

Terms of Reference for the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Sustainable Tourism Cluster

Dated: June 2025

Introduction

The Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Sustainable Tourism Cluster is a collaborative group of businesses and organisations committed to promoting sustainable tourism within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. The cluster will focus on fostering sustainable tourism practices that support local economies, preserve natural and cultural heritage, encourage more sustainable tourism to the destination, ensuring the long-term viability of tourism in the Geopark.

1. Details of Members

Members are tourism businesses, organisations and individuals representing the food & drink, outdoor activity & adventure (inc well-being), culture & heritage, accommodation, and transport sectors within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark. The full membership is in available upon request in Appendix 1.

2. The Purpose of the Terms of Reference

The purpose of these Terms of Reference is to outline the key components of the collaborative relationship between the members of the Sustainable Tourism Cluster, who will guide and support sustainable tourism initiatives within the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark.

These Terms of Reference are not intended to be legally binding.

3. Membership

New members will be considered for membership by the Sustainable Tourism Cluster and invited by the Cluster Chairperson.

Membership is open to tourism businesses, networks, and partnerships involved in the food & drink, outdoor activity & adventure, culture & heritage, accommodation, or transport sectors with an interest in sustainable tourism based within the Geopark. Members must have bookable and saleable tourism products or services.

New members, by invitation, will be admitted at the discretion of the existing members to ensure there are no sectoral gaps within the cluster.

There will be an annual review of membership renewal and/or new membership, which will be approved at the cluster's annual Autumn meeting.

Membership should reflect the diverse sectors of sustainable tourism within the Geopark.

If a member fails to attend three consecutive meetings, their tourism business may be asked to nominate an alternative representative. If no alternative is nominated, membership may be terminated.

Members will be expected to abide by the guiding principles of the Sustainable Tourism Cluster, as set out in Appendix 2 of this Terms of Reference.

Any member can submit items to The Geopark Sustainable Tourism Cluster Chair for discussion by the members. The Chair, in partnership with the Cluster Secretariat, will decide whether such items are appropriate for inclusion on the agenda or may be considered in other ways.

4. Mission

The Geopark Sustainable Tourism Cluster is a group of tourism businesses committed to promoting sustainable tourism in the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark.

The cluster will work together to support local economies, preserve the Geopark's natural and cultural heritage, and encourage responsible tourism practices that benefit business, local communities and visitors.

The principal focus will be on supporting sustainable tourism in the Geopark as designated, in alignment with the Geopark's broader strategic goals.

Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategic Framework; and Sustainable Tourism Cluster Action Plan:

The Sustainable Tourism Cluster is guided by the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Strategic Framework and the Sustainable Tourism Cluster Action Plan.

Each Action Plan is produced by NMDDC once every four years. The Strategy is produced once every eight years; the Geopark Strategy and Action Plan produced in consultation with the Geopark Management Group and the Sustainable Tourism Cluster Action Plan in consultation with the Sustainable Tourism Cluster

5. Agreed Areas for Working

The Members of the Sustainable Tourism Cluster will collaborate in the following areas:

1. Governance and Collaborative Management

- Share best practices, policies, protocols, and knowledge relevant to sustainable tourism.
- Develop and maintain a coordinated approach for communication with key stakeholders, including local government, central government agencies, environmental NGOs, media, and political figures.
- Influence policies and practices that relate to UNESCO Global Geoparks and sustainable tourism, ensuring that the interests of the Mourne Gullion

Strangford Geopark are represented.

- Foster professional standards through networking with other landscape management bodies regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- Actively participate in the development and ongoing support of the Geopark Strategy and Action Plan, providing advice and feedback to NMDDC Geopark staff as needed.

2. Tourism and Sustainability Initiatives

- Encourage the adoption of sustainable tourism practices across the region through the development and promotion of a Geopark Sustainable Code of Practice for Tourism.
- Explore opportunities for sustainable tourism projects that align with the objectives of the Geopark, ensuring that all tourism-related activities contribute positively to the preservation of the landscape and local communities.
- Promote the importance of sustainable tourism, responsible marketing, and environmental stewardship within the region, aiming to enhance the Geopark's reputation as an eco-friendly destination.
- Explore holistic approaches to the management of tourism in the Geopark, with a focus on sustainability, environmental protection, and heritage conservation;

3. Marketing and Promotion

- Support a unified destination marketing strategy that highlights sustainable tourism practices, ensuring that sustainability becomes a competitive advantage for the Geopark.
- Participate in collective efforts to promote businesses within the Geopark, helping to increase visibility and attract sustainable tourism experiences through various platforms, including the Geopark website, social media, and trade networks.
- Support businesses in leveraging Geopark branding and logos for marketing purposes and ensure that the Geopark brand reflects its commitment to sustainability.
- Collaborate on joint marketing campaigns, public relations efforts, and raising awareness about the cluster and its activities;

4. Training and Capacity Building

- Promote the delivery of sustainable tourism training programs for local businesses to ensure that the principles of sustainability are understood and implemented across the region.
- Offer opportunities for businesses to achieve recognised third-party sustainability certifications, providing support and guidance through the process.
- Foster a spirit of knowledge-sharing, ensuring that members have access to the tools and resources they need to enhance their sustainability practices.
- Act as advocates and champions for the Geopark within their own organisations.

5. Environmental Conservation and Advocacy

- Support conservation and environmental initiatives that protect and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the Geopark, with a

- particular focus on biodiversity, geodiversity, and landscape protection.
- Encourage the involvement of businesses and the community in conservation projects, such as habitat restoration, waste reduction, and sustainable resource use.
- Act as advocates for the protection of the Geopark's environment by engaging with the public and policymakers on key issues impacting the region.
- Promote professional standards and collaboration within the sustainable tourism sector;

6. Community Engagement and Stakeholder Collaboration

- Support the involvement of local communities in the management and decision-making processes of the Geopark, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in tourism-related planning and policies.
- Foster relationships between tourism businesses, local communities, and other stakeholders to promote mutual understanding and collaboration for sustainable development.
- Stay informed about and contribute to policies related to climate change, biodiversity, and nature conservation, ensuring that sustainability goals are aligned with broader environmental agendas.

7. Evaluation and Reporting

- Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of sustainable tourism initiatives and the impact of tourism on the Geopark.
- Provide feedback and recommendations for continuous improvement, ensuring that the Geopark's objectives are met and that tourism practices remain aligned with sustainability principles.
- Contribute to the preparation of annual reports documenting progress, challenges, and opportunities related to sustainable tourism in the Geopark.
- Develop a common approach to benchmarking, impact-measurement and quality standards
- Ensure an annual review of the cluster's performance and contributions towards sustainable tourism goals.

7. Nomination to other Bodies or Groups

Members of the Sustainable Tourism Cluster may be nominated to represent sustainable tourism interests in relevant external forums, networks, and groups. Such nominations will be made at the discretion of the cluster and will aim to ensure the Geopark's interests in sustainable tourism are well-represented on a national and international level.

8. Sustainable Tourism Clusters Meetings

8.1 The Sustainable Tourism Cluster will meet on a bi-annual basis, typically in person in April and online in November, with additional meetings called as necessary. Meetings may be requested by any member and agreed upon by the Chair.

8.2 The cluster may invite non-members to attend meetings by agreement of the Chair.

8.3 Non-members may also be invited to present on topics relevant to sustainable tourism within the Geopark. Such invitations will be at the discretion of the Chair and in consultation with the Cluster secretariat.

8.4 The cluster will appoint a Chair every four years, in April. No member can serve as Chair for more than two consecutive terms. NMDDC will provide secretarial support, including sending out a draft agenda at least one week before each meeting.

8.5 The quorum for cluster meetings will be six members. Members will be considered 'present' if attending in person, by telephone, or by any suitable electronic means (such as video conferencing).

8.6 The cluster will aim to reach decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached on a particular issue, the following process will apply:

- Stage 1: Additional evidence will be gathered and discussed at the next meeting.
- Stage 2: A majority decision will be made based on all evidence and recommendations and will be reported to NMDDC.

9. Confidentiality

The Members shall comply with all relevant legislation.

The Members shall keep confidential any and all confidential information that they may acquire in relation to the other Members, their employees or service users and topics being discussed.

No Member shall use another Member's confidential information for any purpose other than to perform its obligations under these Terms of Reference. Each Member organisation shall ensure that its officers, employees and volunteers comply with these confidentiality provisions.

These confidentiality obligations shall not apply to any information which is publicly available or becomes publicly available through no act or omission of the Member or which a Member is required to disclose by order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

These confidentiality obligations shall continue to apply after the termination of this Terms of Reference.

10. Termination

Any Member deciding to leave The Cluster shall be required to give at least three calendar months' prior notice to the other Members.

11. Branding, Publicity and Intellectual Property

All references to the Mourne Gullion Strangford Sustainable Tourism Cluster (The Cluster) will carry any relevant wording and, subject to agreement, the logos of any members wishing to be included.

Equal prominence shall be given to all groups in any publicity, promotional materials, press releases, articles, training sessions, presentations or other events relating to The Cluster for which there is a collaborative effort subject to the agreement of The Cluster.

Any intellectual property arising from The Cluster shall be owned by NMDDC unless otherwise stated in separate agreements or contracts.

Promotion of The Cluster will be the responsibility of all its members. Media enquiries will be dealt with in the first instance by NMDDC Marketing and Corporate Teams, then the Cluster Secretariat and thereafter as agreed appropriate by the Chair.

12. Sustainable Tourism Cluster

These Terms of Reference are not intended to be legally binding and do not constitute or imply any legal group, joint venture, agency, fiduciary relationship or other relationship between the Members other than the relationship between the Members provided for in these Terms of Reference.

13. Policies and Procedures

All of the Members shall comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and shall put in place policies and procedures in relation to health and safety, equal opportunities, the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults and any others required by law or relevant to any projects.

14. Review of this Agreement

This Terms of Reference will be reviewed every four years at a meeting of The Cluster, or when any Member requests a review in writing. Any amendments to these Terms of Reference will require a consensus of The Cluster.

Appendix 1: Members of the Cluster

Available on request

Appendix 2: Guiding Principles of this Collaboration

We agree individually and collectively to adopt the following guiding principles which we believe will improve our services.

Openness and transparency

We will adopt the principles of openness and transparency in all aspects of its operation and communication. This means that we apply the principle of no surprises and we will share information in a timely and accurate manner; that we will raise issues and problems as soon as possible and work creatively and constructively to find a resolution and that we will raise questions and queries promptly and share knowledge and expertise.

Sharing good and best practice

We recognise that each of us has something to bring to THE MOURNE GULLION STRANGFORD GEOPARK SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CLUSTER and that equally we have something to get from it. We will share learning through identifying good and best practice. Each Member will be encouraged to adopt best practice that they see elsewhere and to share examples widely within THE MOURNE GULLION STRANGFORD GEOPARK SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CLUSTER for the benefit of everyone.

Commitment to high standards and continuous quality improvement

We are committed to delivering high quality services and will work to ensure continuous quality improvement of our service provision. This means that we will set and expect high standards which we will monitor. We will support each other to develop our collective standards and where appropriate we will set challenging but realistic quality improvement targets. We will welcome external inspection as an opportunity to verify our internal quality assurance and quality improvement standards.

Operate sound and sustainable business practices

We start off from the premise that we are all successful organisations with a need to generate income and receive fair financial recompense for our contributions. We will work hard to ensure that THE MOURNE GULLION STRANGFORD GEOPARK SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CLUSTER's resources are distributed fairly and reflect the input that we each make. We will be efficient in how THE MOURNE GULLION STRANGFORD GEOPARK SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CLUSTER operates. For example we will keep paperwork and bureaucracy to a minimum.

Commitment to flexibility

As a collaboration we acknowledge that we have much to learn from each other and that there may be times when things do not go according to plan or to expectation.

We will therefore be flexible in terms of how we operate and be prepared to make changes, often at short notice. We will also demonstrate our commitment to flexibility in terms of our relationships with each other and will endeavor to learn about the different constraints placed on each of our organisations and how these affect how we operate.

These Terms of Reference were ratified by Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark Sustainable Tourism Cluster on XXXXX where it was agreed there was not a need to have Members signatures on the Document