

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

To: Leisure & Development Committee

Mountsandel Historic Site Update

10th November 2015

For Information

Report to Committee

Linkage to Interim Corporate Plan	
Strategic Themes	Transition and Transformation Prosperity Health & Wellbeing Cohesive Community
Lead Officer	Peter Thompson – Head of Tourism and Recreation
Cost: (If applicable)	No cost at this stage.

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information outlining the work currently ongoing to assess potential future use of Mountsandel and the surrounding amenity.

Background

Located on the Eastern Bank of the River Bann in Coleraine, Mountsandel Wood is an important recreational site with a strong historical and natural significance. Excavations in the 1970's showed that human activity here dates from 9,000 years ago and it is the location of the first known human settlement in Ireland. In addition to the Mesolithic site, the wider amenity features remains of an Anglo Norman fort, riverside access, a deciduous woodland walk and excellent biodiversity. On the opposite side of the River Bann, land in Council ownership creates a riverside park extending to the towns Old Bridge.

In 2008, Coleraine Borough Council carried out some improvements, including refurbishment of Somerset Riverside Park, and installing interpretative signage on the Mountsandel Woodland Trail. Whilst this was well received at the time there is an opinion by many that the sites location and its historic significance warrants further investigation, with a view to improving the overall experience and sharing this with the area's population and visitors to the region.

Over the past twelve months, Council officers with the support and interest of The Rotary Club have informally been looking at ways to promote the importance of the site historically, from a natural habitat and a biodiversity point of view. Avenues explored have included the potential for the reintroduction of the red squirrel, and discussions with CCEA (Education examination authority) to seek incorporation of Mountsandel into the school's curriculum for history across Northern Ireland. In June approximately 70 students from Coleraine High School and Coleraine Institute, spent a day exploring the history and environmental importance of the woodland area. This is now hoped to be an annual event with the new Coleraine Grammar School.

Council Officers are planning to meet with key stakeholders including NIEA, Forest Service, Waterways Ireland, The Rotary Club, The Rivers Agency and The Hon The Irish Society. The purpose of this meeting will be to seek views, and advice on the potential for development at some point in the future. It is the intention that an outline 'blue print' for development of the wider Mountsandel site will be produced and brought to Council for consideration.