

January 14th, 2025

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee meeting to be held on Monday, 20th January 2025 at 6:00 pm in Council Chamber, O' Hagan House, Monaghan Row, Newry.

Committee Membership 2024-2025

Councillor A Lewis **Chairperson**

Councillor W Clarke **Deputy Chairperson**

Councillor T Andrews

Councillor K Feehan

Councillor C Galbraith

Councillor M Gibbons

Councillor G Hanna

Councillor O Hanlon

Councillor V Harte

Councillor G Kearns

Councillor D Lee-Surginor

Councillor S Murphy

Councillor A Quinn

Councillor M Ruane

Councillor J Truesdale

Agenda

1.0 Apologies and Chairperson's Remarks

2.0 Declarations of Interest

3.0 Action Sheet : Enterprise, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting Monday 9 December 2024

📄 [ERT Committee Action Sheet Dec 24 & Historic Actions.pdf](#)

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Economy Growth & Tourism

4.0 Belfast Region City Deal Regional Hub

For Decision

📄 [ERT Report - BRCD Regional Innovation Hub.pdf](#)

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Exempt Appendicies

4.1 Appendix for BRCD Regional Hub Report

For Information

This is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business

📄 [Appx. BRCD Regional Innovation Hub Business Case \(restricted\).pdf](#)

Not included

Economy Growth & Tourism

5.0 Financial assistance Call 2

For Decision

📄 [ERT Report - Financial Assistance Call 2 2025-2026.pdf](#)

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6.0 Geopark Strategy

For Decision

📄 [ERT Report - Geopark Strategy 2029-2033.pdf](#)

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📄 [Appx - Mourne Gullion Strangford Strategy Geopark Strategy 2025-33.pdf](#)

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7.0 Labour Market Partnership Additional Funding

For Decision

📄 *ERT Report - LMP Additional Funding for 2024-2025.pdf*

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8.0 PEACE Plus

For Decision

📄 *ERT Report - PEACEPLUS.pdf*

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📄 *Appx 1 PEACEPLUS Minutes 24 Oct 2024.pdf*

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Exempt Appendices

8.1 Appendix for PEACE Plus Report

For Information

These are deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business

📄 *Appx 2 PEACEPLUS Business Case Strand 1.1 (restricted).pdf*

Not included

📄 *Appx 3 PEACEPLUS Business Case Strand 1.4 & 1.5 (restricted).pdf*

Not included

Items deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014

9.0 Financial Assistance Basic Eligibility

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business

Report to follow

10.0 Ulster Fleadh

For Decision

This item is deemed to be exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business

📄 *ERT Report - Ulster Fleadh.pdf*

Not included

For Noting

11.0 Inspiring Sustainable Tourism Conference

For Information

📄 *ERT Report - Inspiring Sustainability Conference 2026.pdf*

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Invitees

- Cllr Terry Andrews
- Cllr Callum Bowsie
- Ms Michelle Boyle
- Fionnuala Branagh
- Cllr Jim Brennan
- Ms Sonya Burns
- Cllr Pete Byrne
- Mr Gerard Byrne
- Cllr Philip Campbell
- Cllr William Clarke
- Cllr Laura Devlin
- Ms Louise Dillon
- Cllr Cadogan Enright
- Cllr Killian Feehan
- Cllr Doire Finn
- Cllr Aoife Finnegan
- Ms Joanne Fleming
- Cllr Conor Galbraith
- Cllr Mark Gibbons
- Cllr Oonagh Hanlon
- Cllr Glyn Hanna
- Cllr Valerie Harte
- Cllr Roisin Howell
- Cllr Tierna Howie
- Ms Catherine Hughes
- Cllr Jonathan Jackson
- Cllr Geraldine Kearns
- Miss Veronica Keegan
- Mrs Josephine Kelly
- Mrs Sheila Kieran
- Cllr Cathal King
- Cllr Mickey Larkin
- Cllr David Lee-Surginor
- Cllr Alan Lewis
- Cllr Oonagh Magennis
- Mr Conor Mallon
- Cllr Aidan Mathers
- Cllr Declan McAteer
- Cllr Leeanne McEvoy
- Jonathan McGilly
- Cllr Andrew McMurray
- Ms Aveen McVeigh

Maureen/Joanne Morgan/Johnston
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Cllr Declan Murphy
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Sinead Murphy
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Cllr Kate Murphy
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Cllr Selina Murphy
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Cllr Siobhan O'Hare
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Mr Andy Patterson
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Cllr Áine Quinn
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Cllr Henry Reilly
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Cllr Michael Rice
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Cllr Michael Ruane
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Cllr Gareth Sharvin
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Donna Starkey
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Nicola Stranney
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Sarah Taggart
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Cllr David Taylor
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Cllr Jarlath Tinnelly
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Cllr Jill Truesdale
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Mrs Marie Ward
.....
Cllr Helena Young
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ACTION SHEETECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING – MONDAY 15 APRIL 2024

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/038/2024	Tourism Accommodation Grant Fund	it was agreed to proceed with the Financial Assistance capital grant programme as outlined in section 2.1.	A Smyth	Grant programme being developed for launch Q1 2025.26	Y
END					

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING – MONDAY 10 JUNE 2024

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/060/2024	Church Street and DeCourcy Place Public Realm	The following was agreed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council to progress the scheme and submit a planning application. • Council Officers progress a Business Case (internal) and (external) to Department for Communities for funding. • Council engage County Down Rural Community Network to assist with a public perception survey for Church Street and DeCourcy Place through the existing Service Level Agreement (SLA). 	A Smyth	Planning application submitted. Business Case completed. Awaiting LoO.	Y
END					

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING – MONDAY 12 AUGUST 2024

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/069/2024	Castlewellan Forest Park – Café and mobile vendor provision	it was agreed that the Council undertake a tender process to appoint a suitably experienced operator to deliver catering services at Castlewellan Forest Park as set out in section 2.1 of the officer's report.	A Smyth	In progress – tender being issued	N
END					

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING – MONDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2024

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/080/2024	Down County Museum Café	it was agreed that Council undertake a tender process to appoint a suitably experienced operator to deliver catering services at Down County Museum.	A Smyth	In progress	N
ERT/084/2024	Sub Regional Economic Plans	it was agreed that the Council engage Newry and Mourne Enterprise Agency and Down Business Centre through a Service Level Agreement to scope and shape a concept paper and proposals on relevant investment areas aligned to a sub-regional economic action plan.	A Smyth	In progress	N

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/087/2024	Small Settlement Schemes	<p>the following was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Officials engage with the Scheme Funding Departments to identify options to utilise the unallocated budget within scheme eligibility criteria. • To agree utilisation of unallocated budget reported back to Economy Regeneration and Tourism Committee. 	A Smyth	In progress	N
ERT/089/2024	Cross Border Teaching Registration	it was agreed for the Council to await the findings from the All-Island Labour Market Mobility and engage with cross border stakeholders to support the progression of recommended actions to harmonise the registration process for teachers.	A Smyth	In progress	N
END					

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING – MONDAY 14 OCTOBER 2024

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/093/2024	Local Economic Partnerships / Town and City Centre Taskforce	It was agreed that the Council agree the membership and progress the establishment of the Taskforce as set out in the report.	A Smyth	ToR agreed. First meeting of LEP to take place Jan/Feb 2025.	Y

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/094/2024	Newry Canoe Trail – IWAI	It was agreed that Council provides agreement for IWAI to undertake the planning and phased development of a canoe trail including canoe steps along the Newry Canal owned by NMDDC subject to conditions outlined in section 2.1 of the report.	A Smyth	Letter of Support issued.	Y
ERT/098/2024	Tree Tops Walk proposal	The following was recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To agree the Letter of Intent at Appendix 1. To arrange a familiarisation visit with key stakeholder to the Treetop Walks experience at Avondale, Co Wicklow. 	A Smyth	Letter of Intend issued & fam visit completed.	Y
END					

ACTION SHEET

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING – MONDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2024

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/110/2024	Economics Development Strategy	it was agreed to approve the recommendations as set out within the officer's report.	A Smyth	In progress, tender to be issued	Y
ERT/112/2024	Make It Local Campaign	it was agreed to approve the business case attached to the officer's report for the delivery of a Make it Local campaign in Spring of 2025.	A Smyth	In progress, tender to be issued	Y
ERT/113/2024	St Patricks Avenue	it was agreed to approve the recommendations contained within the officer's report.	A Smyth	In progress	Y

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/116/2024	Removal of Ballykinlar Hut	it was agreed to note the Expression of Interest process for the removal of Ballykinlar Hut.	A Smyth	In progress -to be issued Jan 25.	Y
END					

ACTION SHEET

ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING – MONDAY 9 DECEMBER 2024

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/119/2024	Action sheet of meeting held 11.11.24	It was agreed to note the action sheet	C Mallon		Y
ERT/120/2024	Financial Assistance Call 1	it was agreed to proceed with opening the first call for Financial Assistance for the period 2025 – 2026, commencing with the revenue themes, opening in January 2025, as detailed in section 2.1 of the Officer's Report.	A Smyth	Call 1 opening 13 th January / closing 24 th February	Y
ERT/121/2024	Accessible Beaches SLA	the following was agreed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enter into an SLA with the organisation outlined within the Officer's Report to provide Accessible Beach equipment for Tyrella and Cranfield Beaches project by 31st March 2025. • To extend and update the Partnership agreement with the organisation outlined within the Officer's Report to operate Beach Loan Equipment service at Tyrella Beach in addition to Cranfield Beach 	A Smyth	In progress	N

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/122/2024	Lecale Way SLA	It was agreed to enter into a Service Level Agreement with the organisation outlined within the officer's report to deliver key recommendations from the Audit and Development Plan of the Lecale Way by March 2025, as funded by DAERA, and as outlined in Section 2.1 of the Officer's Report and Appendix.	A Smyth	In progress	N
ERT/123/2024	St Patricks Day 2025 SLA	It was agreed to issue SLAs to the organisations outlined within the officer's report to deliver schools engagement and enhancing float and parade content for Downpatrick and Newry St Patricks Day 2025 events.	A Smyth	In progress	N
ERT/124/2024	PEACEPLUS Theme 1.1	<p>the following was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When received from SEUPB, accept the letter of offer and commence procurement of the projects under strands 2 and 3 of the Action Plan as outlined in section 2.2 of the Officer's Report • On receipt of the Letter of Offer from SEUPB, enter into a Partnership Agreement with the organisation outlined in the officer's report for delivery as per section 2.2 of the report • To update PEACEPLUS Partnership Membership in line with the Partnership Development process as agreed by SEUPB and to align organisational changes and other recruitment processes. 	A Smyth	Update provided at Jan 25 ERT	Y

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/125/2024	Procurement for Tourism & Culture Events	<p>it was agreed to approve a competitive tender process as outlined in Section 2.1 of the Officer's Report for a period of 3 years, renewed annually for the purpose of appointing suitably qualified and experienced contractors to deliver the 4 following contracts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sand to the foreshore at Warrenpoint Beach • Deliver a Visitor Experience Activation Programme at Forest / Country Parks and Beaches • Videography and photography for tourism and tourism events • Traffic management company for annual tourism events 	A Smyth	In progress	N
ERT/126/2024	Slieve Gullion Upland Path Erosion Control	it was agreed to approve the Business Case for path repairs on section of Slieve Gullion mountain path, and to approve the procurement and delivery of the project outlined within the Officer's Report, subject to NIEA funding being secured.	A Smyth	In progress	N
ERT/127/2024	Tree Tops Walk Proposal	It was agreed to note the signing of the letter of intent, and to proceed to the procurement and appointment of an economist and technical team to develop an outline business case for the project	A Smyth	In progress	N
ERT/127/2024	Data Sharing Agreement between NMDDC and LPS	it was agreed to note Data Sharing Agreement between NMDDC and LPS	J McGilly		
ERT/128/2024	Document Storage & retrieval	it was agreed to note the extension of the current contract, under the EPSO framework for a further 12 months, with the possibility of a further 12 months	J McGilly	complete	Y
ERT/129/2024	NISS Go Succeed Update	It was agreed to note the update on the implementation of Go Succeed NI.	A Smyth	Further update will be provided at future ERT	Y

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
ERT/130/2024	Rural Business Development Grant Scheme	It was agreed to note the update regarding the 2024 Rural Business Development Grant Scheme	A Smyth	Further update will be provided at April ERT / scheme conclusion	Y
ERT/131/2024	Taste of Tourism	It was agreed to note that Council will be a co-sponsor at the NI Hotel Federation, Taste of Tourism Summit & Artisan Market in March 2025	A Smyth		Y
END					

Report to:	Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday 20 th January 2025
Subject:	BRCD Regional Innovation Hub
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Amanda Smyth Assistant Director: Economy, Growth and Tourism
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Michael Forster FFNI Operations Lead

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

For decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	For noting only	<input type="checkbox"/>
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1.0	<p><u>Purpose</u> Seek members approval for the recommendations set out in Section 3 of this report.</p> <p><u>Background</u> The BRCD Regional Innovation hub aims to be transformative, propelling the district to the forefront of the digital landscape and positioning it as a smart district ripe with opportunities for investment and foreign direct investment.</p> <p>The hub will be hosted within the new Newry Civic & Regional hub, which is part of the BRCD supported Newry City Centre Regeneration programme, and will foster sustainable collaboration across industry, academia, and societal needs.</p> <p>The hub will support industry, academia and education to improve business and production processes or services using new and emerging digital technologies by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing access to technical expertise and testing, as well as the possibility to 'test before investing' • Providing innovation services, such as financing advice, training, and skills development that are central to successful digital transformation • Helping companies tackle environmental issues, in particular the use of digital technologies for sustainability and circularity. • Educating students at primary and post-primary levels to learn about the use cases of new technologies and the best practices. <p>The hub will be flexible, adaptable and equipped with advanced technologies to meet the needs of diverse industries and innovators and will act as a platform to deliver new capabilities in partnership and collaboration.</p>
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	<p>The establishment of the hub is expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate regional economic growth and create jobs. • Build on the collaboration through existing Council programmes e.g. DBEC and FFNI to establish a unified innovation hub that will encourage shared resources and talent pools across the border enhancing regional competitiveness. • Enhance the innovation capacity and competitiveness of the entire BRCD region. • Promote inclusive development by engaging diverse stakeholders. • Drive advancements in key sectors such as agriculture, logistics, manufacturing, health, education, and technology. • Contribute to achieving regional and global development goals. • Position itself as a Gateway for companies seeking a platform to access UK and EU markets. <p>The hub is proposed to stimulate an increase in private sector investment, the creation of jobs and encourage industry collaboration across the Belfast City Deal region. It will serve as a vehicle for transformation on a regional basis and therefore, play a key part in a more inclusive vision of the City Deal Proposition and enabling the Programme for Government’s regional balance ambition.</p>
2	Key Issues
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress to Date <p>Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has conducted extensive consultation and research through Catalyst, Kavanagh Kelly and Xpand which has identified a clear need for such a hub. 2</p> <p>Following this engagement, a concept note has now been developed and issued to the Belfast Region City Deal Digital Advisory Board for approval to commence the Outline Business Case (OBC).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next Steps <p>In order to progress this project to the next stage, Council are required to complete an outline business case, to support the further development and consideration of the project, required for submission as part of the City Deal approval process in order to secure funding.</p>
3.0	Recommendations
3.1	Members approve the attached Business Case in Appendix 1
3.2	Members approve the and procurement of consultancy support for the development of an Outline Business Case for a Regional Innovation Hub within Newry Civic & Regional Hub

3.3	Members approve the appointment of consultancy support following Belfast Region City Deal, Digital Advisory Board approval.
4.0	Resource implications
	<p>See Appendix 1 - Regional Innovation Hub Business Case, for financial implications.</p> <p>Follow-on funding opportunities</p> <p>Ringfenced BRCD funding for the hub can be drawn down from the BRCD Digital Pillar and Infrastructure Enabling Fund subject to a successful OBC and necessary approvals. (capital)</p>
5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p>

	<i>Rationale:</i>
6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following: Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	Appendices
	Appendix 1 - Regional Innovation Hub Business Case
8.0	Background Documents
	N/a

Report to:		Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee	
Date of Meeting:		Monday 20 January 2025	
Subject:		Financial Assistance Call 2	
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):		Amanda Smyth – Assistant Director Economy, Growth & Tourism	
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):		Sonya Stephenson – Head of Programmes Ciara Burns – Project Coordinator	
For decision	X	For noting only	
1.0	Purpose and Background		
1.1	<p><u>Purpose</u> To approve the recommendations as set out in section 3.1 of this report on Financial Assistance Call 2 2025-2026.</p> <p><u>Background</u> It is proposed the second call for Financial Assistance for the period 2025-2026 will commence for capital themes in March 2025. Closure will be April 2025 with a target of Letters of offer issued in by July 2025.</p>		
2.0	Key issues		
2.1	<p>It is proposed that Call 2 will include the following themes (subject to budget approval through the rates process and/or external funding letters of offer):</p> <p>Capital:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Major/Minor Works • Sports Major/Minor Works • Community Minor Capital Items • Sport Minor Capital Items <p>Grants will be accessed through the new online system as per policy.</p>		
3.0	Recommendations		
3.1	Approval to proceed with Financial Assistance Call 2 - Capital as detailed in this report Section 2.1.		
4.0	Resource implications		
4.1	Budgets subject to Council agreement via the rates process for 2025/26FY.		
5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)		
5.1	<i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i>		

	It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation – N/a</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Rationale:</i></p>
6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	Appendices
	N/a
8.0	Background Documents
	N/a

Report to:	Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday 20 January 2025
Subject:	Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategy 2029-2033
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Amanda Smyth Assistant Director Economy, Growth and Tourism
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Darren Rice AONB and Geopark Manager

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

For decision	X	For noting only	
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1.0	Purpose and Background
1.1	<p><u>Purpose</u> To approve the recommendation as set out in section 3.1 of the report.</p> <p><u>Background</u> The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategy, Action Plan, and Management Plan collectively provide the framework for the Geopark’s governance, operation, and development.</p> <p>The Strategy is renewed every eight years, the Action Plan every four years (with progress monitored and recorded quarterly), and the Management Plan is reviewed annually and renewed if required. The strategy, action and management plan are implemented jointly to ensure cohesive governance and effective execution.</p>
2.0	<u>Key issues</u>
2.1	<p>The Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark Strategy 2025 – 2033 (Appendix 1) outlines a comprehensive vision that integrates governance, development, communication, protection, infrastructure, finances, and partnerships within the Geopark. This Strategy and Action Plan promotes sustainable development, community engagement, and heritage conservation across the Mourne Mountains, Ring of Gullion, and Strangford and Lecale areas. By harnessing education, tourism, and local collaboration, it supports sustainable businesses and resilient communities, enhancing environmental stewardship rooted in the unique geological heritage of the region.</p> <p>The strategy is anchored in the principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and community empowerment, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNESCO’s vision. This plan embodies the UNESCO Global Geoparks Motto, “Celebrating Earth Heritage, Sustaining Local Communities,” and positions Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark as a leader in sustainability and preservation.</p>

3.0	Recommendations
3.1	To approve the (draft) Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategy 2025 -2033
4.0	Resource implications
4.1	No additional resource implications, budget contained within the funding model.
5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p>

	<i>Rationale:</i>
6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	Appendices
	1. Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Draft Strategy 2029-2033
8.0	Background Documents
	n/a

Straitéis Gheopháirc Mhúrna, Shliabh
gCuillinn agus Bhaile Loch Cuan / Mourne
Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategy

2025 - 2033

**“Ag obair le chéile chun a mhór a dhéanamh dár dtírdhreach álainn” /
“Working together to make the most of our beautiful landscape”**



**MOURNE
GULLION
STRANGFORD**
Geopark



Message from Newry, Mourne, and Down District Council Chair

I am delighted to share the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategy, a vision to guide our efforts from 2025 to 2033. This strategy can serve as a beacon for our community, illuminating the path toward a future where heritage conservation, education, and sustainable development go hand in hand.

The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark is a treasure trove of natural wonders and historical significance. Its landscapes, shaped by geological processes over millions of years, are not only breathtaking but also critical to understanding our planet's history. This strategy celebrates our geological heritage while supporting a sustainable, thriving local economy.

Our vision is rooted in clear objectives that ensure our unique landscapes are preserved for future generations while attracting visitors in ways that benefit both our communities and the environment. Newry, Mourne, and Down District Council is committed to involving local residents every step of the way, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

Spreading knowledge and appreciation of our Geopark's wonders is essential. Through strategic partnerships, we aim to foster innovation and create a network of support. This strategy provides a clear roadmap to amplify our message, attract global attention, and achieve our goals. In addition to looking forward, we will reflect on past progress to stay on track, prepare for challenges, and safeguard our success.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to this plan—our partners, stakeholders, and the local community. Your dedication has been invaluable. Together, we will nurture and celebrate the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark, ensuring it remains a place of awe and inspiration for generations to come.

Message from the Geopark Management Group

As the Geopark Management Group, we are thrilled to present a strategy that is ambitious yet deeply rooted in our shared values and vision for the future.

Our Geopark is a mosaic of extraordinary landscapes and cultural narratives. From the majestic Mourne Mountains to the ancient Ring of Gullion and the serene Strangford Lough, every piece contributes to the rich tapestry of our heritage. This plan represents our commitment to preserving these treasures while fostering sustainability and community well-being.

A key foundation of our strategy is geological and natural heritage management. We are dedicated to protecting and enhancing our natural assets through innovative conservation techniques and community collaboration, ensuring they remain pristine and accessible for generations to come.

Sustainable tourism development is a priority; We aim to build a tourism model that respects and benefits our local environment and economy. By promoting responsible tourism, we ensure that the Geopark can be enjoyed by all without compromising its integrity.

At the heart of our efforts lies community engagement. The strength of our Geopark comes from its people and the living culture. By involving local communities in decision-making and development, we cultivate a sense of ownership and pride essential for the long-term success of our initiatives.

Education and outreach are equally crucial. Through tailored programmes and activities, we aim to inspire future stewards of our natural and cultural heritage while deepening appreciation for the Geopark's significance.

Our success will depend on strong partnerships. By working with a diverse range of stakeholders—from local businesses to international organisations—we can leverage resources and expertise to achieve our shared goals.

The journey ahead is both challenging and exciting. This strategy is our roadmap to a future where the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark is recognised not only for its natural beauty but as a model for sustainable development and community engagement.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Together, we will ensure our Geopark remains a place of wonder, learning, and inspiration for generations to come.

Mourne Gullion Strangford Strategic Framework

The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategy, Action Plan, and Management Plan collectively provide the framework for the Geopark's governance, operation, and development. The Strategy is renewed every eight years, the Action Plan every four years (with progress monitored and recorded quarterly), and the Management Plan is reviewed annually and renewed if required. These three documents are implemented in conjunction with one another to ensure cohesive governance and effective execution.

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Executive summary

The Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark Strategy (2025-2033) outlines a comprehensive vision that integrates governance, development, communication, protection, infrastructure, finances, and partnerships within the Geopark. This Strategy and Action Plan promotes sustainable development, community engagement, and heritage conservation across the Mourne Mountains, Ring of Gullion, and Strangford and Lecale areas. By harnessing education, tourism, and local collaboration, it supports sustainable businesses and resilient communities, enhancing environmental stewardship rooted in the unique geological heritage of the region.

Vision and Objectives

Our strategy is anchored in the principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and community empowerment, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNESCO's vision. We aspire to create a geopark that not only celebrates its rich geological history but also serves as a dynamic hub for cultural exchange and sustainable tourism. Key objectives include:

- **Geological Heritage Management:** Preserve and enhance the unique geological features of our geopark through responsible management practices and conservation efforts.
- **Sustainable Tourism Development:** Develop and promote diverse, high-quality tourism experiences that connect visitors with both tangible and intangible heritage, fostering a deeper appreciation for our region's unique identity.
- **Community Engagement and Development:** Strengthen partnerships with local communities to ensure that conservation efforts and economic benefits are shared and sustainable.
- **Education and Outreach:** Leverage the geopark's natural classroom to provide educational opportunities that inspire all ages, fostering a greater understanding of geology, culture, and biodiversity.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Foster strong partnerships with local, national, and international stakeholders to support sustainable development and conservation initiatives.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress, ensure accountability, and facilitate continuous improvement.
- **Communication and Marketing:** Enhance communication and marketing strategies to raise awareness of the geopark's unique offerings and attract a diverse range of visitors.
- **Risk Management and Contingency Planning:** Develop and maintain comprehensive risk management and contingency plans to ensure the resilience and sustainability of the geopark.
- **Future Directions and Opportunities:** Identify and pursue future opportunities for growth and development that align with the geopark's vision and values. This includes proactively seeking relevant funding opportunities (e.g., Shared Island, PeacePlus, National Lottery Heritage Fund) to support ongoing revenue

needs and secure capital funding for developing new tourism attractions and products as outlined in the Action Plan.

Action Plan

The Action Plan, updated quarterly and will be formally reviewed in 2029, translates these strategic objectives into actionable steps with measurable targets and methods for monitoring and evaluation.

Management Plan

The Management Plan, reviewed annually, provides a comprehensive framework for effective governance and operation. It outlines the Geopark's governance structure, financial strategy, partnerships, communication processes, staff roles, budget allocation, and systems for monitoring, reporting, and review. The Plan also includes details on responsibilities, and timelines, ensuring accountability and alignment with strategic objectives.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure accountability and continuous improvement, each action within the plan includes specific targets and methods for monitoring and evaluation. Regular progress reports will be generated, and a formal review of the action plan will take place in 2029, allowing for adjustments based on feedback and evolving circumstances.

Conclusion

The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategy (2025-2033) is a blueprint for sustainability that honours our past while embracing the future. By focusing on education, tourism, and community engagement, we aim to create a vibrant, resilient geopark that benefits residents and visitors alike. Together, we will protect and promote our unique heritage, ensuring it continues to inspire and enrich for generations to come. This plan embodies the UNESCO Global Geoparks Motto, "Celebrating Earth Heritage, Sustaining Local Communities," and positions our geopark as a leader in sustainability and preservation.

1. Introduction and Background

The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark, located in the northeast of the island of Ireland, is a region of exceptional geological significance and natural beauty. Encompassing the land and seascapes of the Mourne Mountains, the Ring of Gullion, Lecale; Strangford, Murlough and Carlingford Loughs; this geologically diverse landscape spans 1931.62 square kilometers and is home to 182,074 people (2021 Census, NISRA).¹

1.1 Overview of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark²

Geological Heritage:

At the heart of the Geopark lies a rich tapestry of geological formations, dating back over 400 million years. The Mourne Mountains, characterised by their rugged granite peaks, are remnants of an ancient mountain range formed during the Caledonian Orogeny. Meanwhile, the Ring of Gullion showcases evidence of volcanic activity from the Tertiary period, with distinctive features such as ring dykes and volcanic plugs.

Natural Features:

Beyond its geological wonders, the Geopark boasts a wealth of natural features, including coastal cliffs, sandy beaches, and tidal loughs. Strangford Lough, one of Europe's most significant marine sites, harbors diverse ecosystems and supports a variety of bird species, while the rugged coastline of Murlough and Carlingford offers dramatic vistas and opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Cultural and Built Heritage:

In addition to its geological and natural heritage, the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark is steeped in cultural history. The area is dotted with ancient archaeological sites, megalithic tombs, and medieval castles, reflecting thousands of years of human habitation and activity. The traditions, folklore, and craftsmanship of local communities further enrich the cultural tapestry of the Geopark.

UNESCO Global Geopark Designation:

In recognition of its outstanding geological significance and efforts in conservation, education, and sustainable development, the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark was

¹ Visit this link for a map of the Geopark - <https://mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com/interactive-map/>

² Visit this link for more details of the Geoparks heritage - <https://mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com/about-our-geopark/>

designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark on 23rd May 2023. This prestigious designation highlights the Geopark's commitment to promoting geotourism, fostering community engagement, and preserving its unique geological and cultural heritage for future generations.³

2. Vision, Mission, and Objectives

2.1 Vision

Our vision is one of a cherished landscape, where the interconnected essence of people, place, and nature is protected, promoted, and revered for the prosperity of present and future generations.⁴

2.2 Mission

As stewards of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark, we are dedicated to realising our vision through a comprehensive approach centred on protection, education, and sustainable development. We pledge to safeguard the richness of our natural heritage, improve biodiversity, conserve geodiversity, and address the challenges posed by climate change. By celebrating the unique geological features that define our landscape, we aim to instil a sense of pride and appreciation among our communities.

Through collaborative efforts with local stakeholders, statutory organisations, and other authorities, we strive to create a harmonious balance between conservation, education, and sustainable practices. Our goal is to ensure the enduring well-being of our communities and the environment, promoting resilience and prosperity for generations to come, in harmony with global initiatives for peace, poverty alleviation, and sustainable progress.

2.3 Objectives and goals

1. Sustainable Management Strategy for Geopark Conservation and Resilience
 - **Goal:** Maintain and implement a robust governance structure and management plan for the Geopark, encompassing conservation, education, tourism, and

³ Visit this link for more details on UNESCO and Global Geoparks - <https://mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com/about-us/unesco-global-geoparks/>

⁴ The motto of UNESCO Global Geoparks is "Celebrating Earth Heritage, Sustaining Local Communities". UNESCO Global Geoparks are fundamentally about people and about exploring and celebrating the links between our communities and the Earth <https://www.unesco.org/en/igpp/geoparks/about#:~:text=The%20motto%20of%20UNESCO%20Globe,our%20communities%20and%20the%20Earth.>

community engagement initiatives, to safeguard its unique geological, ecological, and cultural assets for present and future generations.

- **Objective:** Maintain, monitor, review and implement a comprehensive strategy and action plan to ensure the effective stewardship of the Geopark's natural and cultural heritage, fostering sustainability and resilience.
2. Strengthen Conservation Measures for Geological Sites:
 - **Goal:** Collaborate with relevant authorities and landowners to implement effective management plans for geological sites and key habitats within the Geopark, ensuring their long-term protection and sustainable use.
 - **Objective:** Develop and implement specific conservation strategies for identified geological sites and critical habitats , including habitat restoration, species conservation, and geological site preservation projects, in collaboration with local conservation organisations and stakeholders.
 3. Promote Sustainable Tourism:
 - **Goal:** Increase visitor engagement and spend while minimising environmental impact.
 - **Objective:** Develop sustainable and regenerative tourism initiatives, including experiences, training programmes, and interpretive signage, to raise awareness about the Geopark's geological and ecological significance.
 4. Foster Community Engagement:
 - **Goal:** Increase community participation in Geopark activities and decision-making processes.
 - **Objective:** Effectively manage Geopark forums and outreach to involve the wider community in Geopark initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the conservation and promotion of local heritage.
 5. Strengthen Educational Programs:
 - **Goal:** Double the number of schools participating in Geopark educational programmes.
 - **Objective:** Expand educational offerings, including school field trips, workshops, and online resources, to provide students with hands-on learning experiences about geology, biodiversity, and sustainable development.
 6. Enhance climate change resilience:

- **Goal:** Improve resilience of the Geoparks landscapes and communities to climate change and educate people through climate action initiatives.
 - **Objective:** Implement climate change resilience programmes, such as forestation, blue carbon restoration, peatland restoration, and waste reduction programmes, and sustainable transportation options, to mitigate the Geopark's carbon footprint.
7. Enhance Research and Monitoring:
- **Goal:** Maintain a comprehensive monitoring programme to assess changes in biodiversity, geological features, and ecosystem health.
 - **Objective:** Collaborate with government, universities and research institutions to conduct long-term monitoring studies and gather data to inform conservation strategies and land management decisions.
8. Strengthen Partnerships:
- **Goal:** Establish partnerships with international Geoparks and conservation organisations to share best practices and promote global cooperation.
 - **Objective:** Forge formal partnerships and virtual exchange programmes with relevant entities to enhance knowledge exchange and capacity-building initiatives.
9. Empower Local Communities:
- **Goal:** Empower local communities to take an active role in Geopark management and sustainable development.
 - **Objective:** Provide training and support for community-led initiatives, such as eco-friendly businesses, sustainable agriculture practices, and cultural heritage preservation projects, to promote economic resilience and social cohesion within the Geopark.

3. Policy Context for Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark

The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark operates within a complex legislative and policy framework, tied to local, regional, national and international environmental, cultural, tourism and community planning strategies. Given the significant role of local and regional policies in shaping the Geopark's goals, it aligns closely with Newry, Mourne, and Down District Council initiatives, national directives, and the UNESCO Global Geoparks guidelines. This alignment ensures the Geopark meets objectives related to heritage management and conservation, sustainable development, community engagement and development, and education and outreach.

1. Northern Ireland's policy landscape is shaped by ambitious goals to address biodiversity loss, climate change, environmental resilience, sustainable development, and community development:
 - Northern Ireland Programme for Government
 - Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland
 - Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy (2021-2040)
 - Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland (pending)
 - Green Growth Strategy
 - Department for the Economy Economic Strategy
 - Department of Culture, Arts and Heritage: A Way Forward
 - Draft DfE Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland: 10 Year Plan
 - DfE Northern Ireland Tourism Vision & Action Plan
 - Strategic Planning Policy Statement

2. Local Planning and Community Development
 - NMDDC's Corporate Plan (2024-2027)
 - Local Climate Adaptation Plan
 - NMDDC Performance Improvement Plan (Annual)
 - Living Well Together – A community plan for Newry, Mourne and Down to 2030
 - The emerging Newry, Mourne and Down Local Development Plan
 - High Mournes Holistic Land Management Plan

3. Local Tourism and Sustainable Development
 - NMDDC Tourism Strategy 2023-2028: Unveiling a Vision for Growth
 - Experience Plan: Unveiling Unique Moments in Mourne Gullion Strangford
 - NMDDC Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy 2022—2027
 - Local Development Plan (LDP)
 - NMDDC's Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy 2022-2025
 - NMDDC Village, Towns and City Masterplans
 - Newry City Centre Masterplan, October 2011

In addition to the aforementioned documents, the Geopark Strategy will also compliment several other action plans and strategies (many of which are currently being drafted).

These include the NMDDC Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy, NMDDC Open Spaces Strategy, Ring of Gullion AONB Management Plan, the Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB Management Plan, the Mourne AONB Management Plan, Marine Protected Area Management Plans for Carlingford Lough, Murlough and Strangford Lough, and NMDDC Tree Strategy; and Special Area of Conservation Management Plans for Slieve Gullion and Eastern Mournes, and Down and Armagh Forestry Plans.

4. Geological and other Natural Heritage Management

The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark uniquely captures over 400 million years of geological history, telling the story of two ancient oceans. It chronicles the closure of the Iapetus Ocean around 400 million years ago, which formed the island of Ireland and left behind the Newry granodiorite. Later, as the North Atlantic Ocean opened about 58 million years ago, this region saw intense volcanic activity, creating the Slieve Gullion ring-dyke complex and Mourne Mountains granite formations. Shaped further by the last Ice Age, the landscape now displays diverse glacial features, from mountain formations to unique coastal glaciogenic sediments in Strangford Lough.⁵

3.1 Conservation, preservation and education of geological features

Site Monitoring and Assessment:

Regularly monitor and assess Geopark's geological sites to identify any degradation or threats to their integrity. This will ensure the effective stewardship of our natural and cultural heritage, aligning with our vision of treasured landscapes.

Habitat Restoration:

Implement habitat restoration projects in areas where Geoparks geological sites features have been impacted, focusing on ecosystem resilience and biodiversity enhancement. These efforts will safeguard our geological, ecological, and cultural assets for present and future generations, in line with our mission of promoting landscapes and associated policy and practice.

Visitor Management:

Develop and implement visitor management strategies to minimise any negative impacts of tourism on the Geoparks geological sites, fostering sustainable tourism practices. By engaging tourism providers in educational programmes and providing interpretive signage, we promote responsible enjoyment of our cherished landscapes, as outlined in our objectives.

Community Engagement:

Engage with local communities to raise awareness about the importance of geological heritage conservation and involve them in stewardship efforts. By fostering a sense of ownership and pride among residents, we strengthen our commitment to holistic protection and sustainable development, as reflected in our goals.

⁵ Visit this link for more details of the Geoparks Sites - <https://mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com/things-to-do/geosites/>

Partnerships and Collaboration:

Foster partnerships and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including other UNESCO Global Geoparks, government agencies, NGOs, academic institutions, and local businesses. These collaborations leverage resources and expertise to enhance our conservation efforts, contributing to our goal of sustainable development through regional, national, and global cooperation.

Research and Education:

Support research initiatives aimed at better understanding geological processes and features within the Geopark. Develop educational programmes and materials to increase public awareness and appreciation of the geological heritage. These efforts align with our objectives of promoting education and conservation of our natural and cultural heritage.

Long-term Planning:

Develop long-term management plans and strategies prioritising the conservation of geological heritage while allowing for sustainable use and enjoyment of these resources. By incorporating input from stakeholders and considering best practices, we ensure the enduring well-being of our communities and the environment, as outlined in our objectives and goals.

3.2 Case Study for Geological Heritage Management

PEAT+ Project – Restoring Peatlands in Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark

The PEAT+ project is a transformative initiative aimed at restoring peatlands within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark and across the border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland. With an integrated approach to addressing climate, biodiversity, and societal challenges, this project represents a milestone in sustainable environmental management. In the Geopark it builds on foundational work from the Slieve Gullion SAC Management Plan, the Mourne SAC Management Plan, SCaMP, the Slieve Gullion Blueprint for Management, and the ASCENT Project, culminating in a funding application to the EU's PEACE PLUS Programme.

Foundations of the PEAT+ Project within the Geopark

Peatlands within the Geopark, such as those on Slieve Gullion and the Mourne Mountains, are critical ecosystems that support biodiversity, carbon sequestration, water quality, and cultural heritage. However, these habitats have faced significant degradation due to poor land management, climate change, and invasive species. Early frameworks like the SCaMP NI initiative demonstrated the potential for catchment-based solutions to protect raw water quality and natural habitats, while the ASCENT project addressed visitor management and erosion control, setting a precedent for sustainable upland management.

The PEAT+ project, led by Ulster Wildlife with other Geopark Management Group members including Newry Mourne and Down District Council, Mourne Heritage Trust, NI Water, and Forest Service NI, incorporates lessons from these initiatives. It scales up efforts to ensure long-term conservation and community engagement across the region.

Objectives and Structure

The PEAT+ project is structured around three core work packages:

1. **Conservation Planning & Design**
This involves data collection, aerial imagery, and record compilation to develop comprehensive restoration plans. These plans address key challenges, including invasive species control, wildfire risk management, grazing strategies, and protection of historic features.
2. **Peatland Restoration**
Targeting 22 key sites, including Slieve Gullion SAC and Eastern Mourne SAC, this work focuses on restoring peatland hydrology and habitat conditions. Actions include rewetting degraded peat, removing invasive species like rhododendron, and creating conditions conducive to native flora and fauna.
3. **Capacity Building, Community Engagement & Research**
A robust community engagement program aims to foster public appreciation for peatlands' ecological and cultural value. Educational initiatives and hands-on training for landowners and conservationists build capacity for ongoing restoration and management. Research into carbon storage potential and biodiversity outcomes ensures evidence-based planning and highlights the global significance of local peatlands.

Innovative Collaboration

PEAT+ integrates diverse expertise through its cross-border and cross-disciplinary partnerships. In addition to the Geopark Management Group members, the project includes national and international collaborators such as Bord na Móna, Atlantic Technology University Letterkenny, and the Crichton Carbon Centre. It also engages associate partners, including National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), to expand its impact.

Environmental and Social Benefits

The restoration of peatlands provides a suite of environmental benefits. By restoring hydrology, the project reduces greenhouse gas emissions from degraded peatlands and enhances their carbon capture capacity. This also supports biodiversity, with improved habitats for species unique to upland peat ecosystems. Restored peatlands act as natural flood defences, improve water quality, and mitigate wildfire risks, showcasing their ecosystem service value.

Socially, the project delivers education and engagement opportunities, empowering communities to become stewards of their natural heritage. Activities such as workshops, guided tours, and the production of a three-part documentary raise awareness of peatlands' critical role in addressing climate and biodiversity crises.

Legacy and Future Directions

The PEAT+ project will leave a lasting impact on the Geopark and beyond by developing replicable restoration models and fostering cross-border collaboration. Innovative tools, such as low-cost carbon assessment equipment, will enable more efficient monitoring and management. By tying restoration outcomes to broader strategies like the Climate Action Plan, PEAT+ ensures alignment with regional and global sustainability goals.

Conclusion

PEAT+ exemplifies the power of integrated environmental management. By addressing ecological, cultural, and societal dimensions of peatland restoration, it creates a blueprint for sustainable development. Within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark, the project not only restores critical habitats but also inspires a shared commitment to preserving these landscapes for future generations.

5. Sustainable Tourism Development

4.1 Promotion of responsible tourism practices

In alignment with our commitment to sustainable development and the preservation of our natural and cultural heritage, the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark places a strong emphasis on promoting responsible tourism practices. Our approach is guided by the principles of environmental stewardship, cultural authenticity, community engagement, and visitor satisfaction.

Environmental Stewardship:

We recognise the importance of minimising the environmental impact of tourism activities within the Geopark. To achieve this, we implement various initiatives aimed at reducing ensuring tourism providers, and all Geopark signage communicate the Leave No Trace message to visitors. There are also waste generation, conserving water and energy, and mitigating pollution programmes run within the Geopark by various partners. Through education and awareness campaigns, visitors are encouraged to respect the delicate ecosystems and cultural sites they encounter, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility among tourists.

Cultural Authenticity:

Preserving the cultural authenticity and integrity of the Geopark is paramount in our approach to responsible tourism. We work closely with local communities to ensure that tourism initiatives respect and celebrate their heritage, traditions, and way of life. By engaging community members in tourism-related activities and empowering them as ambassadors for their own culture, we aim to foster a sense of pride and ownership that enhances the overall visitor experience.

Community Engagement:

We actively engage with local communities to ensure that tourism initiatives benefit residents and contribute to their socio-economic well-being. Through capacity-building programs, and training opportunities, we strive to empower local communities to participate in and benefit from the tourism economy. Additionally, we encourage community involvement in decision-making processes related to tourism development, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their interests are represented.

Visitor Satisfaction:

While promoting responsible tourism practices, we also prioritise visitor satisfaction and enjoyment. We provide informative signage, educational materials, and tourism experiences that enhance the visitor experience while promoting a deeper understanding of the Geopark's geological, natural and cultural significance. By working with the industry, the Geopark prioritises high-quality amenities, accommodations, and services, and we aim to exceed visitor expectations and encourage repeat visitation.

Collaboration with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council:

As the legal body responsible for the Geopark, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council plays a crucial role in shaping the tourism strategy for the area. The Geopark collaborates closely with the council's tourism team to ensure that tourism initiatives are aligned with their broader tourism strategy and objectives. By leveraging resources and expertise, we maximise the impact of our efforts and contribute to the overall success of tourism development in the region.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

To ensure the effectiveness of our responsible tourism practices, we implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. We assess visitor feedback on a four-year basis, environmental impacts are monitored, and stakeholder consultations to identify areas for improvement and refine our strategy and actions accordingly. By adopting a proactive and adaptive approach, we strive to continuously enhance the sustainability and resilience of tourism within the Geopark.

The promotion of responsible tourism practices within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark is essential for preserving our natural and cultural heritage while ensuring the well-being of local communities and visitors alike. Through environmental stewardship, cultural authenticity, community engagement, visitor satisfaction, collaboration with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, we aim to create a tourism experience that is both enriching and sustainable for present and future generations.

4.2 Visitor management

Effective visitor management is essential for preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark while providing enriching experiences for visitors. Our visitor management strategies aim to strike a balance between facilitating access to the Geopark's attractions and minimising the impact on its sensitive ecosystems and cultural sites.

Designated Trails and Interpretation Facilities:

We establish trails and interpretation throughout the Geopark to guide visitors through its diverse landscapes while minimising disturbance to wildlife and natural habitats. These trails are carefully planned to showcase the Geopark's geological features, cultural heritage, and biodiversity, providing informative signage and educational materials along the way to enhance the visitor experience and promote understanding of the area's significance.

Visitor Education and Awareness:

Education and awareness play a crucial role in promoting responsible visitor behavior within the Geopark. Through interpretive programs, trained experience providers, and visitor information centers, we provide information about the Geopark's conservation values, cultural significance, and sustainable tourism practices. Visitors are encouraged to respect designated trails, adhere to codes of conduct, and minimise their environmental impact while exploring the Geopark.

Overtourism:

To prevent overcrowding and minimise environmental degradation, we are undertaking research to monitor real-time data throughout the Geopark and put in place mitigation measures at popular sites within the Geopark. This will help distribute visitor traffic evenly throughout the year and ensure that sensitive areas are not overwhelmed by large numbers of visitors at any given time.

Monitoring and Enforcement:

Regular monitoring and rangering mechanisms are implemented to ensure compliance with visitor management policies and regulations.

Our visitor management strategies are designed to provide visitors with enriching and memorable experiences while safeguarding the natural and cultural heritage of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. Through careful planning, education, community engagement, and monitoring, we strive to ensure that the Geopark remains a sustainable and accessible destination for present and future generations to enjoy.

4.3 Development of tourism infrastructure and services

The development and maintenance of tourism infrastructure and services within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark is essential for enhancing visitor experiences while preserving the area's natural and cultural heritage. Our approach focuses on creating sustainable and accessible tourism facilities that meet the needs of visitors while minimising environmental impact.

Infrastructure Development:

We prioritise the development of low-impact infrastructure that blends harmoniously with the natural surroundings of the Geopark. This includes the construction of well-maintained trails, viewpoints, and other centers designed to provide information, interpretation, and amenities for visitors. Sustainable building practices, such as using locally-sourced materials and renewable energy sources, are employed to minimise the environmental footprint of infrastructure development.

Accessibility Improvements:

Ensuring accessibility for all visitors, including those with disabilities, is a key consideration in the development of tourism infrastructure. We strive to make our trails, facilities, and amenities accessible to people of all abilities, incorporating features such as wheelchair ramps, tactile signage, and audio guides. By promoting inclusivity and diversity, we aim to create an enriching and welcoming experience for every visitor to the Geopark.

Visitor Services:

High-quality visitor services are essential for providing a seamless and enjoyable experience for visitors to the Geopark. Our partners offer a range of services, including guided experiences, educational tours, sustainable accommodation options, and dining facilities, to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of visitors. These services are delivered by knowledgeable partners who are passionate about sharing the Geopark's natural and cultural heritage with visitors from around the world.

Interpretation and Engagement:

Interpretation plays a crucial role in connecting visitors with the Geopark's geological, ecological, and cultural features. We develop interpretive materials, exhibits, and multimedia presentations to enhance visitor understanding and appreciation of the Geopark's significance. Interactive experiences, self-guided walks, and cultural offerings further engage visitors and foster a deeper connection with the landscape and its stories.

Collaboration and Partnerships:

We collaborate with local communities, businesses, and stakeholders to develop tourism infrastructure and services that benefit both visitors and residents. By working together, we leverage local expertise, resources, and knowledge to create sustainable tourism experiences that support economic development, preserve cultural traditions, and protect natural resources. Through partnerships with accommodation providers, tour operators, and transport services, we ensure a seamless and integrated visitor experience within the Geopark.

The development of tourism infrastructure and services within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark is guided by principles of sustainability, accessibility, quality, interpretation, and collaboration. By investing in responsible tourism development, we aim to create memorable and meaningful experiences for visitors while safeguarding the Geopark's natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

4.4 Case Study for Sustainable Tourism Development

Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage Experiences Along an Atlantic Route

Intangible Cultural Heritage experiences possess a unique ability to deeply resonate with individuals, stirring their emotions and connecting them with the cultural fabric of a region. But what exactly is Intangible Cultural Heritage? It encompasses the practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage and identity. From the act of playing traditional musical instruments to the passing down of ancient storytelling traditions, Intangible Cultural Heritage breathes life into a community's past, present, and future.

In the context of sustainable tourism, Intangible Cultural Heritage becomes a powerful tool for regenerative tourism. By revitalising ancient traditions, customs, and skills, communities not only preserve their heritage but also create sustainable economic opportunities. Through carefully crafted Intangible Cultural Heritage experiences, communities continue the legacy of their ancestors, celebrate their cultural identity, and ensure the preservation of their traditions for future generations.

One exemplary initiative that showcases the potential of Intangible Cultural Heritage in sustainable tourism is the Atlantic CultureScape project. Launched in 2019 and co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the INTERREG Atlantic Area programme, this project aimed to identify and develop Intangible Cultural Heritage experiences unique to Europe's Atlantic coast areas. Collaborating with seven partners and twelve associate partners from six European countries, including Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the project set out to create a European route that integrates distinct Intangible Cultural Heritage experiences from Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Wales, Portugal, and Spain.

The Atlantic CultureScape project represented a pioneering effort to protect and promote Intangible Cultural Heritage on a transnational scale. Over a three-year period, sixty Intangible Cultural Heritage tourism experiences were meticulously crafted, spanning a diverse range of traditions, rituals, and practices unique to each region. Through intensive training and mentoring programmes, expert providers, many of whom had never worked in tourism before, were equipped with the necessary skills to develop high-quality experiences that share their stories and those of their ancestors.

The success of the Atlantic CultureScape project extends beyond the creation of tourism experiences. It has fostered a sense of pride and identity within communities, connected traditions of the past with the present, and promoted cultural diversity and human creativity. By celebrating Intangible Cultural Heritage, the project has not only supported the livelihoods of experience providers but also contributed to the sustainable development of local economies.

Moving forward, initiatives like the Atlantic CultureScape project serve as beacons of inspiration, demonstrating the transformative potential of Intangible Cultural Heritage in sustainable tourism. By harnessing the power of cultural heritage, communities can not only preserve their identity but also create a vibrant and sustainable future for generations to come.

6. Community Engagement and Development

Involvement of Local Communities in Geopark Activities

Local communities are not just stakeholders; they are the heart of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark's mission and vision. We actively engage community members in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are not only heard but valued. Through a variety of collaborative initiatives such as Geopark Tourism Cluster, Thematic Forums, Management Groups and Events Working Groups we foster a sense of ownership and stewardship among Geopark residents. By encouraging their active participation in Geopark activities, we instill a sense of pride and responsibility towards their heritage.

Collaboration with local communities goes beyond mere engagement; it's about building lasting partnerships based on mutual respect and trust. These partnerships are fundamental to the success of our Geopark, as they enable us to tap into local knowledge, expertise, and traditions. By working hand in hand with community members, we ensure that our initiatives are not only relevant but also sustainable in the long run.

Socio-Economic Benefits of Geopark Designation

The designation of the Mourne Gullion Strangford area as a UNESCO Global Geopark brings with it a myriad of socio-economic advantages. Leveraging its unique geological, ecological, and cultural assets, the Geopark becomes a magnet for

economic growth, job creation, and local livelihood enhancement. Tourism promotion, entrepreneurship support, and infrastructure development become catalysts for prosperity while safeguarding cultural heritage and natural landscapes.

As visitors explore the wonders of the Geopark, local businesses flourish, creating new job opportunities and boosting economic activity. Moreover, by preserving and promoting cultural heritage, the Geopark reinforces authenticity of local identity and pride, further enhancing the socio-economic fabric of the region.

Capacity Building and Training Programs for Community Members

Empowering local communities is at the core of our Geopark's ethos. Through a range of capacity building and training programs, we equip community members with the skills and resources they need to actively engage in Geopark activities. Youth Rangers, Geopark Ambassadors, training and education programmes, and entrepreneurship support are just some of the avenues through which we foster skill development and leadership growth.

Investing in education, training, and personal and business development not only enhances individual capabilities but also strengthens the collective resilience of the community. By collaborating with local educational institutions and training providers, we ensure that Geopark knowledge transfer and skill development are accessible. In doing so, we nurture a skilled workforce and promote socio-economic resilience within the community, aligning with our vision of a prosperous and sustainable future for all.

5.1 Case Study for Community Engagement and Development

Nature Based Solutions to Dune Erosion at Tyrella Beach

The project at Tyrella Beach exemplifies community engagement and development within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark, particularly in addressing dune erosion caused by visitor pressures. A local community heritage group initially trialed habitat restoration techniques at a nearby beach and later approached the Geopark to scale these methods at Tyrella. They were involved in every phase, from planning and submitting funding applications to collecting seeds and partnering with a local charity to cultivate the grasses before planting them with local volunteers.

This initiative is crucial for geohazards and climate change resilience, focusing on restoring dune habitats while highlighting protective measures against the threats posed by climate change. The region's geological features are vulnerable to erosion, making monitoring and assessing restoration efforts essential. Community members learned visitor management strategies to ensure sustainable beach usage, strengthening their connection to the geological heritage and protecting it for future generations.

Through partnerships and collaboration with the Geopark, community members embraced ownership of the project, empowering them as stewards of their landscape.

The initiative emphasised research and education, allowing participants to deepen their understanding of ecological dynamics and the importance of their efforts in fostering environmental stewardship.

This project serves as a model for long-term planning, demonstrating how community engagement enhances resilience against climate change and geohazards. By integrating local knowledge with Geopark objectives, the Tyrella Beach initiative not only contributes to the ecological integrity of the dune systems but also supports the socio-economic vitality of the region. The lessons learned will inform future conservation efforts, ensuring that the natural beauty and geological heritage of Tyrella Beach are preserved for generations to come.

7. Education and Outreach

School Programs and Educational Resources

Education lies at the heart of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark's mission, and we are committed to providing engaging and informative programs for students of all ages. Our school and colleges programs are designed to inspire curiosity and appreciation for the geological wonders of the Geopark, fostering a deeper understanding of our geological heritage.

Through annual interactive workshops, self guided field trips, and curriculum-aligned resources, we aim to make the Geopark come alive for students, allowing them to explore the fascinating landscapes and geological features firsthand. Our educational resources, including lesson plans, activity guides, and multimedia materials, support teachers in delivering enriching learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

Public Outreach Initiatives

Engaging the wider public is essential to promoting awareness and appreciation for the geological heritage of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. Through a variety of outreach initiatives, we strive to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds, inspiring a sense of wonder and curiosity about the Earth's geological history.

Public events, guided tours, and interpretive signage provide opportunities for visitors to explore the Geopark's unique landscapes and learn about its geological significance. We also host workshops, talks, and exhibitions to share the latest research and discoveries in geoscience with the community, fostering a deeper understanding of our planet's dynamic processes.

Collaboration with Educational Institutions and Researchers

Collaboration with educational institutions and researchers is central to advancing our understanding of the geological heritage of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark.

We work closely with universities, research institutes, and geological surveys to support scientific studies and facilitate knowledge exchange.

Through research projects, fieldwork opportunities, and academic partnerships, we contribute to the advancement of geological science and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. The establishment of a Geopark Scientific Committee strengthens these efforts, bringing together experts to guide research and collaboration. We also provide support and resources for student research projects, encouraging the next generation of geoscientists to explore the wonders of the Geopark and contribute to its conservation and interpretation.

6.1 Case Study for Education and Outreach

Virtual Education Tours in Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark

The Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark, encompassing the picturesque landscapes of the Mourne Mountains, the Ring of Gullion, and Strangford and Lecale, stands as a testament to the remarkable forces of nature. Shaped by volcanic activity and sculpted by ice over millions of years, this area is not only a stunning backdrop but also a rich tapestry of geological heritage.

In line with UNESCO's mission of promoting education, conservation, and sustainable development, the Geopark has embarked on a series of three virtual education tours. These tours offer participants a unique opportunity to delve into the geological wonders of the region from the comfort of their own homes.

Each virtual tour takes participants on a journey through the geological history of the Geopark, spanning over 400 million years. From the closure of the Iapetus Ocean to the formation of the North Atlantic Ocean, participants will discover the fascinating processes that have shaped the landscape we see today. Led by knowledgeable guides and supported by immersive visuals, these virtual tours provide an engaging and educational experience for learners of all ages.

To complement the virtual tours, a suite of resources has been developed for seven field sites within the Geopark. These resources are designed to empower post-primary school teachers with the information and knowledge needed to lead field visits to each site. Additionally, students are provided with materials to carry out activities in the field, further enhancing their understanding of geological concepts and processes.

By embracing technology and innovation, the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark is breaking down barriers to education and bringing the wonders of geology into classrooms and homes around the world. Through these virtual education tours and accompanying resources, the Geopark is inspiring a new generation of learners and fostering a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

8. Partnerships and Collaboration

Cooperation with Local Authorities, NGOs, and Other Stakeholders

Collaboration with local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Community stakeholders, education institutes and other stakeholders is essential for the success of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. By working together, we can leverage collective expertise, resources, and networks to achieve common goals. Partnerships with local council departments, environmental groups, and community organisations enable us to coordinate efforts, share knowledge, and mobilise support for Geopark initiatives. Through regular meetings, joint projects, and collaborative forums, we foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit, ensuring that our Geopark remains a dynamic and inclusive space for all.

International Partnerships within the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network

As a member of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network, the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark is an active participant in a global community dedicated to celebrating Earth heritage and sustaining local communities. Our international partnerships are essential for promoting collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the sharing of best practices among Geoparks worldwide. Through our involvement in network activities, conferences, and joint projects, we strengthen our connections with other Geoparks, fostering cultural exchange and global solidarity. By embracing diversity and upholding the values of UNESCO, we contribute to the collective effort to protect and preserve our planet's geological heritage.

In addition to our membership in the Global Geoparks Network, the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark is a member of the European Geoparks Network, The UK Committee for UNESCO Global Geoparks, and the Irish UNESCO Global Geoparks Committee. These affiliations further enrich our network of partnerships and collaborations, enhancing our ability to achieve our shared goals of conservation, education, and sustainable development.

Funding Sources and volunteering

Securing adequate funding is essential for the sustainable development and management of the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. In addition to local and central government grants, our substantial base of volunteers plays a crucial role in leveraging substantial in-kind funding and providing essential support. Through their contributions, volunteers enable us to invest in conservation projects, educational programs, and infrastructure development, ensuring the long-term viability of the Geopark for future generations.

Our volunteers are integral members of our community, dedicating their time, skills, and expertise to various aspects of Geopark operations. Whether it's assisting with ambassador activities, conducting research, or participating in conservation efforts, their commitment and passion are invaluable assets. By harnessing the collective

power of volunteers and financial resources, we can continue to advance our mission of celebrating Earth heritage and sustaining local communities.

7.1 Case Study for Partnerships and Collaboration

Shared Island: Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark and Joyce County and Western Lakelands aspiring Geopark

The Shared Island Civic Society Fund, provided by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, plays a vital role in fostering collaboration between communities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This initiative has connected the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark with the Joyce Country and Western Lakes aspiring Geopark, enabling a valuable exchange of ideas and practices in sustainable community development.

Through a series of four exchange visits, representatives from both geoparks have come together to share knowledge and experiences, highlighting their shared geological heritage and cultural identities. This project has not only strengthened personal and cultural ties but has also opened pathways for future partnerships that will enhance cross-border cooperation among civic society organisations. The initiative serves as a critical response to the challenges posed by Brexit, which has accentuated differences and decreased engagement across the border.

The initiative exemplifies how collaboration with local authorities, NGOs, and educational institutions can amplify community engagement and sustainable practices. By working closely together, stakeholders have leveraged their collective expertise and resources, ensuring that both geoparks can achieve their shared objectives in conservation, education, and economic development. This partnership also underscores the significance of intangible cultural heritage, particularly storytelling, in connecting communities and preserving local narratives.

Moreover, this collaboration highlights the importance of international cooperation within the Global Geoparks Network, facilitating knowledge exchange and best practices across borders. The project has generated diverse publicity that has enhanced the visibility of both geoparks, and ongoing dialogue is paving the way for future initiatives, such as youth geopark ambassador exchanges.

Through ongoing collaboration and commitment to long-term partnerships, the Shared Island project is poised to strengthen the foundations for sustainability and resilience in the face of challenges such as climate change. By integrating local knowledge and best practices, both geoparks can continue to promote their unique geological heritage while fostering vibrant, engaged communities. This model of effective partnerships demonstrates that meaningful collaboration can yield significant benefits for all involved, ensuring the continued celebration of Earth heritage and the nurturing of local communities.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Criteria for Assessing the Geopark's Performance

Monitoring and evaluation are essential tools for assessing the effectiveness of Geopark initiatives and measuring progress toward our goals. We have established clear criteria and key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the Geopark's performance across various areas, including conservation, tourism, and community engagement. These criteria provide a framework for assessing the impact of our activities and identifying areas for improvement. The annual review of the Action Plan, akin to a 'MOT', is integral to this process, enabling us to track our achievements and adapt our strategies as needed.

Monitoring of Key Indicators Related to Conservation, Tourism, and Community Engagement

We systematically monitor key indicators related to conservation, tourism, and community engagement to track the Geopark's performance over time. This includes monitoring biodiversity, visitor numbers, satisfaction levels, and community participation rates. By collecting and analysing data on these indicators, we gain valuable insights into trends, strengths, and areas for improvement, enabling us to make informed decisions and allocate resources effectively.

Regular Evaluations and Adjustments to the Strategy as Needed

Regular evaluations are conducted to assess the Geopark's performance and identify opportunities for improvement. Based on the findings of these evaluations, we make adjustments to our strategy, policies, and action plans as needed. This iterative process ensures that our Geopark remains responsive to changing needs and circumstances, allowing us to adapt and evolve in a dynamic environment. By continuously monitoring and evaluating our performance, we strive for excellence and continuous improvement in all aspects of Geopark management.

8.1 Case Study for Monitoring and Evaluation

Dragons in the Hills

The Dragons in the Hills project was delivered throughout the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, it was led by Amphibian and Reptile Groups UK in partnership with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the Herpetological Society of Ireland. Other members of the Geopark Management Group, including Mourne Heritage Trust, also contributed to the project's success. Designed to reconnect local communities with their natural landscapes, the project focused on conserving reptiles and amphibians.

The primary aim of the monitoring and evaluation element of this project was to measure the connection of local communities to nature and understand how involvement in conservation efforts impacted the well-being of participants, particularly children, volunteers, and members of the public. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative measures and qualitative analyses to assess engagement and its effects on health and well-being.

Data collection methods included questionnaires that utilised the Connected to Nature Scale (CNS) and the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). These tools enabled participants to report on changes in their perceived health and well-being, establishing clear indicators aligned with the Geopark's performance criteria. This systematic monitoring provided valuable insights into community engagement and conservation impacts over time.

In addition to quantitative data, semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders; including families, community groups, and project volunteers; offered qualitative insights into personal experiences and broader attitudes toward nature. This dual approach enriched the evaluation process, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the project fostered connections between people and their environment. Focus groups with project staff further highlighted key enablers and barriers to project effectiveness, helping to refine and adapt the ongoing conservation strategies.

The findings from this comprehensive evaluation revealed that engagement in the Dragons in the Hills project significantly enhanced participants' well-being and their connection to local natural heritage. By systematically assessing community satisfaction and monitoring biodiversity impacts, the project not only advanced its conservation goals but also informed necessary adjustments to community outreach strategies. This process of continuous evaluation and adaptation is crucial for the Geopark, ensuring that initiatives remain responsive to evolving community needs and environmental conditions.

The evaluation results were disseminated to key stakeholders. By translating findings into practical recommendations, this evaluation underscores the importance of partnerships and collaboration in successful conservation efforts. The final report was also shared through conferences and social media, promoting a culture of stewardship and encouraging wider community engagement in amphibian and reptile conservation.

The Dragons in the Hills project exemplifies best practices in monitoring and evaluation within the Geopark context. Its focus on clear performance indicators and active community involvement illustrates effective strategies for conservation initiatives, providing valuable lessons that can inform future projects and enhance the overall effectiveness of the Geopark's monitoring and evaluation framework.

10. Communication and Marketing

Branding and Promotion of the Geopark

Effective branding and promotion are essential for raising awareness and generating interest in the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. We have developed a distinctive brand identity that reflects the Geopark's unique geological, ecological, and cultural heritage. Through targeted marketing campaigns, promotional materials, and digital media platforms, we showcase the Geopark's attractions and activities to local, national, and international audiences. By highlighting our key selling points and value proposition, we attract visitors and partners, positioning the Geopark as a premier destination for sustainable tourism, conservation and education and research potential.

Communication Channels and Media Strategy

We adopt a multi-channel communication approach to effectively reach diverse audiences and stakeholders. Our communication channels encompass websites, social media platforms, newsletters, press releases, and public events. Through strategic content creation, storytelling, and engagement strategies outlined in our Geopark Interpretation Plan, we deliver relevant and compelling messages that resonate with our target audience. By leveraging both traditional and digital media channels, we maximise our reach and impact, fostering greater awareness and engagement with the Geopark's mission and initiatives.

Public Relations and Outreach Efforts

Public relations and outreach efforts play a crucial role in building positive relationships with the community, media, and other stakeholders. We actively engage with the local, regional and National (both UK and Ireland) media to share news, stories, and updates about Geopark activities and achievements. Through press releases, media interviews, and featured programmes, we raise awareness and enhance the Geopark's visibility in the public sphere. Additionally, we conduct outreach activities such as public lectures, workshops, and training to engage directly with the community and foster a sense of ownership and pride in the Geopark.

11. Risk Management and Contingency Planning

Identification of Potential Risks to Geopark Sustainability

Identifying potential risks to Geopark sustainability is crucial for ensuring its long-term viability. Our planned approach will involve conducting comprehensive risk assessments to identify and prioritise risks related to natural disasters, climate change, human activities, and other factors. Through the analysis of historical data, scientific research, and stakeholder input, we assess the likelihood and potential impact of each risk on Geopark assets, operations, and stakeholders.

Strategies for Mitigating Risks Related to Natural Disasters, Climate Change, etc.

Once potential risks are identified, we will develop comprehensive strategies for mitigating and managing them effectively. This includes measures such as protecting vulnerable ecosystems, infrastructure, and cultural heritage sites from the impacts of natural disasters and climate change. For instance, we have already begun implementing measures to mitigate the risk of wildfires. Additionally, the Geopark's legal entity, Newry Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC), collaborates with other local authorities, emergency services, and community organisations to develop coordinated response plans and evacuation procedures in the event of emergencies.

Contingency Plans for Emergency Situations

In addition to mitigation strategies, NMDDC develop contingency plans to respond swiftly and effectively to emergency situations. These plans outline roles, responsibilities, and protocols for responding to various scenarios, such as wildfires, floods, and extreme weather events. By conducting regular drills, training exercises, and simulations, we ensure that Geopark staff, volunteers, and stakeholders are prepared to act quickly and decisively in times of crisis, safeguarding lives and minimising damage to Geopark assets and communities.

12. Future Directions and Opportunities

Emerging Trends in Sustainable Tourism and Conservation

We closely monitor emerging trends in sustainable tourism and conservation to identify new opportunities and challenges for the Geopark. This includes trends related to eco-tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, nature-based tourism, and regenerative. By staying abreast of industry developments and best practices, we can adapt our strategies and offerings to meet evolving visitor preferences and market demands, ensuring the Geopark remains competitive and relevant in the long term.

Potential Expansion or Diversification of Geopark Activities

As the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark continues to evolve, we explore opportunities for expanding or diversifying its activities and offerings. This may include developing new visitor experiences, creating innovative educational programs, or partnering with local businesses to offer sustainable products and services. By diversifying our revenue streams and enhancing the overall visitor experience, we can strengthen the Geopark's resilience and sustainability, positioning it for continued growth and success in the future.

Long-Term Vision for the Geopark's Continued Success and Growth

Our long-term vision for the Geopark is one of continued success, growth, and sustainability. We aspire to become a global leader in geoconservation, education, and sustainable tourism, recognised for our innovative approaches, best practices, and

positive impact on communities and ecosystems. By building strong partnerships, embracing technological advancements, and fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, we aim to realize our vision of a thriving Geopark that inspires, educates, and enriches the lives of all who visit and inhabit its unique landscape.

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13. Appendices

- i. Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Action Plan (Available at <https://mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com/>)
- ii. Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Management Plan (Available at <https://mournegullionstrangfordgeopark.com/>)

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Report to:	Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday 20th January 2025
Subject:	Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Additional Funding 2024/2025 - Level 3 Diploma for Children’s Care
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Amanda Smyth Assistant Director, Economy, Growth and Tourism
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Aveen McVeigh Head of Regeneration and Business Development

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

For decision	X	For noting only	
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1.0	Purpose and Background
1.1	<p><u>Purpose</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To note Council’s acceptance of additional funding from Department for the Economy via Department for Communities for an Upskilling for Growth Course regarding a Level 3 Diploma in Childcare on behalf of NMD Labour Market Partnership. To approve that Council, through an SLA process, appoint SERC as an external delivery agent to deliver the Level 3 Diploma in Childcare on behalf of NMD Labour Market Partnership To note that due to the timescales associated with delivery of this additional funding, recruitment for participants will commence end of January at risk, ahead of a formal SLA agreement for delivery being signed <p><u>Background</u></p> <p>Newry, Mourne and Down Labour Market Partnership (LMP) supports local employment by aiming to deliver initiatives that assist those identified as unemployed/economically inactive into employment/self-employment or closer to employment, and provides upskilling opportunities for residents. NMD LMP will help participants secure jobs locally and assist businesses with recruitment by increasing the supply of skilled individuals across Newry, Mourne and Down.</p> <p>Council have received funding from DfC for the previous 3 financial years (21/22; 22/23; and 23/24) and current year (24/25) for implementation of respective LMP Action Plans. Council provides the administrative support and governance for NMD LMP.</p>

	DfE have offered additional funding specifically for Childcare qualifications for the 24/25 period for which detail is provided below.
2.0	Key issues
2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery for a programme for 12 participants to achieve a NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development (Northern Ireland) • Programme will target individuals residing in the Council area who are currently working in the childcare sector • Participants will be required to complete a survey to assess the impact of training on their employment such as change of role, increased responsibilities or remuneration. This follow up will be completed 6-months’ following the end of the programme. • On completion of the programme, participants will have upskilled to a recognised Level 3 qualification in Children’s Care, Learning and Development • There are no specific prior skills/knowledge a learner must have for this qualification; however, learners may find it helpful if they’ve already achieved a Level 2 qualification. All learners MUST have access to either employment or work experience for a minimum of 20 hours a week to support them to develop and practice their skills and apply their knowledge at an appropriate level. This must be a registered setting e.g. nursery, daycare or other early years settings. Child minding is not included. • On successful completion, it is expected that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A minimum of 12 participants enrolled ○ A minimum of 10 participants upskilling to a Level 3 qualification ○ Increased confidence in the workplace ○ Improved transferable skills in communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and empathy. • This additional initiative will fall within the Upskilling for Growth initiatives previously identified in the overall NMD LMP Action Plan 24/25 which aims to meet employer needs and support career progression by upskilling employees. Provide support to employers to upskill staff to enable career progression for those in employment to facilitate vacancies and opportunities for those entering the labour market.
3.0	Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Members note Council’s acceptance of additional funding from Department for the Economy via Department for Communities for an Upskilling for Growth Course Level 3 Diploma in Childcare on behalf of NMD Labour Market Partnership.

	<p>ii. Members approve that Council appoint SERC through a SLA to deliver the Level 3 Diploma in Childcare on behalf of NMD Labour Market Partnership</p>
	<p>Resource implications</p>
4.1	<p>Delivery for a programme for 12 participants to achieve a NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development (Northern Ireland) will be 100% funded by DfE via DfC to the value of:</p> <p>Total Budget: £23,500.00</p>
5.0	<p>Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)</p>
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Rationale:</i></p>

6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	Appendices
	N/A
8.0	Background Documents
	N/A

Report to:	Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday 20 th January 2025
Subject:	PEACEPLUS Theme 1.1
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Amanda Smyth Assistant Director Economy, Growth and Tourism
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Sonya Stephenson – Head of Programmes Sarah McClory – Project Coordinator

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For decision	X	For noting only			
1.0	Purpose and Background				
1.1	<p><u>Purpose</u> To approve the minutes of the PEACEPLUS Partnership on 24th October 2024 which are attached at Appendix 1 to this report.</p> <p>To establish a Project Partnership and update the Partnership Board in line with that required for each of the pillars to ensure representation is current and no duplication with the Partnership Board.</p> <p>To approve the attached business cases for procurement of the below: Appendix 2 - Strand 1.1 Transforming and reimaging project Appendix 3 - Strand 1.4 Community Navigation Programme and Strand 1.5 Co-Designed cross community place making plans</p> <p><u>Background</u> The PEACEPLUS Partnership met on 24th October 2024. Recommendations arising from these meetings require ERT Committee approval. Minutes are attached and recommendations outlined in the recommendations section below.</p>				
2.0	Key issues				
2.1	<p>Establishment of a Project Partnership SEUPB have issued guidance on the organisational governance structures for delivery of the Action Plan. They require Council to have a Project Partnership and a Partnership Board.</p> <p>The Project Partnership comprises of the lead partner (Council), Project Partners (SERC) and Associate Partners (capital projects selected under the EOI process).</p> <p>The Project Partnership will update the Partnership Board which will remain as the governance and support structure for the delivery of the programme</p>				

	<p>The pillars for the Partnership Board will remain the same as that previously agreed by Council and structures will be updated as required in line with changes in representation across the pillars.</p>
2.2	<p>Letter of Offer & Launch A formal launch of PEACEPLUS local action plan will take place 25th February 2025, venue to be confirmed.</p> <p>Officers will continue to forward plan to ensure that on receipt of Letter of Offer delivery of the Action Plan can commence immediately</p>
2.3	<p>Business cases are attached for the procurement against the follow strands:</p> <p><u>Strand 1.1 Transforming and reimagining project</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1 focuses on Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities. • Under this theme, Investment Area 1.1 supports the creation of Co-Designed Local Community Peace Action Plans • The attached business is seeking approval for the procurement of support for the identification and development of 21 local area action plans which will result in 21 revenue projects and engage 606 participants through the programme. • Phase 1 - The indicative budget over the delivery period (January 2025 – September 2027) is reflected in Appendix 2 • Phase 2 – A budget as reflected in Appendix 2 is available for the delivery of 21 revenue projects. The revenue projects identified under theme 1.1 activity will be publicly procured separately by PEACE Officers <p><u>Strand 1.4 and 1.5 Transforming and reimagining project</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.4 Community Navigation Programme - aims to increase levels of cross community mobility and better awareness and use of existing spaces • 1.5 Co-Designed cross community place making plans - aims to develop an online map of Newry Mourne and Down District Council's public spaces • The attached business is seeking approval for the procurement of support to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Development of online portal for community/voluntary groups to advertise services and events along with a marketing plan to raise awareness of the portal. It will also include information on funding opportunities and how to apply. ○ Mapping exercise on existing spaces and facilities, helping to maximise linkage to other themes and encourage cross-community and cross-border engagement • A budget is available and fully funded through the PeacePlus programme as set out in Appendix 3
3.0	Recommendations

3.1	To approve the minutes of the PEACEPLUS Partnership on 24 th October 2024 which are attached at Appendix 1 to this report.
3.2	To establish a Project Partnership and update the Partnership Board in line with that required for each of the pillars to ensure representation is current and no duplication with the Partnership Board.
3.3	To approve the attached business cases for procurement of the below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appendix 2 - Strand 1.1 Transforming and reimaging project ○ Appendix 3 - Strand 1.4 Community Navigation Programme and Strand 1.5 Co-Designed cross community place making plans
4.0	<p>Resource implications</p> <p>Resource implications are set out in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appendix 2 - Strand 1.1 Transforming and reimaging project ○ Appendix 3 - Strand 1.4 Community Navigation Programme and Strand 1.5 Co-Designed cross community place making plans
4.1	Revenue/Payroll: Project 85% funded by the EU and 15% by the two Governments
5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p>

	<p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Rationale:</i></p>
6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	Appendices
	<p>i. PEACEPLUS Partnership minutes 24th October 2024</p> <p>ii. Appendix 2 (<i>Restricted</i>) Business case for 1.1 Development and delivery of 21 Local Action Plans</p> <p>iii. Appendix 3 (<i>Restricted</i>) Business case for 1.4/1.5 Navigation programme for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Community Navigation Programme. • Develop Co-Designed cross community place making plans.
8.0	Background Documents
	n/a

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**MINUTES OF PEACEPLUS PARTNERSHIP MEETING
Thursday 24th October 2024 @ 6pm
Council Chambers, Downpatrick**

CHAIRPERSON: Cllr Terry Andrews**Others Present:**

Cllr Cathal King, NMDDC
Cllr Philip Campbell, NMDDC
Cllr Glynn Hanna, NMDDC
Andy Hall, Social Partner
Catherine Shipman, SERC
Gerard Rocks, SHSCT
Sarah McClory NMDDC
Theresa McLaverty, NMDDC
Elaine Carr, NMDDC
Julie-Anne Harte NMDDC

Apologies:

Cllr David Lee-Surginor
Cllr David Taylor
Cllr Declan McAteer
Nicholas McCrickard, CDRCN
Rosemarie McDonnell, Advice NMD
Brian Beattie, SHSCT
Paul Yam, Social Partner
Martina Flynn, NMDDC
Sonya Stephenson, NMDDC

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES:

Cllr Terry Andrews chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance. Apologies noted.

2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

None declared.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 19th SEPTEMBER 2024

Updated to add Cllr Philip Campbell to the list of those present then accepted as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

Proposed: Cllr Hanna

Seconded: Cllr Campbell

4. MANAGEMENT REPORT

Sarah McClory presented the management report and advised members an official launch of the PEACEPLUS programme would most likely occur in February 2025 during the daytime. An exact date and venue will be advised once confirmed.

Procurement training will commence week beginning 18th November, a session will take place in each DEA area alternating between day and evening. There will also be one online sessions for those unable to attend in person.

A requirement of SEUPB is for a Steering Group Committee to be convened upon receipt of the Letter of Offer.

5. DELIVERY REPORTS

Theresa McLaverty presented delivery reports for Strand 1, Strand 2 and Strand 3. Partnership members asked to advise any relevant groups/community organisations in each DEA of opportunities to participate. Members sought clarity on how themes were identified and how projects would be selected.

It was explained a needs analysis was carried out and public procurement would apply for tendered projects. Members were also advised it was common practice to consult with other Council departments to ascertain if a need has been identified in any specific area. Each project would be scored on individual merits and under due process, mindful of any potential conflict of interest.

Members asked for transparency on how decisions are made regarding selection.

Action: Papers from previous Partnership meeting showing approvals granted regarding potential project design ideas to be re-sent to members.

The PEACE team are to examine how best to share information on potential projects and revert to the Partnership. Clarification from SEUPB regarding managing potential conflicts of interest.

Approval sought to Procure:

Strand 2 – Capacity Building and Engagement Programme

Strand 2 – Collaborative Interaction Programme

Strand 2 – Events and Festivals Programme

Strand 3 – Themed Diversity Festivals

Proposed: Cllr Campbell

Seconded: Cllr King

Catherine Shipman presented the delivery report for SERC on Strand 2 & 3 and a PowerPoint presentation was shared with all members via email. SERC plan to work alongside communities in each DEA area, Catherine is happy for all queries from members to be forwarded to her email address.

6. AOB

Members expressed wish to ensure projects maximized experiences and programmes/initiatives already in place, tapping into existing experience. Members were assured there was no wish to duplicate and conversation around projects was welcomed.

Members also expressed concern at target numbers and difficulty achieving what was set out. It was explained targets were set by SEUPB and the partnership would be asked to help share information and identify participants.

Members were advised a Social Inclusion officer would be appointed to assist with recruitment for meaningful engagement.

7. **DATES AND VENUES OF NEXT MEETING** - Next meeting: Thursday 19th December 2024, Newry Council Board Room, 6pm

Report to:	Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday 20 January 2025
Subject:	Sponsorship - Inspiring Sustainable Tourism Conference
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Amanda Smyth, Assistant Director EGT
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Michelle Boyle, Head of Tourism Product Development and Visitor Experience

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

For decision	For noting only	x
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1.0	Purpose and Background
1.1	<p><u>Purpose</u> To note that Council will collaborate with and sponsor the Sustainable Tourism Network to bring the 2026 Inspiring Sustainable Tourism annual Conference to Newry, Mourne and Down. This will help showcase the destination and raise awareness of the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark</p> <p><u>Background</u> The 2026 Inspiring Sustainable Tourism Conference is scheduled for 22 January 2026.</p> <p>The Conference inspires sustainable and positive action within the sector with an aim of facilitating a space to learn, connect and build capacity for both public and private bodies.</p>
2.0	Key issues
2.1	<p>Newry, Mourne and Down District Council have been approached to sponsor the 2026 Conference. This would bring approximately 200 delegates to the destination and would be a fantastic opportunity to showcase the sustainable initiatives in the area of sustainability and climate action and to build awareness of the geopark.</p> <p>Delegates to the conference would include representatives from within and outside the Sustainable Tourism Network - from attractions, visitor experiences, to tour operators, activity and accommodation providers.</p> <p>The Conference also showcases a marketplace called the 'Sustainability Hub' where suppliers can exhibit, which is an opportunity for the Council and businesses within the Destination.</p>

	<p>An important project connected to the conference would be the legacy project where the Sustainable Tourism Network would engage with a local community via an environmental initiative and support them onsite in order to leave a positive mark on the community and environment where they would be bringing the conference.</p>
3.0	Recommendations
3.1	To note Council will collaborate with and sponsor the Sustainable Tourism Network to bring the 2026 Inspiring Sustainable Tourism annual Conference to Newry, Mourne and Down. This will help showcase the destination and raise awareness of the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark
4.0	Resource implications
4.1	Sponsorship required £6,000 available within revenue budgets
5.0	Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)
5.1	<p><i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i></p> <p>It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
5.2	<p><i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.3	<p><i>Proposal initiating consultation</i></p> <p>Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves <input type="checkbox"/></p>

	<p>Consultation period will be 12 weeks <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>Rationale:</i></p>
6.0	Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)
6.1	<p>Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please complete the following:</p> <p>Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed <input type="checkbox"/></p>
7.0	Appendices
	N/A
8.0	Background Documents
	N/A