

Title of Report:	PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan Capital Projects – The Altnahinch Dam Project
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	16 June 2026
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2026-31)	
Strategic Theme	P2 Empowering and Supporting our People
Outcome	Healthy, active, engaged communities
Lead Officers	Head of Funding Unit Head of Tourism & Outdoor Recreation

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£178k (100% Funded)
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	Capital
Code	
Staffing Costs	Staff time

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:	Yes	Date: November 2023
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes	Date: November 2023
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes	Date: November 2023
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes	Date: November 2023
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the implementation of the PEACEPLUS 'Altnahinch Dam Project' and request the Leisure and Development Committee to approve the project to move to Stage 2 of the Council's approval process for the development of capital projects.

2.0 Background

2.1 The PEACEPLUS Partnership has been in operation since June 2022 and has overseen the design, development and implementation of the £6.1million PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan which was approved by Council on 5th December 2023. The PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan includes a capital budget for the development of 5 x capital projects including the 'The Altnahinch Dam Project.' The capital budget allocated to this project from PEACEPLUS is £178k. The key issues the project will address along with project aims, project beneficiaries, budgets, outputs and activities are included as **Annex A**.

3.0 Stage 1

3.1 Council's Capital Infrastructure Team undertook procurement in-line with requirements of the PEACEPLUS programme for the appointment of an Integrated Consultancy Team. The following appointments were made:

- Structural, Civil & Marine Engineer– MEA Ltd
- QS - WH Stephens

3.2 On Monday 27th April, the Integrated Consultancy Team presented their Stage 1 report to the Internal Working Group of Officers responsible for developing PEACEPLUS capital projects. The report was presented as instructed, with itemised costings for both the development of a new walking path and proposed works along the Dam Head.

3.3 Options for the capital works, to be funded through the PEACEPLUS agreed budget, as detailed in the Stage 1 report are summarised in table 1 below and attached in **Annex C**:

Table 1

Proposed works	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
All path / walkway works including paths, pavings surfacings, bridge replacements and step overs to pathways.	<i>Full gravel path, timber bridges & timber step overs</i> £565,306	<i>New timber boardwalk, timber bridges & timber step overs</i> £964,255	<i>POLYdeck material for boardwalk, bridges & step overs</i> £1,326,028	<i>Dam Head only, Steel handrail replacement, Steel fencing, Steel gate replacement, Steel door replacement</i>	<i>Looped route gravel path Removal of existing boardwalk, 808m Dust Path, Step overs to pathways, Timber pagoda</i> £178,000
Dam Head construction works	£118,788	£118,788	£118,788	£188,788	N/A
Total	£684,094	£1,083,043	£1,444,816	£188,788	£ 178,000

4.0 Current position

- 4.1 The PEACEPLUS Capital Projects Working Group met on Thursday 14th May to discuss options for development of the project. The Working Group considered the following:
- 4.2 The total costs for options 1-3 far exceed the approved £178,000 of PEACEPLUS grant funding allocated.
- 4.3 Discussions between Council's Coast and Countryside Team and NI Water regarding permissions for works along the Dam Head and options for these works are ongoing.
- 4.4 The Funding Unit will continue to work with the Coast and Countryside team to identify funding opportunities for the continued progression of the project including the remaining walkway and Dam Head sections of the path.
- 4.5 Option 5 is the only viable option that enables the project to complete within the PEACEPLUS allocated budget and the PEACEPLUS project timeframe.

5.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Leisure & Development Committee recommends to full Council:

1. Approval to progress option 5 to Stage 2 of the Altnahinch Dam project with £178,000 funding through the PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan.
2. That the PEACEPLUS Partnership continues to progress this project under delegated authority from Council, proceeding to complete all Capital Project Stages through to completion (Stage 3 & 4). Should the funding situation change Officers will bring a report back into Committee requesting any necessary approvals.
3. Details of Tender Assessment and Report to be taken to Capital Projects Working Group (CPWG) for review and approval prior to proceeding to each Stage.
4. Officers will provide update reports after each stage, to update elected members on progress and costs.

<u>Theme</u>	Local Community Regeneration and Transformation	<u>Programme Name</u>	Altnahinch Dam Project.	<u>Time Frame for delivery</u>	Autumn 2024 – Autumn 2026 (24 months)
<p><u>Programme Aim</u></p> <p>For many of the rural programming proposals in this Programme, there is an acknowledgement that during the lifetime of the PEACE Programming, quite a focus of the programming or addressing need has been focused, quite often in urban settings, looking at the obvious “flashpoints”, “peace lines”, “recognised territorial divisions”, in a sense many of the rural areas were, to an extent overlooked, the “peace hedges” not acknowledged enough, and whilst these outdoor settings, in some instances, sit in areas regarded as “single-identity settings”, they have the potential and the attraction to bring people together both from rural and urban settings to enjoy and appreciate in their respective settings. This is also an opportunity for local people from these areas to welcome people from across the Borough and wider afield, encouraging them to see the area for themselves at first hand, acknowledging what it has to offer and in tandem begin to debunk some of the myths or stereotypes around the locality, building confidence and a sense of pride in their wider locality, increasing actual cross-community & cross-cultural mobility, this presents a hugely positive opportunity. The aim of this Programme is to upgrade the Boardwalk potential and the accessibility of this offering in rural North Antrim. North Antrim is particularly famed for its stunning North Coast and its’ Glens, the lesser known parts of North Antrim include the area in which Altnahinch is situated, and it acts as a huge resource, an opportunity for more rurally isolated people with the wider Loughguille and North Antrim area to avail of and enjoy in a rural, isolated area as an outlet to engage in for wellbeing, mindfulness, family time , scope for carers and those with accessibility issues so that prams, buggies and wheelchairs will be able</p>					

to avail of the new upgrade in order to take in the natural beauty of the dam and its' locality. To date, many local people head further north, to the coast to exercise or take a "run out" as the paths are safer, better lit and in a better state of repair than at the Altnahinch Dam. This potential upgrade would ensure the extension of accessibility to a large cohort of people living in the North Antrim area, thereby ensuring increased mobility of peoples in a cross-community scenario, taking into consideration the catchment area that this project currently attracts and will attract in the future.

Altnahinch Reservoir, at the head of the River Bush, is situated in an exposed area of peaty moorland. Most of the surrounding area is forest. Altnahinch Dam is a large dam located near Loughguile, County Antrim. It is situated on the edge of Slieveanorra Forest in the southern uplands of Glenbush and was constructed in 1967, using stone quarried from the newly founded Corkey Quarry almost 3 miles away. The reservoir is fed from a number of tributaries in the greater Glenbush area, Altnahinch Burn and more famously the River Bush itself which flows from the top of Glenbush, through the reservoir and eventually into the sea at Portballintrae. Nearest Town – Ballymoney (13.23 miles) Nearest Villages – Loughguile, Martinstown, Newtown Crommelin, Magherahoney, Cargan, Corkey. Altnahinch is open to the public and is a popular destination for families for walking. Currently there is a raised boardwalk for approximately 372m giving access along the southern banks of the reservoir. There is a desire to extend the raised boardwalk further along the southern and eastern banks of the reservoir to enable walkers to complete a circular walk around the reservoir. To enable a circular walk, it will be necessary to construct approximately a further 950m of raised boardwalk.

Altnahinch Dam is owned by Northern Ireland Water and is part of the DAERA Public Angling Estate fisheries, so any proposed development would require a multi-agency collaborative approach.

Programme Beneficiaries

- Walking Groups
- Local population

Budget & Participants

£349,000

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors • Health & Wellbeing Leaders • Carers_ & individuals with additional needs • Families • Anglers • We are also confident that we can offer participants from other thematic areas (women, social prescribing, Refugee Asylum Seeker, Older People's Programme, the opportunity to make use of the site as part of their activity programming), adding to sustainability throughout the inter-locking themes. 	<p>465 Participants CNR 60%: PUL 30%: OTHER 10%)</p>
<p><u>Programme Rationale & Outputs</u></p> <p>The proposal, like some others has come about because of the appreciation and acknowledgement of the important natural resources available to us in our locality, especially in the wake of the pandemic, in which many people stuck to their localities and in doing so, discovered the value of their own natural resources, without having to travel far. In addition, the opportunities for rural-dwelling people to maximise their opportunities for health, wellbeing and outdoor recreation can sometimes be limited and dictated by adequate lighting. This proposal would not only add value to a hugely valuable asset, but it would attract additional numbers of people throughout, not just the North Antrim area, but the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area also. Whilst recreation and wellbeing are significant factors in this proposal, the other elements of the history of the quarry and quarrying, the dam as a resource and the importance of water, water quality, the tradition of angling, the biodiversity and natural environment of this place, set apart from the coastal eco-system. This proposed project provides an additional outlet to local people, something that is off the beaten track, away from the busy North Antrim Coastal Route and an alternative to the Appalachian Way. This remains a project which will involve local people in its' reimagination in terms of animation, interpretive signage, viewpoints, and development of nature walks and walking for nature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of the Programme 400 people will have benefited from the delivery of this Programme. • A range of opportunities and activities will have been developed, implemented, and delivered so that a level of legacy will be derived from the Dam Walk. • By the end of the Programme, local people and visitors will be better educated about this resource in terms of its' purpose as a dam, its' history as a quarry and as an opportunity to walk and enjoy. • By the end of the Programme a range of users and organisations on a cross-community and cross-cultural basis will be in a better position to know, how best to maximise the opportunities that this Dam presets for the betterment of the wider community. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Programme Activities</u> • <u>Initial launch Event/Scene-setting Workshop</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In conjunction with the other Capital Build Projects, looking at the depth and breadth of the Programmes on offer, to look at the aims 	<p><u>Key Issues Project Will Address</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas or facilities of outdoor recreation can be used as tools for peace and reconciliation through organised and structured activity and animation, • The encouragement of the groups/organisations/users of this

and objectives of each, to examine any linkages or opportunities, to share ideas resources, to consider potential challenges. To consider the inclusion of sign-posting the projects from each of the individual sites. A “PEACEPLUS Works” Forum will be established to last the lifetime of the Programme, so that beneficiaries could compare, contrast and connect **(25 participants from each Capital Works Project).**

- **Educational & Information Programme** (18 months)

- An opportunity for local people to avail of the boardwalk as an opportunity to learn about the history and heritage of the Programme through workshops, demonstrations, open days and taster sessions, looking at the art of stone masonry, the outputs of quarrying, how quarrying is a feature of our landscape and the use and the importance of the Water Resource, to include water safety guidance and talks **(155 participants).**

- **Health & Wellbeing Programme** (12 months)

- A programme aimed at looking at walking for wellbeing, an opportunity for a range of individuals or groups to meet regularly to avail of the upgraded boardwalk, this could include test-driving the newly finished boardwalk, to extend it to wheelchair and pram/buggy users for accessibility. This group of people/individuals can host groups from the other “Capital Works” and in return test-drive the newly showcased walks in the Glens, North Coast or in the

facility will understand sustainability in their approach and their ability to attract new users post-programme to enjoy and respect the environment, irrespective of their background, people will naturally come together due to their common interest or passion (e.g., angling).

- The mindset that only certain people from a particular side of the community will make use of an outdoor recreation site, that in actual fact the “shared space” approach to our outdoor sites in a post-covid society, has witnessed a positive upturn, and peoples’ habits have changed as a result.
- Practical Accessibility to Altnahinch Dam for any individual who would like to make use of it.
- Provision of a safe and secure rural walking route.

Sperrins. Provision will also be made for the delivery of “Walking Guide/Tour Training”, so that a host programme is available at the site for potential visitors or tourists **(175 Participants)**.

- **Biodiversity & Natural Environment Programme**

- This element of the Programme will look at the very unique eco-system and the biodiversity that is part and parcel of the Dam landscape, participants will learn about the steps they can take to ensure its preservation through a series of educational based awareness raising biodiversity programming, participants will have the opportunity to learn about the local flora and fauna, and a series of “bat walks” will be offered linking the pure water source with bat habitation **(70 participants)**.

- **Angling Programme**

- Altnahinch Dam is a popular haunt for local Anglers, the Programme will identify the needs required by anglers in terms of the upgrade, so that the angling community is not adversely affected. In addition to this, the angling community has a wide reach, and therefore, the opportunities to host other angling clubs across the Borough or beyond, will be an opportunity to promote this new resource **(60 participants)**.

- **Finale Event**

- A proposed outdoor event at Altnahinch Dam, unveiling of the interpretive signage, exhibition (if possible) from local Anglers with guided walks along the dam, showcasing the upgraded works, testimonies from local

walkers or, unveiling of the acknowledgement signage.		
<u>Performance Indicators</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One fully upgraded boardwalk at Altnahinch Dam, enabling individuals to walk a full 360-degree walk. • Completion of the Programme Activities above by 465 participants. 		<u>Targets</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit minimum 465 participants. • A minimum of 26 hours (total) of meaningful engagement must be provided per participant. • Deliver all promotional activities in line with SEUPB guidelines. • Provide monitoring and evaluation in line with SEUPB indicator guidance. • Prepare monthly progress reports to Peace Plus Department • Prepare and deliver a presentation on programme progress against targets.
	<u>Delivery Mechanism</u> External Delivery	<u>Partnership Names</u>
		<u>Cross Border & Cross Community</u> Whilst the programme is aimed at a local audience, there will be opportunity for the “Programme” to move in and out of the locality, to derive learning and share perspectives with other beneficiaries under this Programme. The angling element of the Programme may allow for some Cross-Border Programming also.

