



Title of Report:	Dark Hedges Update
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	16 June 2026
For Decision or For Information	For Information
To be discussed In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2026-31)	
Strategic Theme	P4 Sustainability & Managing our Natural and Built Environment
Outcome	
Lead Officer	Director of Leisure & Development

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	N/A

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	N/A	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Dark Hedges, based on specific queries received from an Elected Member at the May Leisure & Development Committee.

2.0 Background

2.1 Further to a number of AORB queries raised regarding the Dark Hedges, it was agreed at the May 2026 Leisure & Development Committee that the Director would liaise with Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CC&GHT) to seek a response and provide an update report at the June Committee.

3.0 Questions Posed and Responses Received

3.1 Following contact with the CC&GHT, the following responses were provided to the queries raised:

- a. **A Dark Hedges Management Forum (DHMF) was set up through the CC&GHT in 2025. Could you outline the Council's current role within the management plan of the Dark Hedges?**

CC&GHT have a record of only one management meeting of the DHMF being held and that was in January 2025. Those in attendance from Council were Cllr Mervyn Storey and Ald Richard Stewart.

It must be acknowledged that whilst Council are very grateful to CC&GHT for showing leadership on the management of this very complex issue, Council have no real role to play in the management of the Dark Hedges as:

- *The trees are owned by the local farmers and*
- *Road safety is a DFI Roads issue.*

- b. **Given the ongoing imbalance of one of the mature beech trees, what actions are being taken to manage risk, while preserving this significant heritage asset?**

CC&GHT has carried out work at the site for many years including planting, interpretative signage and tree management with a tree surgeon. CC&GHT were advised that a tree safety inspection should be carried out annually, and they recently instructed the Forum's recognised inspector (Paul Hawksford) to carry out an inspection. CC&GHT anticipate receiving a report with recommendations w/c 08 June.

- c. **What measures are in place, or planned to ensure the safety of pedestrians and visitors, especially considering falling limbs and the increasing footfall along the Bregagh Road?**

Minutes from the January 2025 meeting indicate that CC&GHT continues to consult with Timbertec NI to assess damage following storms. With support, CC&GHT will undertake surveys as agreed with DFI on an annual or bi-annual basis (to be agreed by Forum).

- d. **How is Council supporting the care, maintenance, and long-term establishment of the newly planted saplings to ensure continuity of the avenue of trees for future generations?**

Minutes from the January 2025 meeting suggest the forum would agree TORs for a management plan, however it would appear that this has not progressed so far.

- e. **With the busy tourist season ahead, what provisions are being introduced to manage numbers, traffic, and overall site protection?**

The new manager of the CC&GHT believes this will require wide stakeholder involvement and possible legislation changes.

f. What joint actions are being taken with DFI to improve the effectiveness of road closure, traffic enforcements and access control?

See paragraph below noting existing response to social media concerns.

g. How is Council working with landowners and relevant agencies to secure a balanced approach between conservation, tourism and public access going forward?

See paragraph below noting existing response to social media concerns.

3.2 Existing CCGHT response to social media concerns:

Hi, thank you for your comments. As a place close to all our hearts we understand your concerns and frustrations. However, despite carrying out tree management work in the area over the years CC&GHT only took over the strategic direction of the site earlier this year and has never promised that this would be an easy, quick fix or overnight process due to the complexities of the site and range of partners involved.

There is a considerable amount of work to be carried out with partners to establish clear, effective plans for the Dark Hedges from here. The Trust is overseeing a plan for vital areas of work for the area including the management and maintenance of the Dark Hedges trees, safety and accessibility at the site, impact on residents and the local community as well as the socio-economic benefits of the attraction. The work will begin with a new management plan for the trees as part of an overall Dark Hedges Masterplan and, it is expected that this work, will be delivered with the owners of the adjacent Gracehill Estate, The Hedges Hotel and other interested parties.

Again, to ensure this new work is carried out in the right way and with all partners working together, a great deal of work is needed at this early stage.

4.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Leisure & Development Committee note the contents of the report.