of the Organisation all buildings or premises which are now or may in the future be erected and/or grant aided, against loss or damage by fire or theft, for a sum equal to the cost of their reinstatement or replacement and keep the same so insured;
- (x) if the buildings or premises so insured, are in any part thereof destroyed or damaged, expend without delay the monies received under such insurance in rebuilding, reinstating or replacing the same;
- (xi) **maintenance** - maintain in good condition all property, equipment, machinery, furniture, fixtures and fittings and assets which the Department has funded or part funded;
- (xii) **inventory of assets** – establish and maintain an inventory of all fixed assets acquired, built or improved wholly or partly using the Department’s Grant, whether owned by the applicant or third parties. An asset is defined as an item that will not be used up within 12 months and which is not intended to be sold before the end of its useful life. The inventory should show the date of purchase; description of the asset; net price paid; location of the title deeds; serial or identification numbers; location of the asset; date of disposal; and sale of proceeds net of VAT.
- (xiii) **disposal of assets** – not dispose of any asset without the prior authorisation of the Department. If any asset obtained with the benefit of the Grant is disposed of within 4 years from the date of acceptance of this letter, the Organisation shall, on demand, repay to the Department so much of the Grant as the Department considers is reasonable;

- (xiv) **financial controls** - establish and maintain effective financial control systems in relation to its operations generally but specifically in relation to the Project
- (xv) maintain proper and effective accounting records which identify individual financial transactions relating to the Project, including original invoices and receipts;
- (xvi) **provision of records** - from time to time upon request by the Department furnish the Department or the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland with all such financial accounting and other information relating directly or indirectly to the Project as the Department or the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland may request. Original documents or verified true copies must also be produced upon request. Failure to produce the original documents or satisfactory agreed substitutes could result in requests for repayment of Grant;
- (xvii) **access** - permit the Department, the Departments Agents and the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland to enter upon any premises owned or occupied by the Organisation for the purpose of inspecting any asset or accounting record relating to the Project.
- (xviii) **retention of records** - ensure that all records and information relating to the implementation of the Project and its financing are retained for a period of not less than 7 years following the last payment of Grant under this letter and make any such record available to the Department and the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland for inspection upon request by the Department or the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland. If you intend to claim Grant on eligible expenditure made by others acting on your behalf you must ensure that you have a legally binding agreement with them which specifies what information is to be provided and when. You must ensure that those acting for you have original documentary evidence to support all the payments they make for you and for which you wish to claim Grant;
- (xix) **publicity** - include appropriate references to the assistance made available by the Department to the Organisation under this letter in any

publicity or brochures or other material produced by or on behalf of the Organisation and in which the Project is mentioned.

In addition the Organisation will provide copies of all publicity material relating to the project including press cuttings, advertisements or other relevant details. Adequate advance warning should also be given of forthcoming events and/or launches etc. The Department shall be entitled to publish details of the assistance referred to in the Contract for Funding at such times and in such a manner as it may decide. The Organisation shall provide any further information about the project requested by the Department and shall permit the publication of that and any other related information.

- (xx) **data protection** - acknowledge that information on applications and claims for payment for Grant assistance is stored on computer and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, and that such information may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000; in addition this shall include any applicable national implementing Laws as amended from time to time including (i) the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Law Enforcement Directive (LED) and (ii) Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 to the extent that it relates to processing of personal data and privacy; and (iii) all applicable Law about the processing of personal data and privacy;
- (xxi) **overpayments** - shall repay the Department any overpayment forthwith on first demand or becoming aware that Grant has been overpaid, whichever first occurs;
- (xxii) **political or religious** - ensure that the Grant shall not be used for the purpose of or in anyway connected with the promoting of any political party or religious viewpoint. No aspect of the activity being funded should be party political in intention, use or presentation or likely to be perceived as discriminatory. Any activities, such as campaigning, by the Organisation must be in furtherance of, and ancillary to, its main purpose.
- (xxiii) **training** - attend and participate in such workshops and training sessions as the Department deems appropriate.

- (xxiv) **statutory charges (capital projects)** - acknowledge that the conditions of repayment of financial assistance may in accordance with Article 4(8) of the Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, be a Statutory Charge upon the property;
- (xxv) **legislation** - comply with the equality legislation to the extent that the same applies to the Organisation. No aspect of the activity being funded should be party political in intention, use or presentation or likely to be perceived as discriminatory on the grounds of race, disability, sexual orientation, gender or political opinion. Any activities, such as campaigning, by the Organisation must be in furtherance of, and ancillary to, its main purpose;
- (xxvi) **liability** - by accepting this letter acknowledge that the Department accepts no liability to the Organisation other than as expressly provided for, in and subject to, the terms and conditions stated in this letter. Further, the Organisation shall indemnify the Department against all actions, proceedings, costs, claims, demands and liabilities arising out of, in respect of, or in connection with this letter, caused or contributed to by the negligence or default of the Organisation, or by any circumstances within its control.
- (xxvii) **employment** - the Department accepts no responsibility or liability for the staff employed on the Project. The Applicant shall be the employer of staff required for the Project and shall be responsible for all matters in connection with their employment. The Applicant shall comply with the requirements of all EC Directives and legislation from time to time in force relating to working conditions, health and safety at work etc. The Applicant shall comply with the requirements of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 and 1988, the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and any enactments amending, extending or replacing the same.
- (xxviii) **conflict of interest** – declare any actual or potential Conflicts of Interest which could exist as a direct consequence of the Organisation’s use of

the funding to be provided by the Department and record same in a Register of Conflicts.

- (xxix) **Charity law** - ensure that the organisation, operates within, and meets its obligations under charity law in Northern Ireland and further promotes, where relevant to the project, the charitable sector's obligations under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.
- (xxx) **Public Accounts Committee** – attend Public Accounts Committee hearings on request and fully co-operate in an honest and candid manner at such hearings.
- (xxxii) **Government Funders Database – requirements for Government Departments, NDPBs and Councils etc.** Ensure that any award to a Voluntary & Community Sector organisation made from this funding is recorded on the Government Funders Database no later than 4 weeks from the date the award is made.
- (xxxiii) **child protection and safeguarding vulnerable adults** – The grant recipient must provide assurance that they have a Safeguarding Policy in place, and confirm that they operate effective procedures and controls, including appropriate checks, to ensure the safeguarding and protection of children and vulnerable adults.

8. Fraud

- (i) The organisation (and/or its representatives) may be prosecuted if it fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with any condition subject to which financial assistance has been given to the organisation requiring it to inform the Department of any event whereby the financial assistance becomes repayable.
- (ii) The Department may by notice require the organisation to furnish to the Department such information, or to produce for examination on behalf of the Department such books, records or other documents, as may be specified in the notice for the purpose of enabling the Department to

determine whether any condition subject to which the financial assistance is given is satisfied or is being complied with or whether the financial assistance has become repayable in whole or in part in accordance with any such condition.

- (iii) The organisation (and/or its representatives) may be prosecuted if in purported compliance with a notice issued under paragraph (ii) it knowingly or recklessly makes any statement or produces any document which is false in a material particular.
- (iv) The organisation (and/or its representatives) may be prosecuted under Article 4 of the Social Need Order (NI) 1986, if without reasonable excuse, it fails to comply with a notice under paragraph (ii).
- (v) It will be the responsibility of the Organisation to take whatever action is necessary to minimise the risk of fraud and to notify the Department immediately of any instances of attempted, suspected or proven fraud. Following a Departmental investigation all instances of suspected fraud will be reported to the Police and criminal proceedings may be instigated if deemed appropriate.

9. Sharing of Information

All Government Departments, Agencies and other funding bodies may share information to enable them to prevent and detect fraudulent applications and to co-ordinate the processing of complementary applications. Accordingly, information provided by the Organisation during the application and assessment process, monitoring returns and any other information provided by the Organisation may be made available to other Departments/Agencies for the purpose of ensuring the accuracy of information and preventing or detecting crime. Such information may also be placed in the public domain.

10. Monitoring & Evaluation

The Department may from time to time monitor and evaluate the Project by reference to the Performance Outputs and the Organisation shall provide such information and assistance for these purposes as the Department may request.

The Department may also from time to time require the Organisation to provide evidence that the Organisation have fulfilled their statutory obligation in relation to HMRC in respect of PAYE and National Insurance contributions.

11. Withholding of Grant

If the Department has instructed an investigation to be carried out in relation to the Project, the Department shall be entitled pending the outcome of any such investigation to withhold payment of the Grant or any part or parts thereof; provided always that payment of the Grant shall be reinstated as soon as is reasonably practicable after the conclusion of the investigation unless an event of default under paragraph 5 has occurred.

The Department may withhold all or part of the Grant and may require all or part of the Grant to be repaid if it considers that you have not complied with any of the terms and conditions in this Contract for Funding.

12. Notice

Any letter, notice or demand by the Department shall be sufficiently served on the Organisation if it is delivered by hand at, or sent by post to, the Organisation's last known address.

13. Duration

The obligations of the Organisation under this letter shall remain in force for a period of 4 years following the date of acceptance of this letter; with the exception of 7 (xviii), which shall remain in force for a period of 7 years

following the date of the last payment of Grant under this letter in line with legislative requirements.

14. Acceptance

This letter is issued in duplicate and accordingly if the Organisation is prepared to accept the foregoing offer please return one complete copy of this letter duly signed and dated on behalf of the Organisation.

In accepting this offer the Organisation is agreeing to comply with the conditions contained in this letter and any guidance that the Department subsequently issues.

This letter may be made available to other Departments/Agencies and other funding bodies for the purposes of preventing or detecting fraud.

15. Availability

The foregoing offer shall remain open for a period of 4 weeks from the date of this letter. Failure to return one complete copy of this letter duly signed and dated on behalf of the Organisation within this period shall result in the offer being deemed as withdrawn.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon McGowan".

Sharon McGowan
North West Development Office

OFFICIAL GRANT ACCEPTANCE

Project Reference No	NWDO/W/RV/MU/01/23
Project Applicant	Mid Ulster District Council
Project Title	Mid Ulster Town Business Spruce Up Scheme 2023/2024
Amount of Grant	£200,000.00
Period of Grant	06 December 2023 – 30 September 2024

I _____ have authority **on behalf of**
(Name of Chief Executive in Block Capitals)

MID ULSTER DISTRICT COUNCIL
(Name of Organisation in Block Capitals)

to accept the offer of Grant set out in the letter dated **06 December 2023** and agree to deliver the above project on the terms and conditions therein.

Signed by
(Chief Executive)

Witnessed by
(Official)

Name in Block Capitals

Name in Block Capitals

Date

Date

BANK DETAILS

Project Reference No	NWDO/W/RV/MU/01/23
Project Applicant	Mid Ulster District Council
Project Title	Mid Ulster Town Business Spruce Up Scheme 2023/2024
Amount of Grant	£200,000.00
Period of Grant	06 December 2023 – 30 September 2024

Please complete Bank details below.

Name of Organisation: _____

Name of Account: _____

Bank Name : _____

Bank Address: _____

Sort Code: _____ **Account Number:** _____

Signed by
(Chief Executive)

Witnessed by
(Official)

Name in Block Capitals

Name in Block Capitals

Date

Date

18 Project Targets and Output Measures

Target Date:	31 January 2024	Output Measure:	Initial Stakeholder meeting
Target Description:	Arrange a meeting with all stakeholders to commence the project and monthly thereafter.		
Target Date:	31 March 2024	Output Measure:	Contracts Issued
Target Description:	Applications issued, returned, and assessed. Contracts issued to a minimum of 50 Property Owners/Tenants and deliver 20% match funding from Property Owners/Tenants for the property improvements.		
Target Date:	30 September 2024	Output Measure:	After Photos and/or Construction Works completed
Target Description:	To deliver high-quality external and/or internal access improvements to a minimum of 50 properties across Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown & Magherafelt town centres.		
Target Date:	30 September 2024	Output Measure:	Pre/Post Scheme Business Surveys completed
Target Description:	To increase the number of traders who rate the project area as good or very good by XX% (TBC)		
Target Date:	30 September 2024	Output Measure:	Amount of private sector investment
Target Description:	To stimulate a minimum of £40,000 private sector investment.		
Target Date:	30 September 2024	Output Measure:	Reduction in vacancy levels
Target Description:	To reduce the property vacancy levels by 5% across Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown & Magherafelt town centres.		
Target Date:	30 September 2025	Output Measure:	PPE completion
Target Description:	MUDC to complete post project surveys and a Post Project Evaluation within a 12-month period of project completion and disseminate lessons learned.		

19 Breakdown of Grant Award (by financial year)

Eligible Expenditure Category and Breakdown	Total Grant Award	Year 1	Year 2
	From: 06 December 2023 To: 30 September 2024	From: 06 December 2023 To: 31 March 2024	From: 01 April 2024 To: 30 September 2024
CAPITAL			
CPD Fees	£6,500	£5,000	£1,500
Property improvement Scheme, to include (but not limited to): External Works, to include power washing, painting, repairs to guttering, windows, doors, signage and shutter art; and Internal Works, to include reconfiguration to improve public accessibility.	£200,000	£170,000	£30,000
Total Capital	£206,500	£175,000	£31,500

Expenditure Schedule

* These are anticipated amounts and dates and should only be taken as a guide. Normally Grant will be released on receipt of paid invoices/ receipts up to the maximum as detailed on the Breakdown of Grant Award and paid quarterly during the period of the project.

Date(s) Expenditure Due To Be Incurred	*Anticipated Amount	Brief breakdown of Grant amount against eligible expenditure category	*Anticipated Payment dates	Related Terms and Conditions (as per CFF)
06 Dec 2023 – 30 Sep 2024	£200,000	Property Improvement Scheme, to include (but not limited to): External Works, to include power washing, painting, repairs to guttering, windows, doors, signage, and shutter art; and Internal Works, to include reconfiguration to improve public accessibility.	06 Dec 2023 – 30 Sep 2024	<p>Quarterly Progress Report and DfC Claim for Payment forms to be completed and submitted to NWDO, accompanied by agreed supporting documentation by:</p> <p><u>12/05/24</u>, to cover: 06/12/23 – 31/03/24.</p> <p><u>12/08/24</u>, to cover: 01/04/24 – 30/06/24.</p> <p><u>05/11/24</u>, to cover: 01/07/24 – 30/09/24.</p>
				<p>Progress Meetings held on a monthly basis <u>beginning December 2023.</u></p>
				<p>Post Project Evaluation Report to be completed and submitted to NWDO by <u>30/09/25.</u></p>