

<b>Report on</b>	Sperrins Partnership - Annual Update for 2023/24 and New Three-Year Partnership Agreement (April 2024 to March 2027)
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	13 June 2024
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<p><b>Sperrins Partnership - Annual Update for 2023/24 and New Three Year Partnership Agreement (April 2024 to March 2027)</b></p> <p>To provide Members with an update on key activities carried out by Sperrins Partnership for 2023/24 and seek agreement to enter into a new three year Sperrins Partnership Agreement for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27.</p>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<p><b>Sperrins Partnership - Annual Update for 2023/24 and New Three Year Partnership Agreement (April 2024 to March 2027)</b></p> <p>The Sperrins Future Search Conference entitled 'The Sperrins – Reaching New Heights, Realising Our Potential' was held in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on 27 – 29 September 2017.</p> <p>The event brought together a group of key stakeholders to draft and agree an action plan for the future development of the Sperrins and in particular the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). (Action Plan available on Schedule 1).</p> <p>The Sperrins Partnership Project (previously Sperrins Future Search) is a joint collaboration between 4 councils; Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council, who back in 2018 committed to equal financial contribution towards its delivery and have also funded the Sperrins Future Search initiative.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>

**3.1**

**Sperrins Partnership - Annual Update for 2023/24 and New Three Year Partnership Agreement (April 2024 to March 2027)**

The Partnership has developed and been leading on a number of initiatives including the following:

**3.1.1**

The Outdoor Partnership (TOP) - Sperrins Outdoor Activity Development Officer

The Sperrins Partnership in collaboration and with support from Sport NI and Partner Councils, secured funding through to The Outdoor Partnership (TOP) to appoint an Outdoor Activity Development Officer for the Sperrins. The post commenced in February 2023 and funding has been confirmed up to September 2026.

The Outdoor Partnership is an organisation based in Wales who work to support people across the UK to take up outdoor activities as a life-long pursuit. Their vision is: *“Enhancing people’s lives through outdoor activity.”* This means enhancing people’s physical and mental health, and wellbeing while improving the economic return and the social value of outdoor activity such as walking, cycling and adventure sports.

The Outdoor Activity Development Officer role is to build capacity, identify training and education needs within outdoor sports and recreation across Sperrins Communities.

The Outdoor Partnership is the main employer and manage the project with support from Partner Councils. Other aims of the project include enabling communities through promoting sustainable use of the environment, enhancing partnership working through local delivery and improving coach and education and opportunities for volunteering.

Agreement has previously been sought through the 4 partner Council to commit to contributing £4,000 per year for a 2-year period, up to September 2026, to support the Outdoor Activity Development Officer in their role. This contribution has been agreed with all partner Councils.

An overview of projects delivered or being progressed include:

- (a) Two Power of the Outdoors Workshops delivered.  
Theme: EDI & Health and Wellbeing

Two Power of the Outdoors Workshops were delivered in November 2023 & January 2024 in partnership with Sperrins Partnership & Sport NI.

Workshop 1 - Power of the Outdoors for mental well-being

This workshop invited participants to listen to experts in areas of Mental Health and Adventure Therapy by exploring key findings from research and projects. Participants had time to share learning from those who provide activities, to those who work in the community and the health sector. The

aim of the workshops was to make positive changes using outdoor activities to promote better mental health and wellbeing.

Workshop 2 - Power of the Outdoors for All:

This workshop provided insights and innovative solutions that can encourage clubs and organisations to be more effective in making the outdoors accessible to all. The workshop involved practical workshops on current inclusion activities and projects.

Both events were fully attended with over 100 participants in total.

(b) Trail Maintenance Program: Theme- Community Development & Volunteering

This programme involved consultations with Fermangah and Omagh District Council & Mid Ulster District Council on maintenance and upkeep of two trail centre's at Gortin and Davagh. A specialist trail contractor was appointed through The Outdoor Partnership (TOP) and site visits were delivered between the months of January and March 2024. The contractor is now due to conduct surveys of both trail centres to develop snag lists which will give a clear indication of the level of maintenance required at these sites. A volunteer programme will be developed to conduct this work at the trail centres and the survey that was conducted will include a clear indication of the work the volunteers can do.

(c) Field Studies Training: Theme- Community Development & Health and Well-being

In partnership with Field Studies Ireland, The Outdoor Partnership (TOP) have developed and organised 2 wellbeing training workshops called 'Taking Notice', designed to support a connection to local nature through place-based learning. Two training sessions have been organised catering for over 20 members of Council staff which are due to be delivered in June.

(d) Coach Education: Theme- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Inclusive Adventure/Club Development

Money raised through an abseil fund raiser organised by The Outdoor Partnership (TOP) to the value of £5000 will be used to deliver inclusive adventure programmes aimed at increasing participation within EDI groups. The funding will support arrangements to organise a Climbing For All course which is due to be delivered at the Foyle Arena in April. Four members of Foyle Arena, wall climbing staff will benefit from this training along with The Hanging Rockers Climbing Club who have an additional four members on the course. The hope is to then develop further inclusive climbing programmes.

(e) Youth Ambassador Program- Community Development

A youth ambassador Project has been developed in partnership with Sperrins Partnership.

Project Vision:

*“Provide young people with the opportunity to develop their outdoor skills and knowledge through sustainable recreational pathways and environmental, nature topics that are specific to the local rural communities based around the Sperrins AONB”.*

The National Lottery, Awards for All is currently being explored as a method of funding this project.

(f) Rural Area Partnership In Derry (RAPID) Survey DEAs- All Themes

A consultation with RAPID has been carried out to look at the development of outdoor activity hubs in the rural DEAs of Derry City and Strabane District Council which would also act as methods of community development and social prescribing through outdoor activities. An online community consultation is currently being circulated with the intention to deliver further focus groups to identify the project scope. Peace Plus funding is currently being explored to fund this initiative.

(g) Inclusion Steering Group set up: Theme- Inclusion

A Northern Ireland Inclusive Adventure Steering Group has been established since the Power of the Outdoors Workshop was held. It was agreed that the group would remain informal and to be used as a method of sharing information around inclusion projects, offering participants the opportunity to share ideas and build relationships to develop future projects in collaboration with other group participants.

Members will be kept updated the outlined projects developments. Further information on the project can be found here [Northern Ireland-The Sperrins - The Outdoor Partnership.](#)

Sperrins AONB Management

3.1.2

Members may recall receiving an update on 5-year funding secured through the DAERA Environment Fund Strategic Strand 2023 - 2028 to enable the Sperrins Partnership to develop a Management Plan for Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This is a long-standing matter which the Sperrins Partnership Board had supported as a key issue facing the region.

(a) Sperrins AONB Officer

An AONB Project Officer has been recruited and commenced their post on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The post is fully funded through the DAERA Environment Fund. The AONB Officer will assist with developing the Management Plan and Action Plan. An AONB Officer steering group has

been identified and meet quarterly to progress with developing the management plan in collaboration with key stakeholders. An AONB consultant has been appointed to undertake the consultation process with all key stakeholders and the public. This is a critical element of the plan development. The deadline for plan development is November 2025.

(b) Sperrins AONB Consultation

An external agency (S3 Solutions) has been appointed to undertake the consultation process with key stakeholders and the public. The consultation process will commence beginning of April through to mid-June 2024. The consultation responses will inform the management plan and it is vital to the plan development, that the process is successful. Elected Members and key government departments and agencies will be engaged to consult with before going out to consult with community and voluntary sectors. A number of in person events are planned throughout the four Council areas in May/ June 2024.

The Sperrins Partnership team will work closely with S3 Solutions to ensure engagement is far reaching and in an attempt to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to provide input into this important part of the management plan's development. Elected Members in each of the 4 Partner Council areas will be afforded the opportunity to join a meeting to take part in the consultation and provide input. Members are encouraged to take part and have their say in the consultation. The suggested engagement timelines are as follows:

(c) Sperrins AONB Consultation Project Management Process & Timeframe

*Stage 1: Early Planning and Research* (February 19th – March 18th, 2024)

Step 1 focuses on planning and the co-production of the approach to contract delivery.

*Stage 2: Consultation Preparation* (March 18th – April 15th, 2024)

The second phase of the engagement process focuses on preparations for consultation.

*Stage 3: Engagement* (April 15<sup>th</sup> – June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024)

The third phase of this contract focuses on the engagement of key stakeholders. Broken down as follows:

- ❖ Stage 1 Stakeholder Group Engagement will commence 15<sup>th</sup> April – 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024
  - Elected Members
  - Sperrins Partnership Board
  - Government Agencies and Departments
  - Landscape Partnerships

Following Stage 1 Stakeholder engagement, the draft themes and findings will be collated and once approved, will be shared with the Stage 2 Stakeholder group as an informed guide for further engagement.

❖ Stage 2 Stakeholder Group Engagement will commence 20<sup>th</sup> May to 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024

- Community and Voluntary Groups
- All Representative bodies
- 8 x in person Public Consultation Events (2 per council area, one during the day and one in the evening) as follows:

Council Area	Location	Date and Time
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	Glór Dhún Geimhin	Tuesday 21st May 12noon – 2pm
	Glenshane Community Development	Thursday 23 <sup>rd</sup> May 6.30pm – 8.30pm
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Glenelly House	Tuesday 28 <sup>th</sup> May 12noon – 2pm
	Learmount Resource Centre	Thursday 30 <sup>th</sup> May 6.30pm – 8.30pm
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	An Creagan	Tuesday 4 <sup>th</sup> June 12noon – 2pm
	Gortin Community Centre	Thursday 6 <sup>th</sup> June 6.30pm to 8.30pm
<b>Mid Ulster District Council</b>	<b>Broughderg Community Hall</b>	<b>Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June from 12noon – 2pm</b>
	<b>An Carn, Maghera</b>	<b>Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June 6.30pm – 8.30pm</b>

(d) Other projects currently being progressed and delivered through the DAERA Environment Fund include:

- Fixed Point Photography (FPP)

Fixed Point Photography is an effective method of recording and monitoring visual changes within the landscape. It involves taking a photograph, from the same point, at intervals over a period of time. Eight locations have been identified and agreed across the Sperrins and the project will commence in Spring 2024.

- Establishment of Sperrin AONB Wildfire Group

Research has commenced to understand the role remit, resource and responsibilities of establishing a Wildfire Group for the Sperrins. Once this is known then members will be established with a view to forming a functioning Wildfire Group for the AONB.

<p>3.1.3</p> <p>3.1.4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Review and Update of Sperrin Outdoor Recreation Action Plan</u></li> </ul> <p>The original Sperrins Outdoor Recreation Action Plan was produced in 2013 by Sport NI through the then operational Sperrins Outdoor Recreation Forum. The plan is outdated and requires a detailed review of the action identified within. This review will be facilitated through the Sperrins Stakeholder Group which is part of The Outdoor Partnership Sperrins Outdoor Activity Development Officers project.</p> <p><u>Sperrins Walking Programme</u></p> <p>Members may recall receiving an update on the Sperrins Walking Programme 2023/2024. The programme was a huge success with a high majority of walks selling out and feedback from Partner Councils and those who took part was extremely positive. Due to the success and in an attempt to build on the event, the 4 Partner Councils are working in collaboration to deliver the programme again commencing in Autumn 2024 with one element taking place in Spring 2025. The programme will offer a range of walks and will include individual Council specifications.</p> <p><u>New Three Year Sperrins Partnership Agreement (for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2027)</u></p> <p>The Sperrins Partnership Agreement was drafted and agreed by the 4 Sperrins Councils when the project was initiated in October 2020. The initial Partnership Agreement ended on 31 March 2024.</p> <p>A new Partnership Agreement was prepared by Officers from the 4 Sperrins Partner Councils, with input from the respective legal teams, to provide an accurate reflection of the current position of the Sperrins Partnership model. A new Sperrins Partnership Agreement was subsequently drafted and this is enclosed for Members attention on <b>Appendix 1</b>. It is recommended that Members approve the Partnership Agreement.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p><b>Other Considerations</b></p>
<p>4.1</p>	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p>Financial:</p> <p><b>Sperrins Partnership - Annual Update for 2023/24 and New Three Year Partnership Agreement (April 2024 to March 2027)</b></p> <p>The Sperrins Partnership Project is presently funded by 4 Partner Councils at a total annual cost of £88,000. Officers are continuously looking at options to secure additional funding from external sources for relevant projects. External funding has been secured through the DAERA Environment Fund Strategic Strand 2023 – 2028 to develop a Management Plan for the Sperrins AONB. The</p>

Sperrins Partnership provides the delivery model to ensure the Management Plan can be achieved.

Councils currently contribute £22,000 annually to the Sperrins Partnership and have done so since October 2020. To date there has not been any further additional financial requests to Council to support project activities. The funding provided, £88,000, mostly covers salary costs allowing for a small amount of programming costs.

A recent review of Sperrins Partnership project activities and projected salary costs over the next 3 years indicates that contributions may require to be incrementally increased in line with inflation and projected increases to salary costs. Building in these costs would assist Sperrins Partnership to manage the project more effectively and allow for forward planning. .

Sperrins Partnership Funding Sought:

2024 - 2025	£22,000 per Council <i>(no increase required)</i>	Total contributions sought £88,000. Salaries £78,000 and Programming costs £10,000
2025 - 2026	£25,000 per Council	Total contributions sought £100,000. Salaries £82,000 and Programming costs £18,000
2026 - 2027	£28,000 per Council	Total contributions sought £112,000. Salaries £86,000 and Programming costs £16,000

Sperrins Partnership has advised these proposed increases are essential to allow them to continue to deliver on its vision as outlined at the Sperrins Future Search Conference and to provide the mechanism to allow development of the AONB Management Plan for which external funding has been secured up to March 2028.

Sperrins Partnership will be increasing activity moving forward on the Sperrins AONB with a focus on developing the first ever Management Plan for the Sperrins Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposed increase in funding for years 2025-2026 to 2026-2027 will support this activity. Each Partner Council is requested to make a match funding contribution.

Members are asked to approve a Council funding contribution to Sperrins Partnership for the 2024/2025 financial year totalling £22,000. Additionally, Members are asked to approve in principle that Council continues to support Sperrins Partnership for a further 2 years (2025/26 and 2026/27), however, at this juncture, Council cannot agree the amount of funding for future years, until the budget setting process is finalised on an annual basis.



	Human: Officer Time
	<p>Risk Management:</p> <p><b>Sperrins Partnership - Annual Update for 2023/24 and New Three Year Partnership Agreement (April 2024 to March 2027)</b></p> <p>The initial Partnership Agreement ended on 31 March 2024. A new Partnership Agreement has been developed between the four partner Councils. Decision making powers rests with each Council. All key decisions concerning the annual funding to be provided to Sperrins Partnership will be agreed annually at the rate setting process in Mid Ulster District Council. A governance structure exists (<b>Schedule 2A</b>) which consists of a Project Board and a variety of working groups who report to the Board. The Human Resource / Administration Lead Council is Derry City &amp; Strabane District Council. The staff employed by Sperrins Partnership are detailed on <b>Schedule 2B</b>, and the role and responsibilities of each member of staff are contained in <b>Schedules 3, 4 and 5</b>.</p>
4.2	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	<b>Rural Needs Implications:</b>
5.0	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:-</p> <p><b>Sperrins Partnership - Annual Update for 2023/24 and New Three Year Partnership Agreement (April 2024 to March 2027)</b></p> <p>(a) <b>Note</b> update on Sperrins Partnership Project activities for 2023/2024.</p> <p>(b) <b>Approve</b> the new Sperrins Partnership Agreement (Appendix 1) between the four partner Councils for the next three financial years (2024/2025, 2025/2026 and 2026/2027) and authorise Council's Chief Executive to sign and return the Agreement on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council.</p> <p>(c) <b>Agree in principle</b> that Council fund Sperrins Partnership for a three year term, as highlighted at 5.1 (b) above. <b>Approve</b> a Council funding contribution of £22,000 to Sperrins Partnership Project for the 2024/2025 financial year and <b>note</b> that Mid Ulster District Council's financial contributions in years 2025/2026 and 2026/2027, will be determined annually, when budgets are finalised.</p> <p>(d) <b>Note</b> that Sperrins AONB Management Plan consultations will be delivered by external consultants, S3 Solutions, on behalf of the Sperrins</p>

	<p>Partnership. Members attention is drawn to two dates when public consultations will be held in Mid Ulster;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broughderg Community Centre - Tuesday 11 June 2024 (12noon - 2pm)</li> <li>• An Carn, Maghera - Thursday 13 June 2024 (6.30pm – 8.30pm).</li> </ul>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	<p><b>Appendix 1 - Sperrins Partnership Agreement</b> which contains the following Schedules;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Schedule 1 –</b> Sperrins Future Search Report</li> <li>• <b>Schedule 2A –</b> Sperrins Partnership Governance Structure</li> <li>• <b>Schedule 2B -</b> Sperrins Partnership Organisational Structure</li> <li>• <b>Schedule 3 –</b> Sperrins Partnership - Lead Project Officer - Role and Responsibilities</li> <li>• <b>Schedule 4 –</b> Sperrins Partnership - Project Administration Officer - Role and Responsibilities</li> <li>• <b>Schedule 5 -</b> Sperrin AONB Project Officer - Role and Responsibilities</li> </ul>