

Magheracross Coastal Walking Trailhead and Scenic Viewpoint	13th November 2018
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Decision	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing our Environments and Assets Promote our tourism offer locally and internationally Prosperity, Health and Wellbeing and Cohesive Community
Outcome	Improved access to our natural environment. Development of visitor economy and health and well-being opportunities.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism & Recreation
Cost: (If applicable)	£100k approx. to Council (£570k grant aid possible)

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Members to proceed to, and complete on, Stage 2 of the Council's Capital Investment process for works at Magheracross. (Economic appraisal, design to tender and procurement for Contractor).

Background

In April 2018 Council Officers presented a blueprint document on the Causeway Coast Way which received Members' approval to pursue the strategic direction and where possible deliver on the proposed interventions detailed. These included the development of suitable sites for walking trailheads. In addition, the project will offer an improved infrastructure experience for the car driving route known as the Causeway Coastal Route

In September 2018, Council Officers sought approval for advancement of Stage 1 of the Council's Capital Investment process for the development of an iconic tourism/amenity viewing space at Magheracross on the Causeway Coastal Route (A2).

At the Members' Consultation Workshop on Thursday 4th October, Officers presented the proposed design detail for this project. Other potential projects were presented and included coastal path works at Portballintrae, Portaneevy view point (Ballintoy) and Clare Road coastal path Ballycastle.

Site Options

Two locations were considered as suitable trailheads for development, namely Portaneevy Ballintoy and Magheracross circa Dunluce Castle. The RDP funding programme stipulated that any application must clearly demonstrate an international and iconic dimension. To meet this requirement Officials had proposed to incorporate viewing points that reach outwards from the landscape in a seaward direction.

After an outline design was made for Portaneevy, an assessment was made on how the iconic feature at this site would impact on how Council managed the potential increase in visitor numbers. It was considered that with the site being in close proximity to the Carrick-a-rede visitor experience, there is a strong possibility that many of the 250,000 plus visitors at the National Trust site would, on leaving Carrick-a-rede, decide to drive to and park at

Portaneevy, for the extra experience that an iconic viewpoint would offer. The infrastructure at the Portaneevy could not be developed sufficiently to cope with the potential vehicle numbers that may decant from the nearby National Trust site. Officials from the National Trust were consulted as part of this analysis.

To meet the 'international and iconic' criteria stipulated by the RDP Programme it was decided to look at Magheracross as an alternative for this development proposal. This site is also located in close proximity to another popular visitor attraction within the area, namely Dunluce Castle. Dunluce Castle has a small carpark which provides enough capacity for the current visitor numbers. Future plans for this site may lead to an increase in the visitor numbers and hence a greater requirement for car and coach parking spaces would have to be factored for within any proposed development in or circa the site.

It is believed that the Magheracross site has the potential to provide a trailhead for the Causeway Coast Way in addition to providing a stunning stop-off viewpoint experience for vehicles traveling along the Causeway Coastal Route. With regard to Portaneevy, development options for a trailhead are being looked at as part of a number of projects within the development blueprint for the Causeway Coast Way.

Project Proposal

The Council's Tourism and Recreational team, in conjunction with the Infrastructure team, have developed a concept and appointed GM Design to advance this prior to the Elected Members' Consultation Workshop. The elements proposed include:

- Bringing the on-road walking element of the Causeway Coast Way into the site along the perimeter of the clifftop.
- Creating iconic feature viewpoints looking along coast line with the vistas including the limestone cliffs towards Whiterocks and Dunluce Castle.
- Sensitive landscaping and provision made for the Causeway Coast Way to extend eastwards towards the Dunluce Castle domain.
- Adjustments to car parking provision to reduce visual impact on the coast line.

Details of the proposed project will be presented at the Leisure and Development Committee.

Funding opportunity.

With the assistance of the Funding Unit, Officers have sought financial support for this project and are hopeful that funding can be sourced through the Rural Development Programme's Strategic Tourism Scheme (£500,000 at a 75% contribution to costs). Based on estimated costs for the implementation, Council's contribution would be capped at a maximum of £100,000 (other sources of funding including the Landfill Community Fund are being explored). The Rural Development Programme funding requires that the necessary statutory approvals are in place in the first quarter of 2019.

Next Steps

Subject to Elected Members approval, Officers would propose to produce an Economic Appraisal for the project and complete the procurement process for a contractor. In tandem, a full application will be prepared to submit to the DEARA strategic scheme and subject to a successful indication of securing funding, direction will be sought from Elected Members' on whether or not to proceed with appointment and completion of the works. Any works will be subject to planning and statutory consents. The earliest possible start date for Capital works will be September 2019.

Recommendation

The Leisure and Development Committee is asked to approve the advancement of the Magheracross/Causeway Coastal Way project to Stage 2 of the Council's Capital Investment process.