



Dear Friend of Mourne

Department for the Environment Funding to Mourne Heritage Trust

As you may have observed in the media, the Department for the Environment recently issued a consultation paper on its draft budget for 2015-16. Among other things this refers to the possible *'termination of grant and other support programmes'*, including in these the Natural Heritage Fund that provides the bulk of Mourne Heritage Trust's core funding, through Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

At MHT we are conscious of the on-going pressures on government funds and know we must play our part in finding savings. However, having done so as recently as 2010, to the extent of 15% of an already 'bare bones' core budget, we feel our sector has no fat on the bones and lacks sufficient critical mass to withstand disproportionate cuts. As well as the essential nature of many of our services for the well-being of the Mourne AONB and its community, we achieve great value for money in leverage of funds from diverse sources and in stimulating volunteering. We have enclosed, respectively, a summary of the main arguments in favour of maintaining funding to MHT and of the findings of an external review of the Trust, commissioned by NIEA in 2009, which back these up.

We would like to ask you as a 'Friend of Mourne' to consider adding your voice to the consultation and express that you value the Mourne AONB and the services provided by MHT in its care. This will be particularly strong coming from people like you who have supported us out of your own pockets, with your time and in so many other ways. We do not expect input to be either expert or detailed, but simply to represent expressions that people wish to see the Mourne landscape cared for and our work continue and, if your time allows, some of the reasons why.

You can contribute to the consultation simply by way of an email to the following address doe.budgetconsultation@doeni.gov.uk

If you prefer to correspond in writing the contact details are as follows

Anthony Carleton
Director of Finance and Business Planning
Room 6-15
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST, BT2 8GB

The telephone number is 028 90 540820

The closing date for submissions to the consultation is 29th December but we have been advised that timely contributions will be likely to get more notice and attention, before the rush comes in closer to the deadline. So please do act now if you can. It will help our case if support for MHT and its work is received early and often.

A copy of the full consultation document can be obtained at
<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/doe-draft-budget-2015-2016-assessment-consultation.pdf>

If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact our CEO, Martin Carey, at the Trust's offices on (028) 437 24059.

Thanking you in advance of any support you can give

Yours Sincerely,



Mr Desmond Patterson
Farmer, Tourism Business and Councillor
Chairman



Dr Arthur Mitchell, MBE
2012 Europarc Medal, Services to Conservation
Vice Chairman

On behalf of Mourne Heritage Trust

Summary of importance of maintaining DoE core funding to Mourne Heritage Trust

- In Northern Ireland many community sector partners, funded through grant mechanisms **provide essential functions that in the rest of the UK are undertaken by statutory agencies**. MHT's services are in pursuit of the AONB Management Plan under the powers granted to NIEA by the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (Northern Ireland) 1985.
- Despite its great wealth of landscape resources NI already lags significantly behind most other jurisdictions in extent and security of resources for their care. The core funding of MHT for environmental and visitor management services in the 57,000 hectares of the Mourne AONB is £300,000 per annum from five funders. This **is less than one tenth** of the annual budget of the New Forest National Park Authority which deals with an area of exactly the same size.
- MHT's funding from NIEA was cut in 2010 to help DoE find savings. This was just after an external review, commissioned by NIEA, identified that MHT was performing well, that there was a strong need for its services and that **'scope for financial savings is extremely limited'**
- **Due to the underdeveloped nature of landscape management in NI, the various functions provided for under the core staffing complement are at basic minimum levels of provision.** For example, our Countryside Services and Ranger teams each consist of two staff members. If it comes to even small funding losses, functions like these will cease to be viable due to lone working and related considerations and working relationships built up over 17 years will be lost.
- The core funds provided represent a **very productive investment**. Over the last five years **for every £1 of core funding by NIEA, MHT has levered a further £4**. We also lever an estimated **£100,000 of labour for environmental work each year from volunteers**.
- **Project funding drawn by Mourne Heritage Trust is significant and diverse**, including the following: Heritage Lottery Fund (£1.5m from a UK wide Landscape Partnership fund thus entirely additional to NI); Interreg IV A (£1.4m); DETI EU competitiveness Funds (for Green Tourism Programme); NI Rural Development programme under EARDF (countryside access infrastructure); Sport NI and NITB (upland erosion control) and BIG Lottery (volunteer development). These projects are dependent on the small core base.
- Funding provided through the Natural Heritage Fund is largely **match funding on which the input of other funders is contingent** and, in some cases, forms part of a **partnership approach**. In many cases, including MHT, the partnership in question was established by NIEA (or its predecessor).
- MHT is a **significant employer in a rural area, with 17 individual staff members**. Of these, only 8 are core staff, funded – in part - by the Natural Heritage Fund. At present **MHT's additional projects employ a further 9 people and invest over half a million pounds per annum into the local economy**.
- The above figures do not account for the significant - but less easily quantified - **wider economic benefits through tourism, the biggest economic sector in South Down, that MHT contributes to sustaining and growing**. Nor do they account for **the benefits to public health from volunteering and countryside access**. The Mourne Mountains, where many of our visitor management services are focussed, have recorded journeys through electronic counters of over 150,000 in the last year.

Summary of Key Findings of FGS McClure Watters *'Review of Management Trusts and Future Management Bodies for AONB. Mourne Heritage Trust Final Report'* (July 2009)

For Northern Ireland Environment Agency in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board

- 'priorities of the NI Government **support need for management and protection** of NI's natural, cultural and built heritage and in particular the Mourne AONB'.
- 'evidence to support **need for a Body which serves Mourne AONB** and is focused on ensuring a balanced approach to developing the economy and maintaining the natural and built environment'.
- Performance assessment concluded '**MHT has successfully delivered.....** either directly through core activities or development of priority projects'.
- '**MHT's ability to identify local needs and pursue project funding**'
- '**range of areas** that MHT has delivered on is highly significant'
- '**Opportunities for financial savings within MHT are very limited** and where they may be possible they are of low financial value and would be offset by other associated costs'.
- 'It is clear from this analysis that **MHT has faced and is continuing to face a number of funding constraints that are affecting its future stability and ability to sustain its strong performance.**'