



<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Tourism and Recreation Business Plan Report 20/21</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	<b>Leisure and Development Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>19 October 2021</b>
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	<b>For Information</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)</b>	
Strategic Theme	
Outcome	
Lead Officer	

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>YES/NO</b>
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	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 to present on the Tourism and Recreation Business Plan, presented to the Leisure and Development Committee in August 2020. The Tourism and Recreation Business Plan was adjusted for this period to account for the unprecedented circumstances that resulted from the COVID 19 Pandemic.

## **2.0 Background**

Much of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's activities were restricted after the initial lockdown period was implemented from March 2020 to July 2020. Immediate adjustments were made in the delivery of the Tourism and Recreation Business Plans to account for immediate priorities presented by issues relating to the operation of Holiday and Leisure Parks, the impact on the visitor economy, the cancellation of the Tourism Event programme and the unprecedented numbers of day visitors and staycations in the Causeway Coast and Glens area.

## **3.0 Staffing**

During the initial lockdown there was a significant number of staff from the Tourism and Recreation Team furloughed from front line posts in event management and visitor servicing provision. In addition, agency staff were furloughed across most service areas.

## **4.0 Facilities**

Facilities were 'moth-balled' in advance of relaxation of restrictions, and only minimum maintenance activities carried out.

Holiday and Leisure Parks reopened with a limited service from mid-June 2020.

There was a limited opening of Visitor Information Centres in Portrush, Bushmills and Ballycastle from June 2020.

Facilities that generated income for the visitor economy benefited from DfC COVID19 support grant.

## 5.0 Service Prioritisation for Tourism and Recreation

<p><b>The Tourism and Recreation service will work in partnership with others to develop and sustain the region as a high quality recreational and visitor destination. This is for the benefit of the area's residents, the business sector and visitors hosted within our community.</b></p>	<p><b>Target by 31 March 2021</b></p>
<p><b><u>Destination Management</u></b></p> <p>1. To assist in the recovery of the Tourism and Hospitality sector. The Trade Engagement Team will continue to support the trade by telephone, email, ezines and social media to help them, in conjunction with the Prosperity &amp; Place team, navigate the UK and local government support available during these most difficult and challenging times.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaged directly with 333 businesses and advised on access to COVID Business Support Scheme, Large Tourism Hospitality Business Support Scheme.</li> <li>• Produced weekly eZine on grants available training opportunities, marketing opportunities from Council, TNI and TIL. - an increase of 4% in the open rate during the pandemic</li> <li>• Developed Tourism trade support pages on corporate website <a href="https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/work/tourism-trade-support">https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/work/tourism-trade-support</a></li> <li>• Piloted Tourism Excellence Programme in partnership with Alchemy and Digital Causeway, 10 spaces available, 9 applications, 8 successful applicants</li> <li>• Completed Training Needs Survey with Tourism and Hospitality businesses to inform 21/22 Autumn Winter training programme.</li> </ul>
<p>2. For July, August and September the focus will be on recovery and reopening. The Tourism team will work closely with the trade to promote the marketing recovery campaign and encourage businesses to avail of the Cooperative Marketing Fund.</p> <p>3. Deliver a bespoke Council / Destination Marketing Campaign to key market segments in Northern Ireland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made successful application for TNI Recovery Funding.</li> <li>• Designed digital accommodation guide</li> <li>• designed and printed 20,000 visitor guides and distributed throughout key tourism offices/ visitor attractions in NI and ROI</li> <li>• Implemented Spring recovery campaign – key target NI segment (aspiring families and natural quality seekers).</li> <li>• Attended virtual trade shows x 15. – 600 contacts made with tour operators considering Causeway Coast and Glens as a holiday destination</li> </ul>

and ROI to assist the tourism and hospitality sector in recovery of lost business, income and employment.

- ROI target segments (Open Minded Explorers).

**Marketing support activities:**

**Facebook:**

- Reinforcing safety messages re: social distancing
- #WhenWeTravel again social messages - where to visit, things to do
- Providing COVID-19 tourism updates
- Sharing lockdown-related content from local trade (e.g. cookery demos, DIYs, tutorials)
- #OpenForBusiness campaign submission posts scheduled (1-2 per day, every day) - included business re-opening information and/or offers, images/video and link to website or booking engine for each business that submitted to the campaign.
- Eat Out To Help Out posts scheduled with a link to the government's information page/postcode checker.

Facebook followers increased from 25k to 32K an increase of 28%

**Twitter:**

Continued use of both @VisitCauseway and @CCAGTourismTeam accounts to engage with consumer and trade audiences.

Marketing support has included:

- Tweeting and Retweeting information regarding grants and government schemes applicable to tourism trade.
- Retweeting information from trade regarding special offers/re-opening information and lockdown-related content

Twitter followers increase from 8k to 10K and increase on 25%

**Instagram:**

- Important tourism related updates shared under destination posts and on Instagram stories
- #OpenForBusiness posts shared to stories using the 'Shop Local' Instagram sticker feature. Posts added to #OpenForBusiness Story Highlight. (Views range from 500-700 accounts per story). This included businesses which had responded to the Open For Business campaign, as well as businesses which had tagged the @visitcausewaycoastandglens Instagram account in their post(s).

Instagram followers increased from 10k to 16K an increase of 60%

**Website:**

- COVID-19 updates page added to website to include: Tourism updates, Support Local Trade, Support Our Creators and a link to Council's COVID-19 updates
- Database compiled with local tourism trade offering takeout/delivery/e-commerce services and added to Support Local Trade and Support Our Creators pages
- Tourism Updates page updated regularly with the latest advice from the government on travelling to/from and within Northern Ireland, as well as business closures and social distancing guidelines
- #OpenForBusiness page created to replace Support Local Trade page - business listings added for trade that responded to the Open For Business marketing campaign. Links provided to external trade websites.
- Eat Out To Help Out information added to Open For Business page and homepage, with external link to [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)'s information page added.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ROI target segments (Open Minded Explorers).</li></ul>
--	--

4. Partnership working with key Stakeholders and the Northern Ireland Tourism Taskforce to assist the trade on overcoming obstacles to recovery including social distancing measures and the promotion of an industry standard 'We're good to go' and the local initiative 'Safe and Alert'.
5. Establish bespoke forum for engagement with local hotel operators.
6. Phased reopening of Visitor Information Centres subject to assessment and affordability.
7. Represent the tourism and hospitality sector on TNI business working groups, marketing forum and recovery steering group.
8. The development of a new Destination Marketing website for the Council area.

- Destination Management Team and Tourism Event Team represented Council on key NI wide recovery groupings.
- Communicated progress and updates with trade via weekly ezines and direct contact. – an increase of 4% in the open rate during the pandemic
- Assisted in the promotion of TNI industry standard 'We're Good to Go'.
- Established a Hotel Industry Working Group to assist in lobbying for special status from the NI Executive and TNI COVID recovery Task Force. – The group met 6 times within the year.
- Engaged with NI Hotel Federation.
- Phased opening of VIC Centres occurred from June 20. The VIC's working with 66 local crafters and 19 business offering 29 different experiences through the direct booking service.
- Representational committee ranged from Chief Executive to Destination and Events Team Officers.
- Developed new Destination website with soft launch on Feb 21

<p>9. Procurement and completion of infrastructure for new 'car touring route' traversing the borough (procurement of marketing materials and completion of works to frames and installation).</p> <p>10. Assess resources and requirements for adjustment to marketing activities for winter/spring campaign.</p> <p>11. Reconvene Working Group for development of Mountsandel experience</p> <p><b><u>Tourism Events</u></b></p> <p>12. Plan for post-September events in light of COVID and assess the possibility of an autumn/spring Borough-wide event and cost. Revise event planning for adjusted regulations for gatherings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed and Launched in September 2021 (£128,000 funding secured from DAERA).</li> <li>• Further funding secured from TNI to support recovery marketing activities.</li> <li>• Working Group reconvened and progress made on potential purchase of lands at Mesolithic site £40,000 funding secured.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports brought to Council and a virtual programme of activities delivered for Council led events including Halloween and Christmas.</li> </ul> <p><u>Halloween Virtual</u></p> <p>10 x Most Haunted Causeway Coast &amp; Glens Ghost Stories  2 x Craft sessions,  4 x Walking Tours,  1 x Food Tour  2 x Children's Storytelling.</p> <p>10 most haunted very well received with most engaging post reaching over 57,700.</p> <p><u>Christmas Virtual</u></p> <p>9 Switch Ons  3 x Cookery Demonstrations  2 x Craft  4 x Childrens Storytelling</p>
--	---



<p>13. Plan for revision to format of Atlantic Sessions - adjustment to limit numbers, film sessions and broadcast via online platforms.</p> <p>14. Appointment of consultancy services to develop a 10 year strategic approach to tourism event delivery for the Council area (completion December 2020).</p> <p>15. In-house design of evaluation process for small scale Tourism Events.</p> <p>16. Issue guidance to event organisers within Borough on 'best practice' event planning, management and delivery post September.</p> <p>17. Revisit parameters of Tourism Event Funding Programme for 2020 / 2021 to ensure KPI's are achievable for applicants in light of Covid-19.</p>	<p>1 x Mayors Christmas Message First switch on receiving the best ratings with over 21,300 engagements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual programme delivered via online platforms with pre-recorded programmes.</li> <li>• Blue Sail consultants appointed April 2020 and report completed in Oct 2020. Report taken to Council in April 2021 for approval (deferred for further Council consideration).</li> <li>• Report will be taken on next steps to Blue Sail report (including a structure for the Events Remit) in November 2021 to L&amp;D following Councillor Workshop in August 2021.</li> <li>• Consultation with third party event organisers across the Borough regarding the future sustainability and survival of the event sector from 2021 onwards. Continue to liaise with funded events on how Council can best support their sustainability and survival and the modelling of TEF in 2022 /2023 will reflect this. Currently working with the Communities Team in Council to refresh of the 'Guide for the Planning &amp; Organisation of Community Festivals &amp; other Events'</li> <li>• In recognition of COVID 19 a tourism event funding programme was developed to allow an alternative approach for delivery in 2021/22. The programme successfully delivered and grants awarded from 2021 onwards</li> </ul>
--	---

HALPs

18. Assessment of income losses at Council's HALPs.

19. Preparation of refund policy for static and seasonal licence holders.

20. Adjust infrastructure within HALPs to accommodate social distancing measures on phased opening.

21. Adjust booking system to accommodate phased opening dates from 26 June 2020 (self-contained units opening first, other facilities later).

22. Complete risk assessments for HALPs facilities in line with COVID requirements.

23. Resume the process for the Strategic Development of the HALPs.

24. Carry out essential maintenance not completed in advance of opening.

25. Assess the best opportunities for extending touring season.

- With the closure of HALPs, touring and seasonal static incomes impacted. £362,409 was agreed by Council as a refund to static users who lost benefit of access to HALPs (DfC COVID Recovery Fund utilised to recover expenditure).
- Mitigations on social distancing measures put in across all 6 HALPs.
- Complete
- Training and bespoke risk assessments developed for COVID requirements.
- Process resumed and assessment for future development options at Benone HALP and Leisure Complex
- Work ongoing to complete on essential maintenance programme. Phased approach to completion established.
- Opportunities are being assessed for increased demand due to staycation phenomenon. Additional assessment being carried out for expanding touring facilities.

**Coast and Countryside**

- 26. Phased reopening of public facilities subject to guidance and resources.
- 27. Assessment of staffing requirements to manage outdoor recreational spaces with high public usage over the summer months.
- 28. Ongoing inspection and COVID risk assessments of outdoor spaces within T&R remit.
- 29. Action the repair of estate and monitor progress regarding works. Continually risk assess key sites to protect public and recommend actions regarding access to public.
- 30. Prepare draft policy for approval on assertion of Public Rights of Way.
- 31. Complete report on Portrush Public ROW Investigations for Causeway Street.
- 32. Complete scoping study for all potential Greenway Projects. Plan workshop Autumn 2020.

- Completed
- Completed. Full beach warden service during summer 2020. RNLI ran reduced beach lifeguard service, dropping one site due to COVID
- Continuous ongoing action
- Continuous ongoing action. This has been more reactive due to high footfall across a range of sites
- Draft policy and procedures complete. For discussion with HoS, Director and legal.
- Awaiting opinion from senior counsel
- Members' workshop held. Greenway Project Group meeting regularly to progress.

<p>33. Review of first year's operation at Garvagh Forest Mountain Bike facility. Growth market assessment</p> <p>34. Review of CC&amp;GHT workplan for 2019/20. Options for funding, core costs 2020/21.</p> <p>35. Review Local Bio-diversity Action Plan.</p> <p>36. Development of ToR for Council's approach to Beach &amp; Coastal Management</p> <p><u>Capital Projects</u></p> <p>37. Subject to affordability and Council approval including Planning.</p> <p>Stage 3 completion on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Appalachian Trail.</li> <li>• Lower Bann upgrade Marina facilities at Drumaheglis.</li> <li>• Portaneevy Trailhead and Scenic Viewpoint.</li> </ul> <p>Planning approval required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Magheracross scenic viewpoint and trailhead.</li> <li>• Lower Bann upgrade facilities.</li> </ul> <p>Advancement of Cooperation project on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rathlin Island East Lighthouse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partially complete. Focus has been on maintenance of trails given high levels of use</li> <li>• Completed. Further review required considering COVID restricting delivery of some elements of workplan</li> <li>• To be completed – no staff resource</li> <li>• Ongoing – discussion with Harbours and Marinas and with H&amp;S teams</li> <li>• International Appalachian Trail – Due for completion by December 2021. (£106,263 funding secured from DAERA)</li> <li>• Lower Bann upgrade – work completed and tender for private sector operator complete. Recommendation report due. (£207,506 funding secured from DAERA )</li> <li>• Portaneevy – complete and launched in July 2021 (£404,890 funding secured from DAERA)</li> <li>• Magheracross – Planning approval achieved and project now complete. Launched in July 2021. (£500,000 funding secured from DAERA and £30,000 from the Landfill Communities Fund)</li> <li>• Lower Bann upgrade facilities – Camus and Christie Park works complete.</li> </ul> <p>Project transferred away from Tourism and Recreation remit.</p>
--	--



### 3.0 **Budget**

3.1 At the close of the financial year 2020/21, Period 12 accounts for Tourism and Recreation showed:

Net Budget                £1,652,719

Net Expenditure        £652,309

There was a positive end of year variance of £1,000,410

3.2 As detailed above the main reasons for the positive variance were due to the cancellation of the Tourism Events programme of events, staff furloughed, Destination marketing activities reduced, the impact on the visitor economy and operational remits halted.

**Table 1** below shows an overview of the year end position for the Tourism and Recreation services. Please note it does not take into account any audit adjustments

	Gross Expenditure	Gross Income	Net Expenditure	Budget Gross Expenditure	Budget Gross Income	Budget Net Expenditure	Net Variance
Coast and Countryside	595,732.32	48,356.78	547,375.54	655,775.12		655,775.12	108,399.58
Destination Management	638,577.35	50,124.03	588,453.32	976,347.73	42,035.77	934,311.96	345,858.64
Holiday and Leisure Parks	1,665,070.77	2,681,761.80	(1,016,691.03)	1,833,040.11	2,866,794.00	(1,033,753.89)	(17,062.86)
Tourism Events	497,297.12	38,532.65	458,764.47	1,101,950.40	85,350.00	1,016,600.40	557,835.93