**Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council**

**Section 75 Equality and Good Relations Screening**

**Part 1. Information about the activity/policy/project being screened**

**Name of the activity/policy/project**

Development of Digital Sculpture Trail in Hillsborough Forest (installation phase Summer 2022)

# **Is this activity/policy/project – an existing one, a revised one, a new one?**

The Digital Sculpture Trail is part of an ongoing project to enhance Hillsborough Forest as a tourist and leisure attraction.

The Digital Sculpture Trail comprises ten new sculptures sited around the lake in Hillsborough Forest. A digital App is being developed to guide visitors to and between the sculptures using augmented reality way-finding. To date, seven of the sculptures are in situ and the digital app is under development.

There have been two Equality Screening exercises carried out on this project to date (2019 and 2021) and a third one was planned when the project was complete. Although installation is not yet complete (there are 3 sculptures to be installed), it has been decided to carry out another Equality Screening early because the Council has received complaints about one of the sculptures. These complaints have raised issues not previously raised during public consultation and not identified in the earlier equality screenings.

It should be noted that there has been significant positive feedback on the sculptures as well as the negative comments/feedback that has prompted this further consideration.

Since the previous screening in 2021, Council commissioned an accessibility audit through Disability Action which was received in July 2022 and its findings and recommendations are currently being considered.

More detail on the project is attached in Appendix 2.

**What are the intended aims/outcomes the activity/policy/project is trying to achieve?**

The overall aim of the Digital Sculpture Trail development is to further enhance the natural facility that is Hillsborough Forest, attracting new visitors and improving the experience for regular users.

Specifically it is intended to:

* Encourage the participation of as many visitors as practicably possible, taking account of the site constraints

* Further enhance the forest environment to promote physical, mental and social health and wellbeing
* Improve opportunity, access and participation for all visitors by reducing barriers to access for as many groups as possible (including older people, children and those with disabilities).

**Who is the activity/policy/project targeted at and who will benefit? Are there any expected benefits for specific Section 75 categories/groups from this activity/policy/project? If so, please explain.**

The new Digital Sculpture Trail is intended to provide an enhanced visitor experience for everyone who visits Hillsborough Forest. The forest is used by people from all Section 75 groups. However, we know from visitor activity and feedback to date that it is likely to be of particular interest to children and families. The accessibility features that are being built into the design mean that it may particularly benefit people with disabilities, including children.

**Who initiated or developed the activity/policy/project?**

Tourism Development Unit in LCCC

**Who owns and who implements the activity/policy/project?**

Owned by LCCC Service Transformation Directorate; implemented by the Tourism Development Unit

**Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the activity/policy/project?**

**If yes, give brief details of any significant factors.**

**Financial** - Thedevelopment and implementation of detailed designs was dependent on a funding award from DAERA. This funding has been approved and seven of the sculptures are now in situ.

**Legislative:** The land on which the Trail is sited is owned by Forest Service and therefore all Forest Service legislation with regard to the protection of the flora and fauna in the forest must be adhered to and may take precedence over actions to make the site accessible. Accessibility provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act have to be complied with as far as is practicable and Health and Safety issues on site must be complied with.

**Planning:** Some of the sculptures required planning permission. Planning was applied for on 31 October 2019 and approved on 4 June 2020 under planning application ref: LA05/2019/1127/F. There were no responses from the public on this planning application. On clarification of some concerns from the Historical Environment Department (HED) there were no issues from any other public departments.

**Other:** Due to the pandemic the original completion date had to be extended and the project is now due to be completed by the end of January 2023. Possible impacts that might delay completion will be monitored on a continued basis.

**Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the activity/policy/project will impact upon? Delete if not applicable**

**Staff**  - all LCCC staff involved in the project, Tourism staff in particular

**Service users**  - wide range of local and out of state visitors anticipated

**Other public sector organisations** - Forest Service: DAERA (funder); Visitors anticipated from education and health promotion sectors

**Voluntary/community/trade unions** - May be used by groups from community and voluntary sector

**Other** – Elected Members involved in decision making; project designers/artists and contractors

**Other policies/strategies/plans with a bearing on this activity/policy/project**

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| --- | --- |
| **Name of policy/strategy/plan** | **Who owns or implements?** |
| Lisburn & Castlereagh Community Plan | Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council |
| Hillsborough Master Plan | LCCC |
| Interim Corporate Plan 2021-24 | LCCC |
| Making Life Better | Public Health Agency |
| Rural Tourism Scheme | DAERA |
| Forest Service NI Business Plan | DAERA |
| Northern Ireland Tourism Priorities for Growth; Operating Plan | Tourism NI |
| Draft NI Programme for Government | Northern Ireland Executive |
| NI Economic Strategy – Vision for 2030 | Department for the Economy |
| Together: Building a United Community | TEO |
| LCCC Equality Scheme and associated equality action plans and policies | LCCC |
| Children’s Services Co-operation (NI) Act 2016 | TEO/Department of Education |

**Available evidence**

**What evidence/information (qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered or considered to inform this activity/policy? Specify details for each Section 75 category.**

In developing the original concepts for the forest enhancement and installation of the sculpture trail, a wide range of information, research and expert advice was considered.

We have considered feedback gathered from public consultations which have taken place since 2015 about the upgrading of Hillsborough Forest which included the addition of a sculpture trail. See **Appendix 3** for full list of consultations carried out. During consultation, detailed proposals for the trail and the sculptures themselves, including illustrative pictures and detailed information on design, scale, etc, were made available.

Since the sculpture installation began we have received feedback from numerous groups consisting of the very young, older people, people with disabilities and those with mental health conditions who all use the forest on a regular basis.

We have received and considered compliments and complaints received via Council’s customer care system since installation of sculptures began.

We are currently considering the findings and recommendations of a Disability Audit of Hillsborough Forest undertaken by Disability Action (July 2022).

We have also considered the most up to date NISRA population data from Census 2021 (published 22/09/22) [Lisburn and Castlereagh Census Data](https://explore.nisra.gov.uk/area-explorer-2021/N09000007/)

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| --- | --- |
| **Section 75 Category** | **Details of evidence/information** |
| Religious Belief | As a well-known tourist attraction for both local and out of state visitors, it is likely that the forest is visited by people from all religions and those with no religious beliefs. During consultation, we did not gather information on the religious background of respondents as it was not considered particularly relevant and no issues were raised to suggest this was appropriate.  Since sculptures were installed, and following an article in the Newsletter on the 10th June 2022, a number of complaints have been received from faith based people demonstrating opposition to one particular sculpture. |
| Political Opinion | There is no evidence of the political opinion of visitors to Hillsborough Forest. It is likely that the forest will be visited by people with different political opinions, reflecting the local and wider population. |
| Racial Group | A Forest Service survey of all forests in Northern Ireland in 2019 suggested that 1% of visitors to Hillsborough Forest were from Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. This is lower than the percentage of the LCCC and wider NI population that are from BME communities according to the latest Census 2021 analysis (4%).  However, the forest/attraction is likely to be visited by people (local and visiting) of all races and nationalities. |
| Age | The 2021 census showed the population in the Lisburn Castlereagh area totalled 149,106.  19% = (0-14 years)  30% = (15-39 years)  33% = (40-64 years)  18% = (65+ years).  Hillsborough Forest is used by people of all ages for leisure activities but the play park and the sculpture trail are popular with children and family groups. |
| Marital Status | We do not have information on the marital status of people who visit Hillsborough Forest or the sculpture trail. |
| Sexual Orientation | We do not have information on the sexual orientation of people who visit Hillsborough Forest or the sculpture trail. |
| Men & Women Generally | We do not have information on the precise gender make-up of visitors to the sculpture trail but a Forest Service survey in 2019 reported that 46% of visitors to Hillsborough Forest were male and 54% female. There was no breakdown in relation to transgender or non-binary people. |
| Disability | Latest Census data (2011) and LGD boundary data (2014) indicates that 18.29% of the population have a disability or long-term health condition. This includes a wide range of disabilities, including physical, sensory and communication disabilities. The childhood disability figure for Northern Ireland is 5.5%, highest in UK (2017 Research Report, Caring More Than Most, Leeds University on behalf of Contact). Observation and feedback to date suggests that the new sculpture trail is being used by school groups of disabled children. |
| People with and without Dependants | Evidence suggests the forest and sculpture trail are being accessed by people with and without dependants. Evidence to date suggests the new sculpture trail is well used by family groups. |

### Needs, experiences and priorities

**Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular activity/policy/decision? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories**

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| **Section 75 Category** | **Details of needs/experiences/priorities** |
| Religious Belief | During the consultations on the proposed sculpture trail, there were no issues raised in relation to religious belief. Since installation, the vast majority of visitors appear happy with the sculptures. There have, however, been a number of complaints that one particular sculpture, ‘Bigfoot’, is offensive to some people who hold a particular faith, with claims that it is Pagan and anti-Christian. The feedback has included calls to remove the sculpture and it appears there was a concerted campaign by one particular church to lobby council on the matter. |
| Political Opinion | No evidence of issues in relation to political opinion from public consultation or since the sculptures were installed. |
| Racial Group | No issues related to race were raised during consultation but we are aware that BME residents and visitors may be under-represented as users of the Hillsborough Forest facility. We recognise that there is a need to ensure that people know about this free facility and are encouraged to use it. There is a need to ensure that information about the Sculpture Trail is available in other languages for those who do not have English as a first language. This needs to be taken into account when developing the interpretative app. |
| Age | There is a need to provide a sculpture trail that is designed to be safe, accessible and attractive for all age groups, including children and young people. Older people may be less mobile even if they don’t have a recognised disability so may have access issues to some of the sculptures. Paths need to be safe and signage should be clear. Consultation with local schools and feedback from visiting groups have not highlighted any new needs or issues not already identified in the pre-installation phase. However, a number of visitors raised safety concerns in relation to the installation of one sculpture and this was addressed.  A small number of people have raised concerns that one particular sculpture, Big Foot, may be scary for young children. |
| Marital Status | No issues raised during consultation or identified since installation began. |
| Sexual Orientation | No issues raised during consultation or identified since installation began. |
| Men & Women Generally | No issues raised during consultation in relation to gender. However council staff are aware of the need to ensure that forest facilities are perceived to be safe for lone visitors (especially females, young people, older visitors). No new issues raised since sculptures have been installed.  Although only a small proportion of those who have provided feedback to date have provided negative comments, more negative feedback has been received from females. |
| Disability | From the outset, the Sculpture Trail has been designed to allow as many people as possible of different abilities to enjoy it. To enable full understanding of different abilities/disabilities a detailed accessibility audit was commissioned. This audit, carried out by Disability Action on the whole forest, has highlighted a number of areas where accessibility could be further enhanced to meet the needs of wheelchair users, those with reduced/no sight, and older people with mobility issues. More details on the report specifically relating to the Digital Sculpture Trail can be found in **Appendix 4** attached. Issues that have been raised include the need for handrails, a range of seating options to meet different needs, and more compact pathways around the sculptures.  We have had feedback from a small number of people that one particular sculpture, Big Foot, may be negative for mental health. |
| People with and without Dependants | Parents with buggies or people who care for those with physical disabilities may have accessibility issues. Parents with young children may need rest areas that can accommodate buggies, etc. |

**Part 2. Screening questions**

**1 What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this activity/policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?**

The majority of feedback on the sculpture trail to date has been on the aesthetic appearance of the sculptures and on the overall visitor experience.

Positive feedback is mostly from families with young children who enjoy the interactive facilities of the Fox and the Lamp Shade.

Negative feedback is mostly from faith based groups who have a concern over the Big Foot sculpture.

On the whole, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive – see **Appendix 5** for detailed comments – but there have been some negative reactions.

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| **Section 75 Category** | **Details of likely impact – will it be positive or negative? If none anticipated, say none** | **Level of impact -** **major or minor\*** - see guidance below |
| Religious Belief | For most visitors to the forest, there is no impact based on religious belief – people respond to the overall visitor experience and the aesthetics of the new sculptures depending on personal taste. However, a number of people have taken strong exception to the Bigfoot sculpture and have attributed meaning to it (pagan connotations) that was not intended by the commissioned artist. Some have objected to the location of the sculpture saying it is too close to the path. | No impact for the majority of visitors or potential visitors.  Minor negative impact reported for a small number of people on faith grounds |
| Political Opinion | No different impact identified to date | None |
| Racial Group | No different impact for people of different racial groups identified to date. The planned interpretative App will be developed in a way that will enable content to be translated into different languages. | None |
| Age | The sculpture trail has been designed using themes relevant to the surroundings of the forest to be appealing to people of all ages. However, from the response to date, there is no doubt that it is particularly attractive to children.  The physical enhancements to the forest trail – paths, signage, etc – may increase the appeal for older people and contribute to wellbeing.  Young people/school groups may benefit in particular from the added accessibility and new recreational offering.  A small number of people have claimed that the Big Foot sculpture may be scary for young children. | Minor – positive - for children/young people and school groups  Minor – positive - for older people |
| Marital Status | No specific or different impact identified in relation to marital status | None |
| Sexual Orientation | No specific or different impact identified in relation to sexual orientation | None |
| Men & Women Generally | No different impact by gender identified for the sculpture trail to date. Positive feedback has been received from both male and female visitors. However, analysis of negative feedback suggests that more women than men feel negatively about the sculptures. | None |
| Disability | Feedback on the improvements to the forest generally and on the sculptures that have been installed to date suggests that they are received very positively by disabled people of different ages. Feedback from parents, special schools and other visiting groups has highlighted that their visit was a positive experience – see summary of feedback **Appendix 5**.  Two of the sculptures that are interactive have been made as accessible as possible given the natural terrain of the forest and the need to protect the flora and fauna and this has been welcomed.  Further improvements following recommendations from the accessibility audit may further enhance the visitor experience for those with disabilities.  There has been a small number of negative comments that the Big Foot sculpture has a negative impact on mental health. | Minor - positive - for most disabled people  Minor – negative – noted for a small number of visitors |
| People with and without Dependants | Children, older people, family groups and those with a disability have all reported a positive experience when visiting the Digital Sculpture Trail to date. The further improvements that are planned are likely to lead to further positive experiences. | Minor - positive |

\* See Appendix 1 for details.

**2(a) Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?**

As feedback is received, consideration will be given to any issue raised before installation of the trail is completed and into the future.

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| **Section 75 Category** | **IF Yes, provide details** | **If No, provide details** |
| Religious Belief | Feedback from those who have concerns with the Bigfoot sculpture has been considered and mitigation measures proposed. |  |
| Political Opinion |  | No need or opportunity identified |
| Racial Group | Information about the sculpture trail and the planned interpretative App can be developed with the needs of those who do not have English as a first language in mind. |  |
| Age |  | No further opportunities identified at this stage but any measures that improve accessibility for disabled people may also benefit some older people. |
| Marital Status |  | No need or opportunity identified |
| Sexual Orientation |  | No need or opportunity identified |
| Men & Women Generally |  | No need or opportunity identified |
| Disability | Consultation will be undertaken with the Digital Consultant to determine if an audio description of the Sculptures can be made available via the App to inform those individuals with a visual impairment about the sculptures.  While accessibility has already been built into the project, recommendations from the Disability Action Audit will be implemented as far as budget and the physical environment allow.  Specific steps can be taken to promote awareness of the sculpture trail and to provide advance information for visitors with a disability. Signage on site can be provided in Braille. The needs of people with different disabilities can be taken into account in developing the interpretative App. There are plans for targeted consultation to ensure the App is fully accessible. |  |
| People with and without Dependants |  | The needs of some people with dependants have already been considered but will be kept under review as the project develops. |

**Equality Action Plan 2021-2025**

Does the activity/policy/project being screened relate to an action in the [Equality Action Plan 2021-2025](https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/council/publications/equality-section-75/action-plans-equality-and-disability)? Yes/No If yes, specify which action.

Yes, Actions 2.1 Access to Information and 3.4 Digital inclusion

**2(b) DDA Disability Duties (see Disability Action Plan 2021-2025)**

Does this policy/activity present opportunities to contribute to the actions in our [Disability Action Plan](https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/council/publications/equality-section-75/action-plans-equality-and-disability):

* to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?
* to encourage the participation of disabled people in public life?

Potentially yes, in relation to promotional/information material and ongoing consultation with disabled people and groups.

**3 To what extent is the activity/policy/project likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Good Relations Category** | **Details of likely impact. Will it be positive or negative?** [if no specific impact identified, say none] | **Level of impact –** **minor/major\*** |
| Religious Belief  Political Opinion  Racial Group | We know that the forest and the Digital Sculpture Trail is already used by school groups and community groups for cross-community activities. There may be further opportunities in future for increased activities, sports, education, social and cultural programmes and to promote use of the Trail and the forest in general as a shared space. | Minor - positive |

\*See Appendix 1 for details.

**4 Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Good Relations Category** | **IF Yes, provide details** | **If No, provide details** |
| Religious Belief  Political Opinion  Racial Group |  | No, there are no further opportunities to better promote good relations between these groups. All opportunities are currently being addressed. |

**Multiple identity**

**Provide details of any data on the impact of the activity/policy/project on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.**

We have taken into account the needs of different multiple identities in the development of the sculpture trail. For example, children with disabilities or older people with disabilities will benefit from enhanced accessibility measures.

**Part 3. Screening decision/outcome**

Equality and good relations screening is used to identify whether there is a need to carry out a **full equality impact assessment** on a proposed policy or project. There are 3 possible outcomes:

1. **Screen out** - no need for a full equality impact assessment and no mitigations required because no relevance to equality, no negative impacts identified or only very minor positive impacts for all groups. This may be the case for a purely technical policy for example.
2. **Screen out with mitigation** - no need for a full equality impact assessment but some minor potential impacts or opportunities to better promote equality and/or good relations identified, so mitigations appropriate. Much of our activity will probably fall into this category.
3. **Screen in for full equality impact assessment** – potential for significant and/or potentially negative impact identified for one or more groups so proposal requires a more detailed impact assessment. [See Equality Commission guidance on justifying a screening decision.]

**Choose only one of these** and provide reasons for your decision and ensure evidence is noted/referenced for any decision reached.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Screening Decision/Outcome** | **Reasons/Evidence** |
| Option 1  **Screen out** – no equality impact assessment and no mitigation required [go to Monitoring section] |  |
| Option 2  **Screen out with mitigation** – some potential impacts identified but they can be addressed with appropriate mitigation or some opportunities to better promote equality and/or good relations identified [complete mitigation section below] | The screening has identified that impacts will be minor and positive for most groups. Feedback from visitors to date and from extensive consultation has been overwhelmingly positive.  However, we have had some negative reaction on religious grounds, including from two faith-based groups. We have also had concerns from four members of the public on grounds of mental health and the potential to scare some children.  We have concluded that there is insufficient grounds to conduct a full equality impact assessment but we do need to take on board the feedback to date and implement mitigation measures – see below.  Limitations regarding accessibility will always be a challenge given the location of this project but all feasible recommendations from the Disability Audit will also be implemented.  Council will work with the artists, the digital consultant, Forest Service and stakeholders to ensure maximum inclusion/accessibility without compromising the design and the forest infrastructure. |
| Option 3  **Screen in** for a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)  [If option 3, complete timetabling and prioritising section below] |  |

**Mitigation (Only relevant to Option 2)**

**Can the activity/policy/project plan be amended or an alternative activity/policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?**

If so, give the **reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative activity/policy and ensure the mitigations are included in a revised/updated policy or plan.

Ongoing feedback from the public will be considered as the installation of sculptures nears completion.

There will be further targeted consultation and testing of the App design to ensure maximum accessibility. Mitigations already under consideration include accessibility considerations for different disabilities, older people, families and those who do not have English as a first language.

**Mitigations regarding Bigfoot**

In response to the negative feedback from a number of visitors, which is on the basis of religious and mental health grounds, and following advice from the Equality Commission, Council is considering the following options in relation to the Big Foot sculpture. Options will be brought to the relevant council committee.

1. Status quo – do nothing
2. Maintain sculpture in current location, in addition provide planting which would limit the visual impact as well as provide appropriate/parental guidance information within the App and on signage in the car park (Cost £4.5k)
3. Maintain sculpture in current location and re-align the adjacent path so those who wish to can avoid it more easily (approx. 120m of pathway)
4. Remove or re-locate the sculpture.

**Timetabling and prioritising for full EQIA (only relevant to Option 3)**

If the activity/policy has been **‘screened in’** for full equality impact assessment, give details of any factors to be considered and the next steps for progressing the EQIA, including a proposed timetable.

Is the activity/policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities? Yes/No. If yes, please provide details.

Not applicable

**Part 4. Monitoring**

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission’s Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

Effective monitoring will help a public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the activity/policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and activity/policy development.

**What will be monitored and how? What specific equality monitoring will be done? Who will undertake and sign-off the monitoring of this activity/policy and on what frequency?** Please give details:

The Tourism team will be responsible for monitoring of this project that will involve logging feedback and complaints from users and taking action when required. The Council will proactively seek feedback from users by way of surveys in the forest next spring when the Tourism Trailer will be back on site.

We will particularly monitor reactions and responses from the public on the issues that have been raised to date.

In line with Council policy there will be ongoing maintenance of each of the sculptures which will ensure safety and accessibility is regularly checked.

**Part 5 - Approval and authorisation**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Position/Job Title** | **Date** |
| Screened by: | Margaret McAvoy  Tourism Development Officer | 28.10.2022 |
| Reviewed by: | Equality Officer | 19.10.2022 |
| **Approved by:** | Paul McCormick | 12/12/2022 |

Note: On completion of the screening exercise, a copy of the completed Screening Report should be:

* approved and ‘signed off’ by a senior manager responsible for the activity/policy
* included with Committee reports, as appropriate
* sent to the Equality Officer for the quarterly screening report to consultees, internal reporting and publishing on the LCCC website
* shared with relevant colleagues
* made available to the public on request.

Evidence and documents referenced in the screening report should also be available if requested.

**Appendix 1 – Equality Commission guidance on equality impact**

\*Major impact:

1. The policy/project is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
2. Potential equality matters are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
3. Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
4. Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
5. The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
6. The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

Minor impact

1. The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
2. The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
3. Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
4. By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

No impact (none)

1. The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations;
2. The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Revised Template @ April 2022

**Appendix 2 - Background and Update on Project.**

Lisburn Castlereagh City Council took on a lease and licence in 2019 to develop parts of Hillsborough Forest for recreational and tourism purposes. An internal Board was set up with representatives from across Council Departments all with varying responsibilities at the forest. The Board was formed as part of the governance for the project.

Phase 1 of the project included the upgrading of paths around the lake, new bridges, extended car park, new picnic area and a new woodland themed play park. This was completed in 2021.

Phase 2 of the project is the installation of a Digital Sculpture Trail. The Digital Sculpture Trail has been part funded by DAERA’s Rural Tourism Scheme. A key element for the funding was to provide a tourism product that is innovative and world class. There will be nine new physical sculptures placed around the forest and the Harry Ferguson sculpture that is currently on the A1 dual carriageway will be moved into the forest to complete the trail. The sculptures will be linked by a downloadable app.

The Sculptures will be permanent structures and range in size from 1.5 to 8 metres in height and will be placed just off the pathways around the lake. Each one has a theme that complements the natural environment of the forest and reflects the rich history, heritage and culture of Hillsborough Village. The nine themes are:- Reflection, Nature, Heritage, Hope & Aspiration, Harmony, Fantasy, Childs-play, Motion and Science. There are two sculptures under the Childs-play theme and two of the sculptures are physically interactive, these are Motion and the Childs-play sculpture called The Fox.

The Motion sculpture is an overhead lampshade formed around a central pole with a stainless steel base fitted with kinetic pedals so visitors, when peddling, can generate power which will light the lampshade. The pedals have been positioned so the user can both sit on the structure and pedal with their feet or pedal by standing or sitting in a wheelchair.

The Child’s-play sculptures are two separate pieces, one of a Fox and one of a Hare.

Children can enter into The Fox and peep out through the eyes. There is wheelchair access to the fox by way of a ramp.

Each sculpture installation interprets a particular theme and the digital APP will guide visitors to and between sculptures using augmented reality way-finding. The digital content will encourage interaction with the sculptures with written, audio or video content that will engage, inform and educate visitors. A complete three-dimensional map of the forest will be developed and made available for visitors providing the relative locations of all sculptures and an offline digital method of navigation.

The content management system will be integrated with Google’s translation facility which will allow for a number of languages to be included within the APP. Which languages are to be included will be based on visitor numbers from non-English speaking countries.

Seven of the sculptures are in situ and the remaining 3 new ones will be installed in the coming months.

Whilst most of the feedback on the current sculptures has been positive some concerns have been raised from faith based members of the public around the Sculpture called Big Foot. The Council are considering the concerns and how they can be addressed.

Disability Action were assigned to undertake a full accessibility audit of Hillsborough Forest and the sculpture trail. This report has been received and is being considered by the Council. It is inevitable that the Council will not be able to implement all the recommendations in the report mostly due to the forest terrain and necessity to protect the natural environment, however, as many recommendations as possible will be implemented.

**Appendix 3 - This section chronicles planning and decision making including public engagement.**

**June/ July 2016** - public display of Concept Plans for feedback in Hillsborough Courthouse from 4 June to 2 July 2016, Public engagement events in Hillsborough Forest on Thursday 23 June and Saturday 25 June 2016, and a public display of proposed plans in Lagan Valley Island from 5 to 11 July 2016. Questionnaires distributed at all events and made available during public displays. Majority of responses providing strong support for a sculpture trail within the forest.

**January 2018** Expression of Interest (EOI) submitted to DAERA Rural Tourism Scheme (RTS) for a Digital Sculpture Trail at Hillsborough Forest, agreed by January 2018 Development Committee.

**March 2018** – Committee informed of success of being shortlisted to the Application Stage of the DAERA RTS funding programme. A number of criteria was required to be met before a full application can be submitted, including completion of Economic Appraisal, Procurement of Construction Work/ Services, and securing Long Term Tenure of the intended site i.e. Hillsborough Forest.

**June 2018** – Committee updated that due to change in scope of the Sculpture Trail (i.e. use of digital technologies) a more detailed Outline Business Case was required for the application to DAERA. Agreed to appoint RSM McClure Watters to conduct this. Committee also reminded that the idea for the Hillsborough Forest digital sculpture trail was to tap into new technologies which would form a ‘different, unique, and innovative’ concept that would put Hillsborough Forest firmly on the map for the visitor.

**July 2018** – procurement workshop among Council Officers, DAERA, AECOM (design team) to discuss proposed Procurement Strategy for the appointment of artists to work on the digital sculpture trail. The option of Restricted Competition with a two stage process agreed. Also agreed to relocate Harry Ferguson sculpture from dual carriageway to the forest.

**14 August 2018** – Special Joint Committee (Development Committee and Leisure & Community Development Committee) – Members provided with a copy of the procurement guidance notes issued by CPD and asked to consider the procurement artwork options. It was agreed the option of Restricted Competition be conducted divided into two stages. First stage intended to shortlist the number of eligible artists to submit a tender and the second stage would be the submission of the tender itself. It was also agreed that delegated authority be granted to the September Development Committee to agree the sculpture themes and make-up of the selection panel.

**September 2018** – Committee updated on procurement proposals, agree on the main themes, and an assessment panel with cross party representation approved (Chair of Development Committee, Chair of Leisure and Community Development, SDLP rep, APNI rep, and UU rep.)

**April 2019** - Council formally takes on 20 year lease for parts of Hillsborough Forest to develop for tourism and recreation purposes.

**June 2019** – Following two unsuccessful tender exercises a new proposal by using direct invitation to artists, (agreed by the funding body, DAERA and Council Procurement Section). Development Committee agrees a framework for taking forward the project, including consultation to a cross party Councillor working group (DUP, UU, APNI), consultation with the Hillsborough Forest Project Board, and achieving Council approval of the Outline Business Case.

Stakeholder engagement continually reported to (internal) Hillsborough Forest Board meeting. At this stage a meeting with Rector of St. Malachy’s Church, presentation to Committee of Hillsborough Presbyterian Church, HRP ongoing meetings, ongoing one-to-one meetings with business owners, and attendance at public meeting arranged by Chair of Community Association were all positive.

**27 August 2019** – Art Loves/ AECOM present to cross party Councillor working group with concepts and costs agreed to progress (presentation attached).

**September 2019** – Extended deadline for applications to the Rural Tourism Scheme, DAERA to the end of October 2019. Committee provided delegated authority to the October 2019 Committee to approve Outline Business Case. Friends of Harry Ferguson Celebration Committee content for Harry Ferguson plane sculpture to be relocated to the forest. HF Board (11.9.19) agree shortlist of artists and themes.

**2 October 2019** – Development Committee approve Digital Sculpture Trail OBC and total costs. It was then agreed to further test the concepts with local stakeholders by way of consultation.

**Planning** (LA05/2019/1127/F) – Submitted on the 31st October 2019 and approved in June 2020. A number of subsequent Non Material Change (NMC) applications for 1. Change of colour of pink to teal hare, 2. Reduction in height of Big Foot, 3. Full application for movement of “Hope & Aspiration” (3m approx.). Planning submission was one criteria for the RTS application.

**November 2019** – Capital Project Committee - refined OBC approved and progresses to Phase 2 of the Capital Investment Programme. The Council’s professional design team, AECOM, commissioned Art Loves as facilitators of the artistic element of the project and extended the brief for a direct appointment procurement route as two previous open tender exercises were abandoned.

**December 2019** – application to RTS DAERA was successful with a Letter of Offer received mid-December 2019 and assessment panel convened.

**January 2020** – Digital Workshop in partnership with Portfolio Office, HF Board and Councillors conducted to look at wider digital council piece. Digital Workshop attendees support all 10 proposed sculptures and themes in readiness to progress.

Stakeholder engagement incudes HRP ongoing meetings, monitoring meetings with funders, ongoing one to one meetings with business owners, Partnership Meeting with Forest Service, meeting with Tourism NI. Information sessions on the Digital Sculpture Trail planned including the tourism exhibition trailer (with proposals) displayed at Hillsborough Forest car park on Saturday 18 January and Tuesday 21 January 2020 (attached). Further to this meetings with business, community groups, schools, churches and forest users took place. Information Days in January 2020 - each of the events were promoted through social media, flyers distributed through the village and posters erected in Hillsborough business windows.

**February 2020** – Match funding was confirmed for the Digital Sculpture Trail. Monthly Meeting agree to sign contracts for artists and the digital app developer.

**May 2020** - work had commenced on the contracts for LCCC to enter in with each artist. However, due to COVID-19 works are on hold and a date for completion and signing of these contracts is not yet known. Due to the current Coivid-19 crisis the Forest has been closed for a number of weeks but has reopened under guidance from Forest Service.

Stakeholder engagement update – Ongoing discussions with HRP, AFBI and FS over closure/ opening of forest car park, and pedestrian access based on government COVID-19 guidelines. The funders agree to extend the completion date of the project given the current circumstances.

Digital Sculpture Trail App - the opportunity to widen the digital app to include the village businesses, and attractions is being developed, with an addendum to the original Outline Business Case being produced by Cavanagh Kelly Consultancy. As requested, additional income from the app is also being explored with options to be presented at a future Board meeting. To date feedback has been positive from Hillsborough community, including residents and business owners.

**July 2020** - Work has recommenced on the production of contracts for LCCC to enter in with each artist. Due to the LCCC current financial position, CMT has not yet made the decision on the Capital Projects that will continue. The HF Board were informed that Covid-19 had had a profound impact on the Council’s financial position and that all projects must work within the affordability limits of the Council’s current budgets.

Stakeholder engagement includes ongoing discussions with Forest Service. The funders agree to extend the completion date of the project given the current circumstances. A revised programme of works is compiled from AECOM to allow the funders an understanding of the revised start and completion dates.

Addendum to the Digital Sculpture Trail Outline Business Case, produced by Cavanagh Kelly Consultancy is circulated. The addendum considers a village wide offer for the App to include businesses, attractions and the community benefiting - additional income from the App was also to be explored. However, the recommendation from the consultants is not to generate income streams from the launch date, but rather to have capabilities to develop this over time.

**September 2020** – Development Committee agree refined Hillsborough Forest Digital Sculpture Trail OBC subject to the outcome of the capital programme affordability review.

**October/ November 2020** – Capital Project Committee approve the capital budgets for Hillsborough Forest Digital Sculpture Trail and award to be made subject to Full Council approval. Following the councils Affordability Review process and approval to progress the Digital Sculpture Trail the funders Rural Tourism Scheme (DAERA) are informed.

**February 2021** - feedback from RTS (DAERA) was positive about agreed payment schedule, with signed contracts with artists and programme of works for each to be submitted before end of March 2021.

**March 2021** - Artists contracts are now signed. Project completion estimated June/July 2022. Since the ambassadors (COVID-19) were redeployed to the forest complaints have been noticeably reduced and a more positive relationship with the public has been experienced.

Equality Screening – **May 21** (screening #1 in advance of design)

**June 2021** – The Board are shown each of the Digital Sculpture Trail detailed designs, explaining any amendments made to the original concept designs. It was noted that the previous pink colour was not a planning issue for the Hare, but rather community feedback wanting it changed.

**October 2021** - Works are ongoing with the artists, and app developers, with a three phased approach being utilised for erecting on site. Phase 1 expected to commence late December 2021 with final Phase 3 to be complete by July 2022. DAERA and Forest Service fully supportive of new Digital Sculpture Trail.

**January 2022** – Information Days on 28/29th January 2022 to inform forest users of the final designs and estimated time for installation (attached). Promotion of these days done by social media, flyers with flyers’ posters presented inside local businesses, churches, and schools.

**Appendix 4 - Summary of recommendations from DA report.**

Disability Action made a number of best practice recommendations that address accessibility of the sculpture trail and the wider forest as a visitor attraction. These are being considered by Council and it is likely that some may not be feasible due to financial constraints and restrictions dictated by the natural terrain of the forest.

* Pre-visit information –
  + make disabled visitors aware that parts of the trail route are located in forest woodland
  + highlight LCCC’s policy relating to mobility scooter users and adapted cycle users
  + highlight where cyclists and vehicles may be present on the overall forest site and that caution is required e.g. access road
  + information regarding car park locations and accessible parking provisions
  + provide postcode and coordinates for forest car park
  + inform visitors that steep sloop sections are evident on the trail route and on approach to some sculptures
  + inform visitors of the range of path surfaces and update when/if changes are made
  + outline where toilet facilities are and opening times
* Consider what, if any, allowances are, or can be, made for disabled people wishing to access the Digital Sculpture Trail using adapted cycles or all-terrain mobility vehicles
* It is preferable that sculpture signs/interpretation panels incorporate or are complimented by a 3D model of the sculpture which can be viewed and touched from the trail path
* On ramped gradient path sections and those steeper than ramped standards, a form of handrail support installed on both sides will assist older people on ascent and descent, and ambulant disabled people who may be weaker on one side than the other
* LCCC, assess if the forest track path surface between the Hare and the Fox sculptures can be further compacted to improve this mainly firm surface by reducing or eliminating some of the larger loose stones
* Explore options to provide and install a firm ground surface to enable all visitors to approach and access sculptures close up and to address sloping verges leading to and from the trail path
* Provide Digital Sculpture Trail specific way-marker arrows to assist visitors to use the paths that the sculptures are on
* Provide a dedicated way-marker system for the sculpture trail
* New way-marker arrows should be large in size with raised tactile information symbols, posts located immediately adjacent to trail paths at regular intervals and at all junctions
* All way-markers must be clearly visible on approach in both directions
* Mark the start and destination points and any potential entry point from other trail routes
* Consider if level circulation widths to the rear and sides of sculptures can be extended to enable free movement and experience of the sculptures in 360°
* Consider if a peep hole can be added at lower level to assist children who are smaller or who cannot climb onto the eye ledges
* Provide a form of lighting to assist people who may find very dark conditions frightening and/or include information e.g in an Autism-friendly guide, to inform visitors of what lighting conditions to expect within the sculpture body (Fox sculpture)
* Consider if level circulation width adjacent to at least one hand pedal location can be extended to accommodate wheelchair users (Lamp shade sculpture)
* Provide Digital Sculpture Trail specific interpretation panels in a similar vein to that on the car park access path, preferably at the start/end of the sculpture loop in either direction, and at the forest park entrance adjacent to the Forest
* A map showing a clearly defined trail path, including start point, destination point and a ‘you are here’ reference and a compass point.
* Provide Braille compasses and vibrating compasses for use on the trail to assist people who are blind or partially sighted (could be held in the Tourism Trailer)
* Signage at each sculpture ideally could include:
  + Be sited on hardstand to enable close up reading
  + Angled to avoid excessive stoop or stretch
  + Incorporate Braille on each sign
  + Comprise large, embossed text and tactile pictograms to encourage learning and to highlight specific features

**Appendix 5 - Summary of feedback from groups.**

Over twenty groups visited Hillsborough Forest during July and August 2022 and these ranged in age from 6 months to 75. The groups included day nurseries, schools, walking groups, special needs adult groups and church groups and also covered a wide geographical area which ranged from Bangor, Belfast, Bessbrook, Holywood, Dunmurry, Newcastle, Ballynahinch, Armagh and Lisburn.

All of the groups walked the sculpture trail with the exception of one of the day nurseries as it was too far for the very young children to walk there and then walk to the play park. Comments given included “the sculptures keep the walk around the lake enjoyable for the children”, “amazing”, “interesting”, “loved them”, “brilliant the children enjoyed the interaction”, “we will be back” etc. There were negative comments from adults in two groups about the plastic look of some of the sculptures however they also acknowledged that “children would love them”.

**Comments on group overall experience**

“One of our favourite places to visit”, “a great set up for adults with learning disabilities to enjoy everything on offer” and “much congratulations to LCCC for so much investment in the park”.

**Suggestions for future improvements included:**

More coach parking bays for larger coaches

Toilets required at the car park

More car parking at the forest

One group mentioned that it would be nice if the picnic tables at the entrance to the forest could be extended so wheel chair users could fit comfortably under the tables at each end.