Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Title of Report:	**Correspondence Report**
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	17 November 2026
For Decision or For Information	For Information
For discussion In Committee	**NO**

Linkage to Council Strategy (2026-31)	
Strategic Theme	Priority 3: Creating Conditions to Deliver Opportunities within the Borough
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	**YES/NO**
Capital/Revenue	n/a
Code	n/a
Staffing Costs	n/a

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	N/A

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	N/A
Legal Opinion Obtained	N/A

Screening Requirements	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:
	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Correspondence for Members consideration.

2.0 The following items are listed:

2.1 Correspondence from the Department for Infrastructure in response to correspondence sent to the Minister by Council regarding the Dark Hedges. (Dated 20th October 2026)

2.2 Correspondence from the Department for the Economy in response to correspondence sent to the Minister by Council regarding the Dark Hedges (Dated 04 November 2026)

3.0 Recommendation

The Leisure & Development Committee are asked to note the contents of the correspondence.

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Ms Pat Mulvenna
Director of Leisure & Development
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Your ref:
Our ref: TOF-0792-2026
Date: 20 October 2026

Dear Ms. Mulvenna,

Thank you for your email dated 13 October 2026 to the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the Dark Hedges and Bregagh Road. I have been asked to respond on behalf of the Minister as these queries fall under my area of responsibility.

Dark Hedges is widely recognised as a significant tourism and heritage asset, and I appreciate the concerns expressed by Elected Members regarding its long-term management, protection and sustainability. However, it is important to clarify that DfI Roads' responsibility at the site is limited to the management of the public road and associated road safety matters. The Department does not own the trees and is neither the heritage manager nor tourism authority for the site. Responsibility for the trees themselves rests with the landowners, while wider tourism, heritage, conservation and visitor-management matters require cooperation between a range of stakeholders, including landowners, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, tourism bodies and heritage organisations.

I can confirm that the Department has been actively involved in matters relating to the Dark Hedges for more than a decade and has worked with a wide range of stakeholders to address road safety, traffic management and visitor-related issues associated with the attraction. Throughout this period, the Department has consistently recognised that the long-term protection and management of the site cannot be delivered by any single organisation and requires a coordinated approach involving landowners, local government, tourism bodies, heritage interests and enforcement authorities. However, for much of the last decade, it appears many of the above stakeholders have not engaged in active management of the site.

The Department's involvement has focused on ensuring the safe operation of the public road network, including the introduction of traffic management measures, assessment of road safety issues arising from visitor activity, and engagement with partner organisations on matters affecting the highway. The Department will continue to fulfil these responsibilities and to engage constructively with stakeholders where road safety considerations arise.

Over the past 10 years the Department has undertaken a substantial range of measures at the location, these include:

- Installation of tourist and directional signing.
- Progression and implementation of the Control of Traffic (The Dark Hedges) Order (Northern Ireland) 2017, which came into operation on 30 October 2017 and prohibited general traffic from using part of Bregagh Road.
- Delivery of a traffic-management scheme on Bregagh Road comprising kerbed build-outs, upgraded signage, revised road markings and measures intended to discourage through traffic and protect the trees.
- Provision of advisory and supplementary signage to support the prohibition.
- Introduction of additional directional signage to encourage visitors to use designated parking facilities.
- A series of road-safety improvements at nearby junctions, including enhanced warning signage, STOP signs, road-marking improvements, red surfacing and rumble strips.
- Drainage improvements on Bregagh Road.
- Commissioning of a specialist arboricultural survey, subsequent tree-safety interventions, and service of statutory notices on landowners where public-safety concerns had not been adequately addressed.

Whilst records demonstrate that the Department has committed considerable staff, contractor and financial resources to the location over a prolonged period, I do not have a cumulative figure for this expenditure. Regrettably, this has not been matched by other stakeholders.

The Dark Hedges Management Forum was formally established in January 2025 and includes representatives from Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust, **Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council**, DfI Roads, Tourism NI and local landowners. You should note that DfI Roads does not chair this Forum and responsibility for convening meetings rests with Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust. I can confirm however, that DfI has recently sought the reconvening of Forum meetings and remains committed to participating in that process.

The Department regards the Dark Hedges Management Forum as the appropriate mechanism for engaging with all relevant stakeholders and progressing future management of the site. Any future changes to current arrangements, including possible physical access controls, would only be considered through an agreed Management Plan developed by the Management Forum and with the support of stakeholders and landowners. DfI Roads will not be taking forward any further measures until there is a firm commitment by all stakeholders to deliver on an agreed Management Plan.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,



IAN COULTER
Network Development Manager

From the Office of the Minister
DR CAOIMHE ARCHIBALD MLA

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Our ref: COR-0635-2026

4 November 2026

Pat, a chara

Dark Hedges and Bregagh Road

Thank you for your letter of 13 October 2026 on behalf of Causeway Coast and Glens Council, seeking clarity in relation to the management of the Dark Hedges and Bregagh Road area.

I recognise the importance of the Dark Hedges as a unique heritage asset and internationally recognised visitor attraction. I welcome the collaborative approach needed to support the long-term stewardship of the site.

Tourism NI was represented at the inaugural meeting of the Dark Hedges Management Forum led by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust, which has responsibility for the management of the Dark Hedges. Tourism NI reaffirms its willingness to contribute to discussions on the sustainable management and promotion of this important tourism asset. Tourism NI remains available to participate in any future meetings of the group.

It is important to note that responsibility for road infrastructure, traffic management measures, enforcement and associated signage rests with the Department for Infrastructure. Accordingly, matters relating to road closures, access arrangements and signage on the public road network fall within that Department's remit.

The protection and sustainable management of the Dark Hedges requires continued partnership working across the relevant organisations and stakeholders. My Department, through Tourism NI, will continue to engage constructively with partners, where appropriate, in support of efforts to safeguard this iconic attraction for residents and visitors alike.

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DR CAOIMHE ARCHIBALD MLA

Minister for the Economy