

The Ring of Gullion Landscape Conservation Action Plan – Summary Document



Newry and Mourne District Council

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Executive summary

The Landscape

Slieve Gullion and its mystical ring dyke formed over 60 million years ago with the opening of the North Atlantic Ocean! In more recent times the landscape has been shaped by the action of glaciers, leaving behind the stunning scenery you see today. Every nook and cranny has been exploited by wildlife over the millennia; Red Deer, Red Squirrels, Red Grouse, Irish Damselfly and Irish Hare have all made their home among the peat, wood and wetlands. The Ring of Gullion has been inhabited by people for up to 12,000 years and those who lived here have left their mark on the landscape; whether it be Neolithic tombs, Iron Age fortifications, Christian monasteries, 16th and 17th century castles and much more. The Ring of Gullion is bursting at the seams with myths, legends and folklore – it truly is a remarkable landscape.

The Partnership

The partners cover a wide spectrum of expertise from geology, built heritage, biodiversity, tourism, agriculture, forestry, and recreation, to everything that makes up a community: its storytelling, music, dance and history. The lead partner, Newry and Mourne District Council, has made the Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) a top priority and has committed substantial funding and resources to its delivery, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has also committed substantial funding, and all other partners have pledged their support for the LPS and have showed that it is a priority within their organisation.

The Scheme

Through extensive consultation, an agreed set of themes for this Landscape Partnership have emerged. Principle among them are the conservation of built, natural and cultural heritage in the Ring of Gullion and increasing access and understanding of the areas important heritage.

The scheme will help to conserve some of the most threatened habitats in Northern Ireland, such as the heather moorlands, the woodlands, and the wildflower meadows as well as the threatened species such as the red squirrel, the barn owl and many more. It will conserve age-old townland traditions that are being consigned to history; spark an interest in those involved to continue the work through local community engagement; and encourage participation in the area's culture through festivals, storytelling and oral history projects. Schools will be able to learn about the landscape and its heritage, and access that heritage through new trails and the restoration of old ones. The bank of skills learned along the way by all those involved will ensure that this project leaves a long-lasting legacy.

The Legacy

During the 'troubles' South Armagh was heavily militarised and even now sixteen years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement the Ring of Gullion is an area currently internationally known only for its militarisation.

The Landscape Partnership Scheme through the Heritage Lottery Fund has the potential of creating a new legacy of cooperative regeneration building on a shared heritage for a sustainable future. The Landscape Partnership Scheme will be seen as a flagship of the Peace Process.

Economic Development

It is important to offer a positive impact economically, socially and environmentally. Thus the delivery of the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership Scheme will bring with it immediate, short-term, medium-term and long-term economic development potential. It will immediately bring cash into the local economy through recruitment, overheads, and professional fees and crucially it will create four new jobs.

In the short term the scheme will bring further cash to the local economy, the scheme will deliver outcomes for the conservation of the areas natural and built heritage, substantially increase access to the countryside resulting in greater visitor numbers, and health benefits for those who live and work in the scheme area. High quality training will be implemented in order to support local groups and societies.

In the medium to long term (4 years +) the scheme will deliver a positive economic impact by creating the circumstances whereby local communities can create and improve on livelihoods by using the outcomes of the four programmes. Greater access and understanding of the area, highly trained individuals, and greater sense of pride will all help to bring about economic regeneration of the Landscape Partnership Areas by supporting the social and economic wellbeing of its communities.

The Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership is an ambitious four year project with enthusiastic and qualified partners in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Projects

The partnership projects aim to address the threats and opportunities to protect the landscape of the Ring of Gullion and raise awareness and encourage local community involvement in the historic, cultural and environmental features of the Ring of Gullion.

The partnership will create more opportunities for physical, intellectual and sensory access to the Ring of Gullion, and highlight its recreation potential, local culture and its internationally important biodiversity and geology. This will ensure that high

quality up to date training and skills required to address the above are all available locally.

The total proposed scheme budget is £1,422,125. This includes project costs, salaries and associated costs, in-kind contribution and volunteer time. The Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership Scheme is made up of 24 projects. Below is a brief description of each of the 24 projects, a full Project Delivery plan can be found in the Ring of Gullion Landscape Conservation Action Plan available at www.ringofgullion.org.

1. Habitat protection, restoration and creation- £63,000

This involves a range of projects to conserve, restore and create areas of high biodiversity value. The project aims to do this through surveying, education, practical conservation work and raising awareness. The project will address biodiversity loss by restoring habitats and removing the threat of non-native invasive species. A native tree and wildflower nursery will also be established.

2. Protect Slieve Gullion cairn - £6,295

A report from the Landscape Partnership Scheme Development Phase has detailed the deterioration of the passage tomb. This project aims to address some of these negative impacts by clearing the entrance passage to its original depth, remove the graffiti from the stones in the chamber, and establishing a maintenance team to monitor the tomb. The LPS will also provide another survey during its lifetime and provide a report on the feasibility of repairing the roof, including cost estimates.

3. Newry canal project - £12,000

There will be a new interpretative trail established from Victoria Lock up through Fathom Forest to the Flagstaff viewpoint. The project will provide interpretative panels, road signage, way markers and hard surface trail from Victoria lock to Flagstaff.

4. Know your townlands - £46,000

This project aims to mark each townland with boundary markers on roads that intersect them. It will produce a townland brochure with maps, translations and explanations as well as the stories from the area. The project will also provide an online space for the stories of the townlands to be documented; and an educational resource for use in the local community and in schools.

5. Built heritage surveys - £34,125

This project aims to raise awareness of the areas built heritage by; providing desk-based community training workshops for built heritage surveying; field workshops to the community in order to survey the landscape; identifying and investigating at least

one site of archaeological importance and providing the results to NIEA Built Heritage. The dig will provide artefacts for the museum loan box and carry the work into the schools and other community groups.

6. Signage and Interpretation - £25,000

This project aims to create a Signage and Interpretation document as well as putting in place gateway signage at Camlough and Forkill roundabouts, clearing the Dorsey Embankment site of vegetation and installing signage, installing interpretation for Camlough Quarry and providing comprehensive information on the website.

7. Cultural heritage festivals and historical revival - £52,600

This project will host two annual cultural festivals; a winter solstice event at Slieve Gullion and a summer solstice event in the LP area. The vents will celebrate the areas unique cultural heritage. Each year, an event will be run in conjunction with an ancient event or historical re-enactment.

8. Oral history and storytelling - £4,050

An important element of the festivals will be to record the talents. Working with the established group Cuimhneamh (an organisation with the aims of raising awareness of the life and work of Michael J. Murphy). The project will involve younger generations in telling the folklore of the LP area in digital audio-visual media. The project will record the stories of people working at our events, and during the festival. Heritage sites and artefacts are often inaccessible to the general public. This project plans to make an audio-visual archive of various sites and stories available online, enabling people to appreciate a little of the area's rich heritage.

9. School heritage guidebook - £5,250

Many of the heritage sites in the Ring of Gullion can be used to educate young people from the area. These landscape heritage sites can link to the national curriculum. This project aims to produce a guide book for primary school teachers to enable them to use the Ring of Gullion's heritage to deliver the curriculum more effectively.

10. Schools heritage training - £500

Around the heritage book there will be a teachers training programme, alerting them to the potential of school visits, staff talks, web-based resources, and site visits overseen by the Outreach Officer. School visits and site visits will produce more web-based material, videos and podcasts.

11. Showcase Gullion's heritage - £7,800

The Ring of Gullion Traditional Arts Partnership now has approximately 120 young people attending classes, it is very supportive of and encourages young musicians to take part in Cross Community events.

This project will organise exchange weekends for the 12-18 year olds who attend classes. These exchanges will give the young people a chance to meet other young musicians from different parts of the country and world, and also offer the opportunity to learn tunes from different areas.

12. Provide workspace and outlet for local artists - £6,500

The project will establish a shop at the Slieve Gullion Courtyard whereby the local artists' forum will run and manage the shop. The shop will be mirrored by an online shop hosted on www.ringofgullion.org

13. Museum exhibitions - £1,000

Newry and Mourne Museum is one of the most visited local authority Museums in Northern Ireland however artefacts from South Armagh are fewer than those from the city of Newry and the rest of Newry and Mourne DC.

This project aims to partner with the Museum staff in order to increase the participation of people from the Ring of Gullion LP area. A loan box will also be made up during the lifetime of the LPS and managed by Newry Museum at the end of the scheme.

14. Establish a community and heritage group networking forum - £1,875

Establish a forum for everyone to get together and express their ideas and formulate plans.

15. Wildlife safari - £15,000

A 1.5km circular route between Slieve Gullion Courtyard and Bells Castle focusing on the areas endemic biodiversity. This project will create a wildlife trail by installing a trailhead, six biodiversity interpretation panels, and three hides and feeding stations, along with all necessary hygiene equipment. There will be an accompanying nature detective trail brochure, trail cameras, and an infrared camera

16. Camlough and Bessbrook heritage trails - £85,750

This project will create trails around Camlough Lake, Camlough Village and along Camlough River into Bessbrook. Artwork along the trail river will interpret the shared industrial heritage of the two villages. Interpretation and brochures will guide the visitor along the trails.

17. Slieve Gullion sensory trails - £12,900

A sensory trail on Slieve Gullion Forest Roads will be established, providing a trailhead, way marking, interpretation and a brochure.

18. Slieve Gullion summit to lake trail restoration - £123,420

This project will repair the degraded paths by using sustainable path techniques to accommodate the existing high level of use and to provide for predicted increase in use. This will allow restoration of the damaged habitat and will prevent future damage.

19. Ring dyke trail - £51,500

This project will create a new 60km route around the ring dyke, taking in the hills that were once dominated by military towers, providing access to all the peaks of the ring dyke mountains. It will also provide interpretation, waymarking and an up-to-date 1:25000 scale map of the LP area.

20. Natural history and traditional countryside skills training - £12,000

This project will provide training in biodiversity and countryside skills to people who live work and visit the LP area.

21. Community walking leader and heritage ambassador training - £15, 800

This project aims to hold a series of courses teaching people about how to walk safely in the hills, including what gear to wear and bring, etc. A number of participants will be trained to lead groups of walkers in the hills. This will encourage people to get walking in the LP area. The training will enable trainees to deliver a successful walk programme.

Walking In Your Community provides:

1. Introductory Community Walk Leader training
2. Insurance
3. Further training, including first aid and further navigation
4. Online forum & networking events.

Ring of Gullion Ambassador training will involve holding a number of training courses, including geology, natural heritage, culture, history, etc., to provide all the tools needed to become an ambassador for the Ring of Gullion. These workshops will be aimed at current tour providers, aspiring tour providers, and people in the tourism sector in the LP area.

22. Historical coach tours - £7,640

A coach tour will be run each weekend in July and August. Tourists will be charged £6 per person with lunch provided. LPS will cover any shortfall in income to the coach provider and guide.

23. Volunteering and Youth rangers programme - £40,500

This project will deliver a range of conservation volunteering opportunities by establishing a volunteer workforce and a programme of events, training community groups to enable them to organise and lead volunteer teams, providing insurance, risk assessments and PPE for community groups.

This project will also establish an annual youth rangers programme whereby younger Volunteers will get the chance to be involved in delivering many practical elements of the Landscape Partnership Scheme.

24. Traditional building skills training - £26,500

This project will implement a skills and training course with traditional countryside building providing skills training in traditional building skills at Slieve Gullion Courtyard.

Acknowledgements

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- The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund;
- The Northern Ireland Environment Agency: an Agency within the Department of the Environment;
- Newry and Mourne District Council;
- European Union: European Regional Development Fund Investing in your future through the Ireland/Northern Ireland Interreg IVA Programme managed for the SEUPB by the East Border Region Interreg IIIA Partnership.