



Title of Report:	Sperrins Future Search
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	19 October 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing Our Environments and Assets
Outcome	All environments in the area will benefit from pro-active decision making which protects the natural features, characteristics and integrity of the Borough
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation Coast and Countryside Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£11,000 until 31/03/2022 £22,000 for financial year 2022/23
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is update Elected Members on the work of the Sperrins Partnership Project and to request an extension of the funding until April 2023.

2.0 Background

In December 2018, Elected Members agreed to contribute £21,210 for the financial periods 2018/19 and 2019/20. Due to delays in recruiting staff, financial support was not apportioned for the year 19/20 until the 20/21 financial year as the Project Officer and Admin Support did not take up their Posts until Oct 2020. At a recent Sperrins Partnership Project Board meeting, Directors from the representative Councils agreed that a request would be put to the 4 lead Councils asking for 3 year's funding to allow the extension for the contracts for the Project Officer and Admin Support. See **Annex A**.

3.0 Progress to Date

A Sperrins Partnership Project Officer and part time Administrative Support have been appointed and took up their respective roles in October 2020.

Work completed or progressing since mid-October 2020 includes:

- Approval and sign off of the Sperrins Partnership Agreement between the partner councils;
- A Governance Structure for the project drawn up and agreed at Board level;
- The formation of a Sperrins Partnership Board;
- The development and launch of a new website dedicated to the project www.sperrinspartnershipproject.com;
- An official Launch of the Sperrins Future Search Report and Action Plans;
- A review and update of the Brand and Tourism Action Plan;
- The formation of the Brand and Tourism Thematic group;
- Engagement with Statutory Agencies;
- Support, assistance and promotion of collaborative projects including, the Sperrins Sculpture Trail and IAT (International Appalachian Trail) projects.

4.0 Current Projects and Priorities

There are a number of projects each of the partners councils are leading on that will support the collaborative work of the partnership and enhance the product offering in the region.

- The Sperrins Sculpture trail will consist of 3 iconic pieces of artwork positioned in spectacular settings within the Sperrins. The sculpture trail is designed to promote the natural and built heritage of the region and encourage rural tourism and out of state visitors whilst preserving the natural assets of the rural community. This project is a working partnership between Derry City and Strabane District, Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.
- The International Appalachian Trail (IAT) links the mountains in West Donegal through to Larne in Co. Antrim along the geological Appalachian trail. The route crosses 6 different council areas which include the 4 Sperrins partnership councils with varying distances in each council.

- The OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory located in Davagh Forest recently opened its doors to visitors and is the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland. The park is an initiative by Mid Ulster District Council and sits within the Sperrin AONB.
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council recently secured external funding for enhancement works at Banagher Glen. Once complete, the project will improve and enhance the visitor experience at this stunning location. The project will create opportunities for the local community and visitors to enjoy the site on a year round basis, and also create opportunities for visitors to explore the high Sperrins on foot.
- Garvagh Forest Trails has proved to be a very popular attraction. The project has created a community outdoor recreation hub in Garvagh Forest through the development of a multi-use walk and off-road family cycling trails. Within the Branding and Tourism element, Garvagh will feature as a Sperrins attraction.
- In Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area recent improvement work was completed at Gortin Glen Forest Park. The redevelopment of Gortin Glen Forest Park has transformed it into a family friendly outdoor experience and includes a destination play park, trim trail, additional parking and the creation of mountain biking trails.

Sperrins Partnership Project has several priorities over the coming months which include:

- Commencing work on the delivery of the short- and long-term actions contained within the Brand and Tourism Action Plan.
- Identifying funding opportunities and creating the respective business cases (HLF, RDP, Peace Plus etc).
- Completing an audit of the tourism product of the Sperrins region.
- Forming strong cross boundary partnerships.
- Researching and identifying the best practice delivery structure for Sperrin region.
- The formation and development of the remaining Thematic Groups.

Each council was delegated to co-ordinate the thematic group meeting as outlined in the table below.

Thematic Group	Lead Council
Environment & Heritage	Mid Ulster
Infrastructure	Fermanagh & Omagh
Brand & Tourism	Causeway Coast & Glens
Community	Derry & Strabane
Management Structures	Mid Ulster

5.0 Moving Forward

The Sperrins Partnership Project is presently funded by 4 councils at a total annual cost of £88,000. It is anticipated that the annual operating cost will remain the same for the next number of years and these costs will be purely attributed to the management and administration functions of the Sperrins Partnership Project. With regards to implementation of projects across the thematic groups, additional funding will be sought from external sources. At the Director Coordinating Group meeting, held on Friday 17 September 2021, it was agreed by partners present to ask respective Councils to extend the project for 3 years.

Attached for Members consideration:

- Sperrins Partnership Board - Terms of Reference – **Annex B.**
- A Project Road Map up until 2023 – **Annex C.**

6.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Leisure & Development Committee recommends to Council that it continues to fund the Sperrins Partnership Project up until March 2023 and, subject to review, until October 2023. The review will take place prior to March 2023. The cost for Council is £22,000 per annum.

Sperrins Partnership Project

Director Coordinating Group Meeting

Minutes of Sperrins Partnership Project - Director Coordinating Group Meeting held via WebEx on Friday 17th September at 2.30pm

Present:-

Ms Kim McLaughlin (*Director of Regeneration and Planning FODC*); Mr Richard Baker (*Director of Leisure and Development CC&GBC*); Mr Stephen Gillespie (*Director of Business & Culture DCSDC*); Ms Aeidin McCarter (*Head of Culture DCSDC*); Ms Ciara Toner (*Sperrins Partnership Project Officer*).

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies received from Mr Michael Browne (*MUDC*)

2. Minutes from Previous Meeting

Minutes from previous meeting held 10th June 2021 were agreed.

3. Project Update

The Project Officer provided an update on project progress since the last meeting of the group, mainly:

- A virtual launch event to launch the Sperrins Future Search Report and Action Plans took place on 5th August and feedback received had been positive with a number of stakeholders querying how that might contribute towards the delivery of the actions plans. The Project Officer had followed up on each query and responded accordingly.
- A new website had launched and social media platforms would go live soon.
www.sperrinspartnershipproject.com
- A meeting of the Statutory Partners took place on 14th June and another meeting would be rearranged over the coming weeks. The Project Officer would share the minutes of the last meeting with the group.
- Discussions were underway with Officers in Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to assess if they have capacity to be the lead council for the Brand and Tourism Working Group. Finance for delivery would also need to be discussed.
- The Sperrins Partnership Board last met on 25th June and it was hoped to rearrange a further meeting in October. This date would be shared with members once identified.

ANNEX A

- It was agreed at the last meeting of this group that a finance update report would be submitted to the partner council to seek a further financial contribution towards the continuation of the project, post October 2021. Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council confirmed that approval had been granted for future funding, subject to ratification by Council. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council confirmed that the report would be tabled at the Leisure and Development Committee to be held on 19th October.

The Project Officer then departed the meeting to allow a further conversation on the future funding for the project.

- It was agreed by the partners present to confirm annual funding to continue project for three years and for DCSDC as the lead employer to extend the contracts for three years. In the meantime they will extend on a month by month basis until all partners have confirmed funding.

Sperrins Partnership Board

Terms of Reference

The geographical area represented by the Sperrins Partnership Board includes the council areas of:

- Causeway Coast and Glens
- Derry and Strabane
- Fermanagh and Omagh
- Mid Ulster

Definition: There is uncertainty as to what is meant by 'the Sperrins' in terms of a geographical area. The discussions that took place suggest that there is a probable consensus around treating the AONB as the core while embracing the critical relationships between communities in the AONB and neighbouring larger settlements (gateway towns).

1 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the Partnership and role of the Chair is to:

- (i) oversee the strategic direction and delivery of the four thematic groups Action Plans, Environment & Heritage, Infrastructure, Brand & Tourism and Community. The Partnership will provide a mechanism for interested parties/stakeholders to help preserve, enhance and manage the culture and heritage of the Sperrins by making them more accessible and enjoyable for all, in ways that address social, economic and environmental interests, and with regard to issues of particular local relevance.
- (ii) facilitate understanding of needs and aspirations of user groups, activity providers, sporting clubs, land owners, competent authorities, and statutory bodies.

2 Objectives

The Sperrins Partnership Board will aim to:

- 2.1** Promote and support the marketing of developments that increase and improve sustainable and responsible activities taking place in the area.
- 2.2** Promote the development, adoption and communication of voluntary codes of conduct that promote responsible use of the area and help create a sense of ownership by the local communities.

- 2.3** Encourage partnership working to avoid duplication with other relevant bodies.
- 2.4** Drive forward the ideas of the wider thematic groups, overseeing budgets, employment and management responsibilities.

3 Membership

3.1 SPERRINS PARTNERSHIP BOARD

- 3.2** The Sperrins Partnership Board will comprise 20 members including 8 elected members drawn from the membership of each of the four participating Councils (2 elected member representatives from each Council). Should any member not be able to attend, they may nominate another representative from their party.
- 3.3** Councillors designated will be nominated at the relevant Council's Committee meetings and ratified by full council.

3.4 Thematic Group Members

Two Representative from each of the following Thematic Groups may attend:

- Environment and Heritage
- Infrastructure and Economy
- Brand and Tourism
- Community

- 3.5** Two representatives from the Coordinating Group will be nominated to sit on the board
- 3.6** Two representatives from the Statutory Partnership sub-group will be nominated to sit on the board
- 3.7** Local Government Officers may attend meetings of the Board in an observer status.

3.8

The Sperrins Partnership Board is a network of sector representatives with an interest in the development of opportunities for increased participation in the Sperrins.

4 Chair

- 4.1** The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board shall be appointed by voluntary nominations to the Partnership Board and shall hold office for up to three years or until such time as they are replaced by nominations at the first meeting following the expiry of that calendar year. Subject to their continued membership to the Partnership Board they shall be eligible for re-nomination thereafter.

In the case of more than one nomination being received a vote will take place to appoint the positions of Chair and Vice – Chair.

5 Administration

- 5.1** An appointed secretary will be responsible for the administration of the Partnership Board.
- 5.2** The Partnership Board shall normally meet four times per annum and additional meetings may be arranged where necessary. Board meetings will rotate around each of the four council areas.
- 5.3** An annual open network meeting will be held once per annum to share information to sector groups by representatives.
- 5.4** Meeting agendas shall be agreed between the Chair and the Project Officer. Agendas, papers and minutes of the meeting shall be available to the public on request from the Project Officer.
- 5.5** The Partnership Board may, where appropriate, formally invite observers to the meeting who shall be able to contribute to the meeting at the discretion of the Board.
- 5.6** All papers for meetings will be sent to members at least five days in advance and should be supported by a clear recommendation wherever possible.
- 5.7** A consensus should be reached on all matters discussed but where this is not the case opposing views will be recorded.

ANNEX B

- 5.8** The quorum for meetings of the partnership board shall be 10 members. Any member missing three consecutive meetings shall be addressed by the Chair.

6 General obligations

- 6.1** A member must:
- promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person
 - treat others with respect
 - not do anything which compromises or which is likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of the partnership board.

- 6.2** A member must not in his or her official capacity, or any other circumstance, conduct himself or herself in a manner that could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or the forum into disrepute.

- 6.3** A member must not in his or her official capacity, or any other circumstance, use his or her position improperly to confer on or secure for himself, herself or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage.

7 Disclosure of personal interests

- 7.1** All member must disclosure and sign a register of interest which will be maintained and updated on an annually basis.

- 7.2** A member with a personal interest in a matter who attends a meeting of the forum at which the matter is considered must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent and must leave the room when it is being discussed.

- 7.3** The declaration of interests shall be an agenda item at the start of each meeting.

A Conflict of Interest would include, but not be limited to, direct or indirect interests of a Member in:

- A company, service or product that could be affected by a decision of the partnership board;
- A company or product that is in competition with a company, service or product that could be affected by a decision of the forum;
- Acceptance of any gift, entertainment, services, loans or promises of future benefits from any person or organization that might benefit because of the individuals connection with the forum;

ANNEX B

- Compensation in the form of fees or salaries if such payment results directly or indirectly from the Member's work with the partnership board.

Project Road Map

	2021	2022	2023
Sperrins Partnership Board	Plan strategy	Encourage Partnership Working Promote responsible use of the area	
Environment & Heritage		Review Community Planning Audit Existing E&H	Define Geographic Area Sustainable tourism
Infrastructure		Growth deal Appoint a Champion	Audit of Infrastructure Define potential Greenways/access Implement a full marketing plan
Brand & Tourism	Establish USP Identify short term initiatives	Define the area/essence/product Visitor Experience Plan	Events Strategy
Community		4 councils community planning teams to meet Research other AONB Models	Community Networking
Management Structures	Build Datasets	Look at Best Practice Link to CP/LDP's and PfG	Link with existing Policies Agree Vision, Scope and Plan
Project Management	Agree targets Agree Governance Structures	Agree Risk Register and Road Map	Agree Workplan