

Our Plan for Growth

Mid Ulster's Economic Development Plan

Executive Summary 2015-2020

www.midulstercouncil.org



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Foreword

by the Chair Councillor Linda Dillon

Welcome to Our Plan for Growth, the economic and regeneration strategy for the Mid Ulster district. This strategy sets out Mid Ulster District Council's key priorities for growing the local economy over the next five years and explains how we aim to achieve them.

Mid Ulster (incorporating the former council areas of Cookstown, Dungannon and South Tyrone and Magherafelt) is the most entrepreneurial region in Northern Ireland in terms of business start-ups. It also possesses the largest business base outside of Belfast.

Strategically located, Mid Ulster has a widely acknowledged strong, diverse and dynamic business base, together with an educated and entrepreneurial workforce.

Our Plan for Growth over the next five years is both innovative and ambitious, and seeks to deliver a clear message that Mid Ulster is ready to do business.

Supporting economic development and investment is very clearly a priority in our Corporate Plan, where 'Creating Growth' is a key strategic theme.

We have carried out extensive consultations with local stakeholders in the formulation of the new strategy and from these we have developed four priorities to drive growth and regeneration. These are Economic Growth, Employability and Skills, Town and Village Regeneration and Infrastructure and Connectivity. The pages which follow provide more information and actions associated with each of the priority areas.

Naturally these priorities will also be reflected in our area's Community Plan, which is under development, and we will seek to deliver them by developing strong partnerships and joint ventures, using a multi-agency approach to maximise resources.

Our Plan for Growth will also see the Council developing its role as a key enabler in the region, adopting a direct lobbying approach to become a leading strategic influencer of wider economic and social policy.

The Council is committed to building on the district's key attributes to support local economic and social development. I look forward to seeing how this plan can help us to maximise all future opportunities to reinforce Mid Ulster's position as a top performing region in Northern Ireland.



Cllr Linda Dillon

Chair
Mid Ulster District Council

“This plan will enable economic growth, sectoral diversification, employability and skills, town and village regeneration and infrastructure and connectivity throughout the Mid Ulster district.”

The Mid Ulster District: At A Glance

Mid Ulster is the most entrepreneurial region in Northern Ireland in terms of business start-ups.

- 7,915 businesses which is the largest business base (outside Belfast) and represents 12.9% of the regional total.
- It has the 2nd lowest unemployment rate of the region at 2.5%.
- The Gross Value Added (GVA) is £2.075 billion, the 4th highest in the region in 2014, producing 7.3% of the region's total economic output.
- 700,000 people within a one hour commute of the district boundaries.
- 13,000 people employed in 600 manufacturing businesses in Mid Ulster.
- 40% of world's mobile crushing and screening equipment is made in Mid Ulster.

Key Employment Sectors

Manufacturing 24%

Services 38%

Construction 11%

Retail 17%

Agriculture, forestry & fishing 10%

Total Businesses

7,915

Largest business base outside Belfast

Unemployment Rate

2.5%

2nd lowest in NI

Mid Ulster GVA

£2.075 billion

Produces 7.3% of the region's total economic output

Area Population

142,000

The fastest growing new council area

Total Workforce

89,991

Of working age



Theme 1: Enabling Economic Growth / Sectoral Diversification

Mid Ulster has been identified as the most entrepreneurial region in Northern Ireland in terms of business start-ups and also boasts the largest business base outside Belfast.

This strong private sector has particular strengths in manufacturing, engineering, construction and retail, as well as other potential future growth in areas such as agri-food, business services and high value added industries.

This theme recognises that entrepreneurship, business start-up, growth and innovation are key drivers in further growing Mid Ulster's economy.

It includes a comprehensive range of business support interventions to help Mid Ulster's businesses take advantage of all emerging opportunities. It also seeks to ensure Mid Ulster is recognised as a key strategic investment location on a regional, national and international level.



Aims

1.1 Foster a culture of enterprise

Actions:

- Deliver a Pre Start Programme promoting enterprise and entrepreneurship.
- Deliver a Start-Up Support Programme.
- Develop Accelerated Start Up Support.

1.2 Support existing businesses to drive productivity

Actions:

- Support business innovation and capacity building through a range of measures (for example, in tendering, exporting, or growth support).
- Align initiatives with Rural Development Programme measures to integrate support provision.
- Promote access to finance for businesses.
- Create a Mid Ulster Business Directory.

1.3 Maximise opportunities emerging from infrastructure initiatives

Actions:

- Support for businesses to exploit procurement opportunities emerging from capital investments.

1.4 Promote sustainable development

Actions:

- Promote sustainable development, including renewable energy initiatives.

1.5 Promote regional, national and international recognition of Mid Ulster's sectoral strengths

Actions:

- Provide a Cluster Development Programme.
 - Phase 1:** Preliminary engagement work with companies.
 - Phase 2:** Development of collaborative networks to (e.g. agri-food, construction, and engineering).
 - Phase 3:** Consideration of the establishment of a Research Centre and/or Thematic Enterprise Zone.
- Liaison with Government Departments in NI and RoI, industry and university representatives, to develop a policy platform at European and UK levels.

1.6 Maximise opportunities for cross border, national and international investment opportunities

Actions:

- Facilitate greater opportunities and EU investment.
- Explore potential of employing an EU Officer to research and exploit all EU and other funding opportunities across Council.
- Explore initiatives to support local economic regeneration.

1.7 Promote Mid Ulster as an investment location

Actions:

- Develop an online presence and high quality promotional materials to promote Mid Ulster.
- Attract investment to the region.
- Develop a land bank for inward investment / businesses.
- Promote an 'Agency Attraction' programme.
- Identify constraints to central government investment in the Mid Ulster area.
- Develop a database of Mid Ulster contacts abroad and explore potential networking opportunities.



Theme 2: Enabling Employability and Skills

One of the main drivers of strong economic growth is the availability of a high performing skilled workforce.

This theme seeks to address the skills requirements in Mid Ulster's key sectors, while at the same time ensuring that those not in employment or training have the opportunity and support they require to find a job, apprenticeship or training scheme which meets their needs.



Aims

2.1 Address sectoral labour market requirements

Actions:

- Examine the potential for a Mid Ulster-wide skills forum.
- Consider the potential for the development of a training academy (for construction / manufacturing / engineering sectors).
- Explore initiatives to increase uptake of training and employment opportunities in skilled trades/professions.
- Promote job opportunities in key sectors.

2.2 Address training and employment needs

Actions:

- Consider an intermediate labour market solution for the long term unemployed, marginalised groups and families, and encourage placement / apprenticeship opportunities.
- Targeted pre-start up support for the unemployed or economically inactive.

2.3 Address productivity constraints through in-job training

Actions:

- Lobby government to promote in-job development opportunities.

2.4 Promote the development of a strong educated skills base

Actions:

- Support campaign to increase Early Years provision to maximise training and employment opportunities for young families.
- Advocate for a strong link between education provision and the skills and job requirements of growth areas.
- Lobby for adequate government spend on education and skills.
- Assess barriers to training and implement actions to remove them to support a strong mobile labour force.

2.5 To act as advocate to address social factors that impact upon the economic well-being of the Mid Ulster area

Actions:

- Lobby for the provision of a living wage to increase economic and social well-being.
- Lobby Government on the need for interventions in poverty and social protection to maximise employability and spend in Mid Ulster.
- Lobby for inclusion of Social Clauses in contracts (Council and other agencies).



Theme 3: Enabling Town and Village Regeneration

The purpose of this theme is to promote the towns and villages of Mid Ulster as places to shop, visit, invest and live. The five principal settlements of Mid Ulster: Cookstown, Dungannon, Magherafelt, Coalisland and Maghera are recognised as vibrant shopping towns with a strong independent business base and retail mix which continues to successfully attract visitors from out of the region.

Consultations identified a comprehensive range of initiatives required to ensure Mid Ulster's towns and villages stay ahead of the competition and sustain the momentum of developments progressed in recent years. These include physical improvement schemes, delivery of signature events, and town centre business support measures, all of which will be underpinned by strategic, integrated and co-ordinated promotional campaigns.

Aims

3.1 Ensure vibrant town centres and regenerated villages

Actions:

- Conduct a baseline study of the Council's principal towns and villages, identifying key growth drivers.
- Deliver Shop Front and Internal Reconfiguration Schemes, Derelict Property Improvement Schemes and Site Enhancement Schemes.
- Deliver quality town centre environments with suitable access provision.
- Develop links between town centre businesses and edge of town developments (e.g. signage).
- Support independent retailers promotion initiative(s).
- Provide a satellite worker Initiative.
- Promote 'Town Centre First' concept and work closely with Planning on development and area planning.
- Act as the catalyst to develop key opportunity sites across Mid Ulster.
- Develop an Evening Economy Strategy for principal towns.
- Revitalise and enhance markets.
- Explore the potential to create a Business Improvement District.

3.2 Promote Mid Ulster's towns and villages

Actions:

- Build on existing marketing and promotional work to promote principal towns.
- Deliver and promote key signature events.
- Market and target potential retail/service investors.
- Deliver a digital / e-commerce initiative.
- Develop an Integrated Mid Ulster Tourism Strategy.





Theme 4: Enabling Infrastructure and Connectivity

To facilitate growth among indigenous companies and potentially attract foreign direct investment, Mid Ulster must have the requisite physical infrastructure and connectivity in place. Consultations identified a significant number of 'not-spots' with limited or no broadband connection and poor mobile phone coverage; this situation must be addressed urgently.

The need for development land was viewed as being the single most important growth constraint for

medium/large sized companies in the Mid Ulster area. Council will liaise with regional development agencies such as Invest NI to encourage them to expand their supply.

The Mid Ulster area is readily accessible to the main East/West and North/South motorway routes and has a potential catchment of approximately 700,000 people within a 1 hour drive. However, consultations identified the need for a by-pass for Cookstown and Dungannon and improved linkages between the principal settlements and their respective outlying areas.



Aims

4.1 Develop Strategic Routes

Actions:

- Lobby for roads infrastructure improvements to improve links to main economic routes and export points.

4.2 Develop Strategic Sites

Actions:

- Develop land and property bank for businesses/inward investment.
- Prepare development proposals for key opportunity sites as well as other urban and rural areas.
- Maximise and profile opportunities of these sites to attract investors / investment.
- Promote rural property provision for new business starts.
- Influence Area Plan development ensuring flexible zoning; identify market ready sites.
- Support the provision of specialist small/medium incubation space for agri-food sector.
- Ensure local businesses maximise all opportunities emerging from the 'Gas to the West' project.
- Explore the potential development of Strategic Enterprise Zones and /or a Public Sector Hub.

4.3 Improve Telecommunications Provision

Actions:

- Highlight broadband and mobile phone 'not-spot' issues through development of an enhanced lobby campaign.
- Explore opportunities for businesses to source funding to improve broadband access, coverage and speeds.

What we aim to achieve **by 2020**

Local Investment totalling

£30 million minimum

Employment & Training opportunities for

4,000 participants

Jobs Created & Sustained

3,000 jobs

Businesses Supported

1,500 businesses

New Business Starts

1,000 new businesses



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Our Plan for Growth is also available on our website:

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