



# **LAGAN VALLEY REGIONAL PARK**

## **LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME**

### **Access and Audience Development Plan**

## Executive Summary

This Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP) – Access & Audience Development Plan describes and presents issues affecting access to and within the Regional Park. Its purpose is presented in relation to the development of the LVRP-Landscape Partnership Scheme, with particular aims of improving access, increasing the enjoyment and appreciation of the Regional Park and involving people.

The Plan explores various user surveys, plans and policies prepared by other organisations which address access and audience development issues.

This plan also examines the type of people, who currently use the LVRP and examines their frequency of use; age, employment and gender profiles; how they reach their origin whether by car, walking, cycling or by public transport.

The plan reviews the public transport servicing the Regional Park and assesses potential access issues for disabled users.

The plan explores some of the barriers that limit the involvement of users and non-users of the Park, in an attempt to find solutions to overcome them. 7 key audiences have been identified which are currently considered to be unrepresented or underdeveloped.

The plan has been adopted by both the Lagan Valley Regional Park, Management Group and Advisory Committee. It will be used to ensure the Landscape Partnership Scheme is delivered to ensure involvement from all aspects of the community.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This documents sets out an Access and Audience plan for Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP). The document outlines the existing role of the Regional Park along with the aims of the Management Group and Advisory Committee.

Details of the consultation process which were adopted during the preparation of this report are detailed which include workshops, park user surveys and reviews of key stakeholders access plans & policies.

The Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP) was established in 1967 with the aim of protecting the local countryside and its wildlife, and developing an area for informal recreation. It covers 4000 acres (1600km) including an 11 mile River Lagan towpath link between Belfast (Stranmillis) and Lisburn (Union Lock) / the most popular public pathway in Northern Ireland.

The Regional Park is a mosaic of countryside, urban parks, heritage sites, nature reserves and riverside trails.

Despite its proximity to urban areas the Lagan Valley Regional Park retains its rural character and is an ideal place to enjoy the countryside, pursue active sports such as golf and canoeing, or to participate in more leisurely pursuits such as bird watching and walking.

### 1.1 Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme

The aims of the Lagan Valley Regional Parks' Landscape Partnership Scheme are to:

- Increase the public's awareness of the natural and built heritage throughout the LVRP,
- Undertake surveys throughout the park to gain a better understanding of the flora and fauna within the park;
- Perform active management of grassland & wetland habitats;
- Increase the publics' participation and understanding in the management of the LVRP;
- Improve and enhance open space riverside area for informal recreation.

## **1.2 Aims & Objectives of Access & Audience development plan**

The aims of the Access & Audience development plan are:

- To identify the key users within the park and provide facilities to enhance their experiences within the Park;
- To increase people's enjoyment and appreciation of the Regional Park;
- To identify non-users of the park and remove any barriers to their involvement;
- To improve accessibility to the regional Park by addressing identified barriers – organisational, physical, sensory, intellectual, social & cultural, and financial.

## **1.3 Consultation**

The LVRP-LPS development phase has been developed in consultation with a variety of statutory and non-statutory bodies and the public.

By its very nature the Regional Park operates in consultation with a wide variety of statutory and non-statutory bodies and the public. The LVRP Management Group is the main vehicle for organisations to co-ordinate their management work on the ground within the Regional Park. The Management Group consists of representatives from Belfast, Castlereagh, and Lisburn city Councils, Environment and Heritage Service of DOE, The Department of Culture Arts and Leisure, The National Trust, Ulster wildlife trust, Forest Service and Park staff.

The Management Group in turn reports to the LVRP Advisory Committee which consists of the above members plus : members of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, Countryside Access and Activities Network, Councillors from the three councils, Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development, Planning Service and three members of the public co-opted onto the committee.

During the development phase of the Landscape Partnership Scheme several meetings were held with both the LPS management group and the Advisory Committee. This was necessary in order to keep members advised of progress of the HLF application. These meetings involved presentations, workshops and round table discussions. In addition, the development officer met with local community groups, schools and volunteer organisations in order to ascertain their expectations from the Landscape Partnership Scheme.

## 2.0 RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PLANS

It is necessary to take account of the particular aims and objectives of key interest groups within the Park, in order to identify the context within which the aims and objectives of the Access and Audience plan have been established. This section provides a summary of the main findings of the various plans, strategies and policies employed within the park:

### 2.1 Countryside recreation Strategy, 2005

In May 2005 a 'Countryside Recreation Strategy' was completed for Lagan Valley Regional Park. The report reviewed the existing recreational opportunities within the park and composed a 'Vision' for the park in five to ten years time. In addition a series of recommendations and an action programme was prepared to create a pathway to this 'vision'.

Within this strategy report a large number of issues were identified during an extensive consultation process. At least 34 separate organisations were consulted in the preparation of the report. The following issues of concern were noted within the report and provide an indication of the feedback received:

#### ***Personal safety***

*The parks environment and linear layout of the path network has resulted in various incidents occurring in the past leaving people, especially females, with uncertainty about their personal safety. To increase their confidence there is a stated desire 'to see more official personnel on the towpath', however more frequent maintenance and considered use of vegetation (such as creating views towards destinations and allowing more light to the path) would also aid this situation. Removal of existing vegetation would have to be considered in the context of any potential impact on biodiversity.*

#### ***Lack of Facilities***

*Throughout the park there is an obvious lack of toilet and eating facilities. Indirectly this may discriminate against various groups from the public, such as the elderly and young families, instead of attracting more to use the park on an all day visitor purpose. Where there are facilities they are either of limited opening hours (Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park), kept locked (Belvoir Park Forest) or are within public buildings but are not strictly open to those using the park e.g. Malone House. Lisburn*

*City Council's Civic Centre at Lagan Valley Island has public toilets which are available 7 days / week.*

*More specifically there is a lack of facilities for those participating in water sports, especially canoeing. Shaw's Bridge has the best formal facilities making it the main focal and access point for the sport, despite the entirety of the river being used on a regular basis.*

*The building proposed by the Belfast Activity Centre will only act as a boat house/storage facility, for their own activity programme, thereby changing and showering facilities are still wanting. The ability of the existing car park at Shaw's Bridge to accommodate competitors and spectators during competitions is also limited, thereby restricting the number of other visitors to the park. A public facility (perhaps also meeting the needs of BAC) should be considered at Shaw's Bridge to provide visitor services and changing for training and events.*

### **Signage, Activity Mapping and Interpretative Signage**

*The lack of knowledge of the range of activities and facilities of the LVRP outside its local area has resulted in poor visitor numbers. There are few clearly sign posted access points to the park and where signage is in place, vandalism is an ongoing problem. For effective signage and use of the park it is important to ensure that the following five layers of information are in place:*

- *Presentation of the area to people (within Belfast Metropolitan area as least) as a focus for activities*
- *Presentation of the wide range of activities available in the area*
- *Guiding people to appropriate activity sites and background services ( e.g. toilets, changing, detailed information, maps etc)*
- *Providing information about opportunities such as courses, hire, instruction, day events*
- *Providing management information to assist sustainable or shared use.*

### **Dog Fouling**

*Although the Towpath Code states that dogs should be kept under control, several complaints have been made about dog fouling within the LVRP, which detracts from the attractiveness of the park. The main dog walking areas are likely to coincide with high use areas, such as Shaw's Bridge, Drumbeg and Union Bridge due to the*

*provision of car parking at these destinations. Due to the intensive use at these points an effort should be made to enhance their role as a gateway to the park. Dog fouling could be controlled through the provision of dog toilet areas or dog bins, along with the increased presence of LVRP rangers, who have the power to issue fines to dog owners who do not clean up after their dog. Dog toilets are incompatible with canoeing access and angling as boats and equipment need to be set down during carries and are picked up again by hand with excrement attached. This is an issue at Shaw's Bridge and elsewhere.*

## **2.2 Towpath User Survey 2001 - Lagan Valley Regional Park**

The **towpath users' survey** was undertaken in July, August and September 2001 over 83 days with counts and interviews undertaken during a two hour period each day.

4160 users were counted overall with 382 (9%) attitude surveys carried out. 62% of all people recorded were walkers, 24% cyclists and 12% runners. Of the remaining 2% anglers and wheelchair users predominated.

The male to female ratio was 1.3: 1 and the predominant age range was 15-60 years with a very small representation of under 15's.

The majority of users lived locally with 39% using the towpath on a daily basis and 44% weekly. Shaw's bridge was the most popular joining place on the towpath with Stranmillis, Union Bridge and Drumbeg also being significant entry points. This is mirrored in the most popular leaving points. Only 1% of users surveyed had used public transport to reach their towpath starting point. 33% had arrived by car, 37% had walked and 26% had cycled. Similar numbers of people walk in each direction on the towpath with a pattern of out and back journeys.

The predominant reason for visiting the towpath was for pleasure at just under 60%. Sports use was just over 13% of users. Walking the dog (12%) and travel to work (5%) also featured. The wildlife of the towpath was the predominant reason for its use (44%) with other significant reasons being its traffic free nature, its proximity, and the level nature of the path. 65% of people surveyed wanted to see more information and interpretation.

Some people, particularly women, wished to see more official personnel on the towpath to provide a greater sense of security.

There were some concerns over barriers in places and around 1 in 5 people felt that a range of measures to help people with various disabilities to use the towpath was necessary.

Additional issues raised in the survey included:

- Need for more seating
- In river and riverside litter
- Dog fouling
- Vulnerability of women
- Welcome for improved water quality and the return of salmon
- An ambivalence about the potential for navigation to return to the river and some concerns over the loss of quiet wetland areas.

### **2.3 National Trust – Access plans & Policy documents**

Access is a principle purpose of The National Trust. The National Trust own 1% of land within the UK and as such are recognised as one of the biggest contributors to the provision of access to public lands and the countryside. The Trust provides routes, facilities, staff, information, education and high standards of safety. With this in mind it was important to consider some of the approaches the Trust recommends in its 2000 report on Access and Recreation on National Trust Land.

The report identifies some of the management techniques that the Trust employs in dealing with the fine balance of providing access while ensuring the continued tranquillity, peace and quiet people come to the countryside to enjoy.

The Trust highlights the need to ensure that the provision of access does not compromise conservation. Many of the potential impacts caused by increasing access to their property are relevant to Lagan Valley Regional Park. These potential impacts include:

- Litter
- Damage /removal of vegetation
- Soil erosion
- Disturbance to wildlife
- Increase in traffic
- Damage to built structures and boundaries.

Lagan Valley Regional Park recognises the need for increased signage and better access, and will strive to achieve the required balance of improved facilities for all, while continuing to ensure quiet enjoyment for all the Parks' users.

### **2.4 Belfast City Council – Park User Survey Report 2005**

The Belfast Parks Survey included 721 interviews across all Belfast City Council Parks. Two of these parks are within Lagan Valley Regional Park, namely Barnett Demesne, where 38

interviews were undertaken and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park, where a further 48 interviews were completed.

The gender profile for the uses overall was 51% female and 49% male, with 51% of all users living within 1 mile of the individual park.

The top 3 reasons for visiting the parks were walking alone or with others (58%), relaxing (38%) and walking a dog (29%).

Top ten suggested improvements included the provision of toilet facilities (noted by 41%), requests for additional or improved facilities for children (26%), while 25% suggested improved seating.

Requests for improved security /safety showed a significant rise from the survey conducted in 2002 by Belfast City Council. It rose from 9% of the interviewees in 2002 to 15% in 2005.

Respondents were asked how valuable they felt historical buildings and monuments are to the residents of Belfast. 60% of the 721 people surveyed stated they considered historical buildings and monuments 'Very valuable'.

## **2.5 Sustrans Towpath User Survey**

Sustrans undertook a user survey along the towpath in August and September 2004. A total of 164 interviews were undertaken over a 48 hour period. The User survey profiled the users along the towpath and found that 33% were cyclists, 44% pedestrians with the additional 23% being classified as others.

Their survey categorised the users in terms of their employment status and age profiles. 57% of those surveyed were employed, with 24% retired, 10% studying and 6.3% unemployed. 83% of users stated that they use the towpath because of the pleasant surroundings, 55% for personal fitness and 42% for personal health.

Sustrans noted that only 1.9% of towpath users availed of public transport to reach the start of their visit.

## **2.6 Lock Keepers Cottage – User Survey**

During the EU Heritage Open weekend in September 2006, Castlereagh Borough Council opened the Lock Keeper's Cottage to the Public. Those visiting the cottage were given the opportunity to take part in a questionnaire survey relating to the future of the Cottage. Over 2

days a total of 186 people were surveyed on a range of topics concerning the future use of the Lock Keeper's Cottage. The findings of the User survey are presented in Appendix Y.

- 98% of the people surveyed indicated that they would like to see the Cottage and the associated Lock No.3 restored.
- 93% were in favour of facilities being developed in the grounds of the cottage,
- 14% stated they would visit such facilities in both winter and summer, while 12 % said they would only visit during the summer. The remaining 74% did not indicate a preference for winter or summer.

### **3.0 ACCESS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

In 2005 in preparation of the Countryside Recreation Strategy (Ferguson McIlveen in association with Judith A. Annett Countryside Consultancy) reviewed access into the Regional Park by Public transport. The findings of that report are presented below.

Lagan Valley Regional Park is easily accessible to the many residents who live within its boundary or on its periphery. In some respects it is both a regional and local park as demonstrated by user surveys. For people visiting the park from other parts of the Greater Belfast area and beyond, the preferred means of transport would appear to be the car. The regional park is crossed by main roads at several points: -

Access to the towpath is available at all these locations except Lower Lambeg (Wolfenden's Bridge). The car parks beside Drum Bridge and Shaw's Bridge are well used, and are on occasions inadequate for the demand. The car parks near Union Bridge also cater for town centre and civic centre users. Lisburn City Council has developed a new public car parking facility beside Lisburn Distillery FC grounds, as an integral part of the Ballyskeagh Park scheme with new footpath links to the towpath. This facility needs to be publicised by means of signage from the Ballyskeagh Road. At four locations, roadside parking is the only available option.

#### **3.1 Bus routes**

*The three main roads between Belfast and Lisburn are all serviced by various bus routes, which also serve the Regional Park. The most frequent are those travelling along the Lisburn Road and Malone Road. Along with the regular Ulsterbus services, Translink have recently commissioned a new bus service, the Metro. This has replaced several of the existing routes operating along the main arterial roads into Belfast City Centre, the Lisburn Road and Malone corridors are two of the twelve which have been created. The Lisburn Road is served by Services 9A, 9B and 9C, which operate between Belfast and River Road, Conway; this service has stops at Finaghy, Dunmurry Village, and Seymour Hill.*

*This route is also served by the City stopper service between Belfast and Lisburn, Belfast and Newry and Belfast and Portadown and Ulsterbus routes 503, 523, 524, 525, 527, 528, 530, 531, 538, 551 and 572. All of these have stops within close proximity of the Park at Derriaghy, Lambeg, Hilden and Lisburn.*

*Routes 8A, 8B and 8C service the Malone Road, which operates along its length as far as Erinvale Avenue, Malone, whereas the 8C continues on to Ladybrook. All these routes pass*

*both through the park and along its boundary and operate along both corridors, every fifteen to twenty minutes, except the 9C, which operates three times daily.*

*Services 22 and 521 connect Belfast and Lisburn via the Hillhall Road, in total these operate eleven times a day, with stops at Edenderry, Blacks Corner Bridge, Ballyaughlis and Rosevale and Drumbeg, Ballyskeagh, Hillhall and Tullynacross, respectively. A section of the Hillhall Road is also served by Route 25B, which connects Lisburn and Belvoir via Drumbo and Carryduff.*

*Belvoir Park Forest is served by route 513 and 513B. The first approaches from Shaw's Bridge thereby also stopping close to Barnett's Demesne, Clement Wilson Park and Shaw's Bridge itself, going onto Leveroge and Drumbo, twelve times daily. Route 13B comes from the Ormeau Road travels through the estate and turns at the Hydebank Roundabout, the schedule is every 20-50 minutes.*

### **3.2 Train Service**

*The Belfast-Lisburn Railway skirts the western park boundary between Dunmurry and Lisburn. Trains run every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday and approximately every hour on a Sunday.*

#### **Station Access to LVRP**

- *Dunmurry 500 metres to start of Dunmurry Glen*
- *Derrriaghy 700 metres to Derrriaghy Glen / beside footpath in Aberdelghy*
- *Lambeg 400 metres to Lambeg Bridge*
- *Hilden 650 metres to Hilden Bridge*
- *Lisburn 650 metres to Union Bridge*

*It is currently possible to take a bicycle on this train service and this allows for a full cycle along the towpath and a return by train. The new trains, which have just been deployed, have the capacity to transport four full size bikes for free, however travel for those with bicycles is limited to after 0930.*

### **3.3 Access for people with disabilities**

*Access for people who use wheelchairs to many areas of the parks and towpath is relatively good within the LVRP and has been gradually improved by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure over recent years. Lisburn City Council is creating a new and easier access to*

*the towpath near Ballyskeagh Bridge but the section between Drumbeg and Ballyskeagh remains the most problematic. Due to the valley topography, some paths that link onto the towpath are quite steep, such as some in Belvoir Park Forest. The requirement to keep out motorised vehicles has in the past impeded wheelchair access but this is being addressed at all locations.*

*There is a Disabled Access Scheme in Clement Wilson Park with a 1.9km (1.2miles) level / ramped circular route from Shaw's Bridge Car Park. This facility has its own interpretative sign.*

*With the aid of Shopmobility, Northern Ireland Disabled Ramblers was created two years ago, for those with disabilities. With forty-five members the Lagan Towpath and the LVRP are just two of the frequently used venues province wide. The ramblers can borrow scooters or wheelchairs for the day, from Shopmobility Belfast or Shopmobility Sprucefield.*

*The only problems the group have come in to contact with so far, are kissing gates and narrow bridges, especially at Lambeg and Drumbeg, however these are passable.*

*Access for people with other forms of disability is not facilitated within the park. Examples include information and access for people with visual impairment to enable them to use parts of the regional park unaided. For people who move slowly due to their disability or for people with auditory impairment some of the road crossings are hazardous and traffic calming where park pathways cross major roads will be an important component.*

## **4.0. CURRENT AUDIENCE**

To identify the current audiences that utilise the Lagan Valley Regional Park, a user survey (Appendix D) was conducted throughout the park during the months of July, August & September 2006.

The key elements of the user survey extrapolate the following information:

- Profile of the users in terms of age and gender,
- Usage of the park (frequency & location),
- Purpose of their visit
- Identification of user conflict issues
- Identification of barriers to their enjoyment

Although the fundamental questions remained the same as the user surveys conducted in 1998 and 2001, some additional questions were added to address the topics below:

- What additional services / facilities they would like to see within the Park,
- Should additional funds become available, what aspects of the park would they like to see improved.

### **4.1 Methodology**

A total of 2055 users were counted during the survey, from which a total of 361 surveys were completed. This represents 17.5% of the total.

The entire length of towpath between Union Locks, Lisburn and Stranmillis, Belfast was split into 5 sections as follows:

- Section 1      Lockview car park to Shaw's Bridge
- Section 2      Shaw's Bridge to Drumbeg
- Section 3      Drumbeg to Hilden
- Section 4      Hilden to Lagan Valley Island
- Section 5      Lagan Valley Island to Union Locks

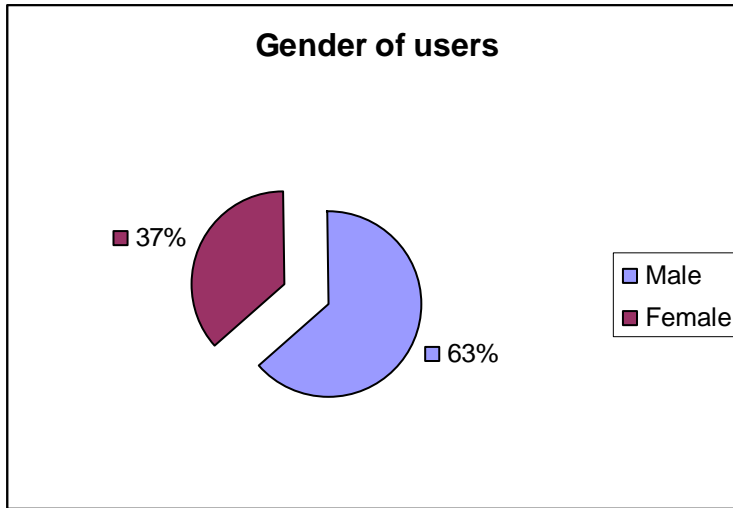
The five sections of the towpath were surveyed with a staggered rotation. The surveys were conducted over a period of three months, which covered a total of 92 days. In practise a total of 62 surveys days were recorded, with a total of 361 individuals being interviewed. During this period the surveyors spent 2 hours of each day on one of the 5 sections, with the first hour being devoted to the user count.

Towpath users were stopped at random and asked to participate in the survey, with their responses being noted on the questionnaire.

Many of those questioned welcomed the opportunity to express their views and concerns and considered it a worthwhile exercise. The main findings of the survey are presented in section 4.2 – 4.5.

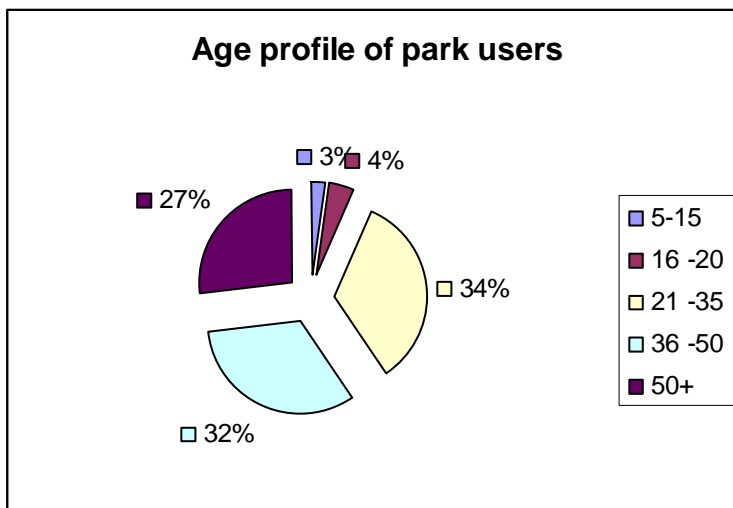
## 4.2 User profile

The proportion of male to female is presented in Figure 1, with males representing 63% of the users in the Park during the survey period.



**Figure 1** – Gender profile of park users

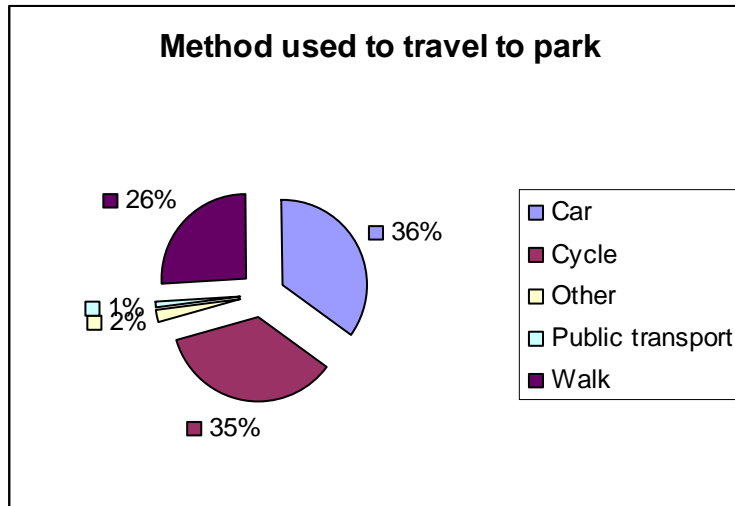
Users were also categorised on the basis of age and Figure 2 outlines the distribution of this. The 3 largest age profiles are ages 21-35 (34%), ages 36-50 (32%) and 50+ (27%).



**Figure 2** – Age profile of park users

### 4.3 Method of Transport

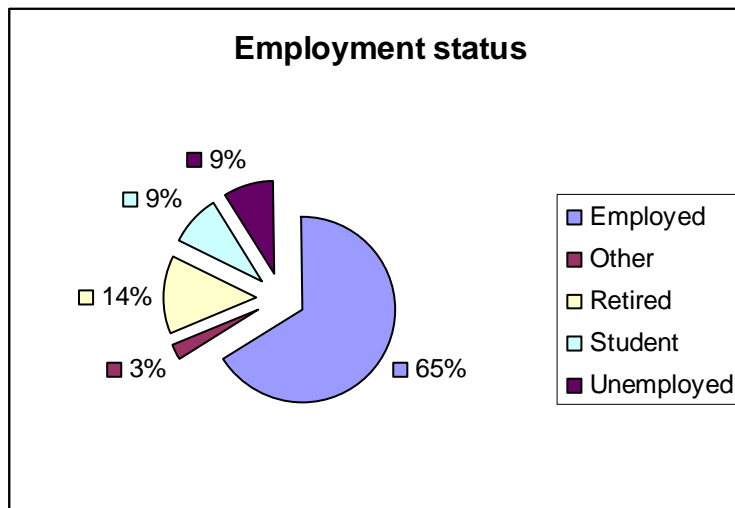
Visitors were asked which method of transport they used to reach the park. Entering the Park by private car (36%), cycling (35%) and walking (26%) represented the main method of transport. Only 1% of park users reached the Regional Park using public transport.



**Figure 3** – Method of transport used to access the park

### 4.4 Employment Status

Users were classified in terms of their employment status, as indicated in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** – Employment status of park users

The highest percentage of users is employed (65%), with both students and unemployed users representing 9% each. 14% of the users' surveys are retired. Others included accompanied children.

### 4.5 User Counters

In addition to the physical user counts undertaken during the survey, a series of electronic counters, operated by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure, are located along the towpath. These counters are monitored weekly to record the volume of people passing the individual areas.

The counters are located at the following locations:

- Stranmillis
- Drumbeg
- Lambeg
- Shaw's Bridge
- Moore's Bridge

Quarterly results for 2005 and 2006 are presented for each counter location in Figure 5 (a) and 5(b).

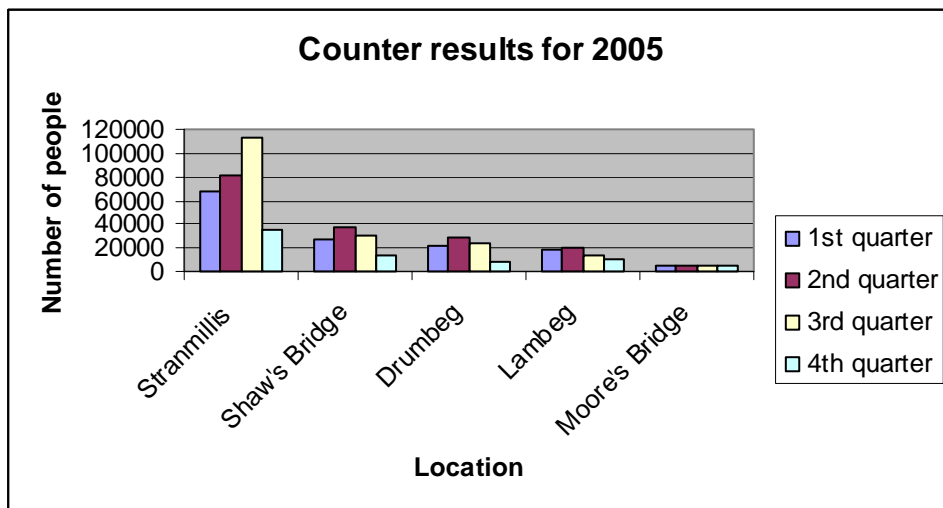


Figure 5 (A) – Counter results for 2005

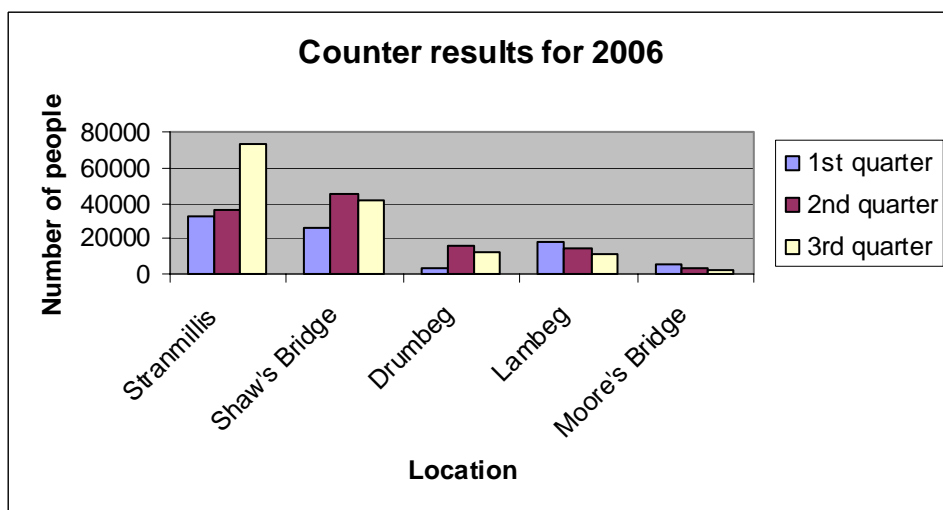


Figure 5 (B) – Counter results for 2006 to September

Occasional maintenance is undertaken on the counters. During this period no data is collected, which yields an overall lower figure for these periods of time.

Maintenance on the counters took place at the following locations during 2005 & 2006.

Location	No of weeks being maintained (no results obtained during maintenance period)	
	2005	2006
➤ Stranmillis	2 in 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter	3 in 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter
➤ Drumbeg	3 in the 4 <sup>th</sup> quarter	
➤ Shaw's Bridge	8 in 4 <sup>th</sup> quarter	

Figure 6 outlines the frequency of use recorded from the User survey.

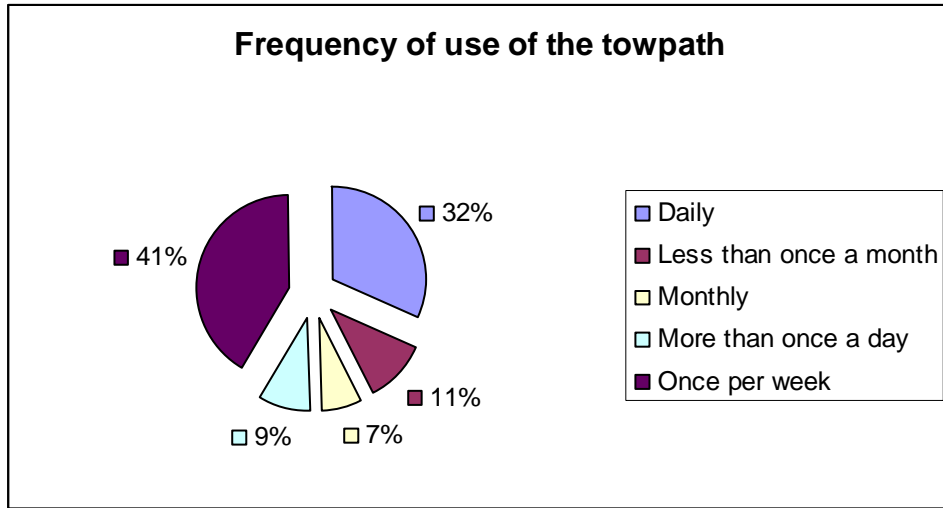


Figure 6 – frequency of use of towpath

41% of respondents use the towpath more than once per week.

The main purpose for visiting the Regional Park was to enjoy the natural environment (77%) as indicated in Figure 7.

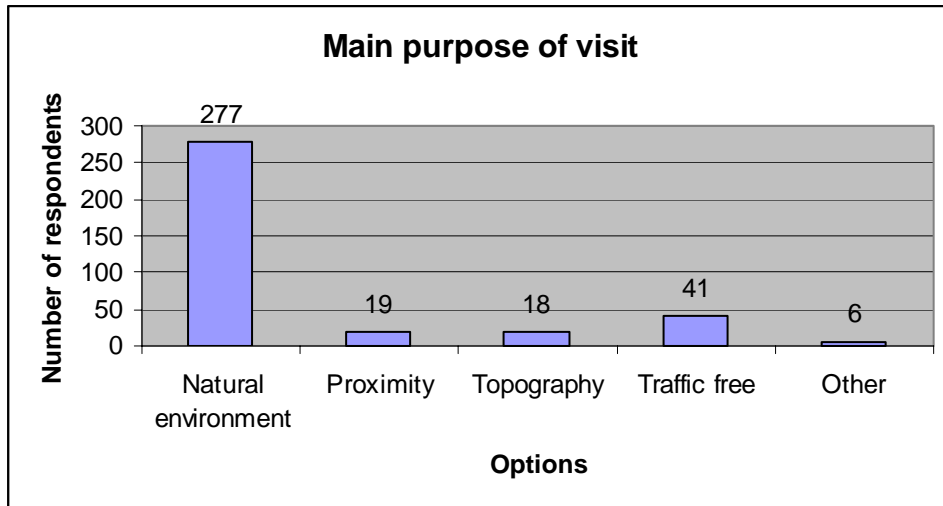
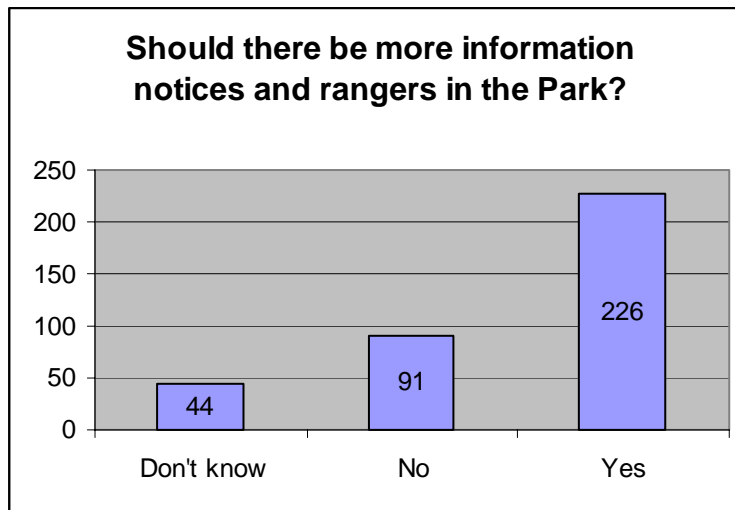


Figure 7 – Main purpose for visiting

## 5.0. OPINION POLL

During the 2006 user survey, visitors were asked a series of questions to determine their level of satisfaction with the facilities within the Regional Park. This section reviews the findings of that poll.

Question 14 asked respondents 'should there be more information notices and rangers on the towpath? Figure 8 indicates that 63% supported this idea; with 12% stating that they 'did not know'. 25% of respondents did not support more information or rangers being present.

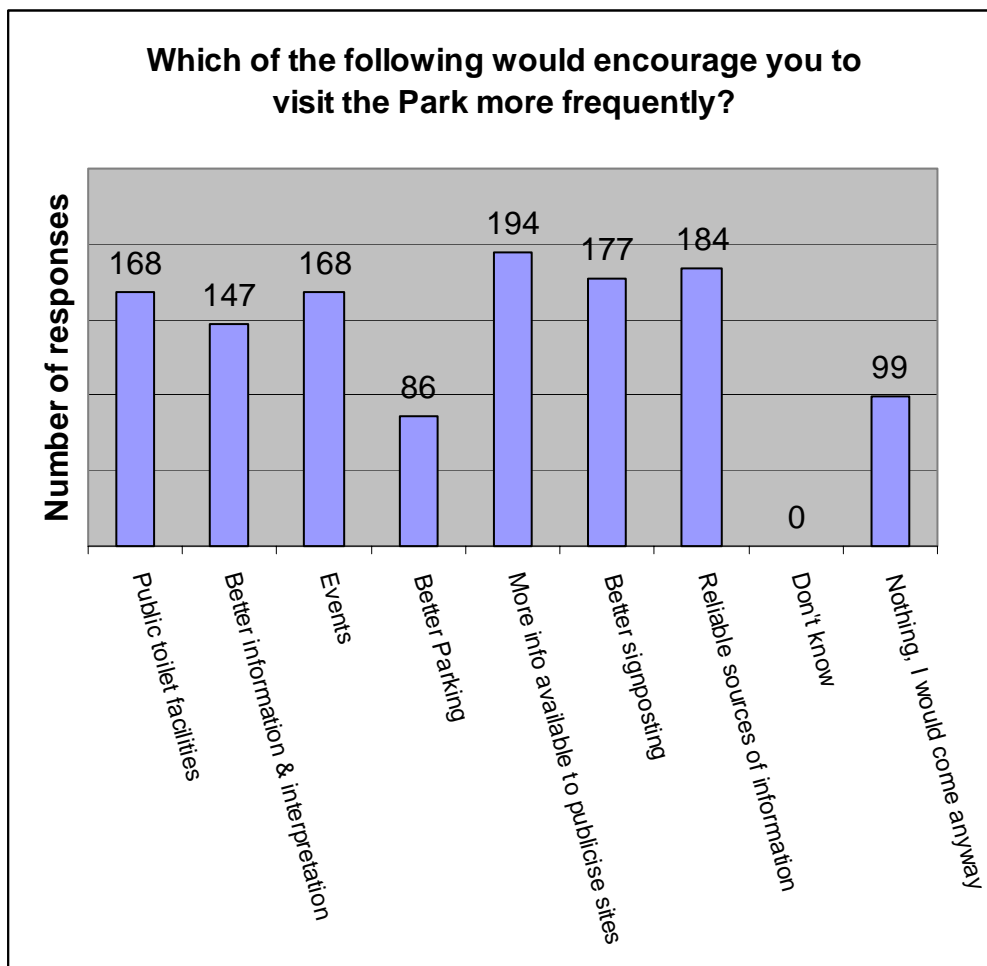


**Figure 8** – Level of support for more information & rangers in the Park

A series of options were provided which reflected the proposed projects being undertaken through the Landscape Partnership Scheme, which were proposed in Stage 1 application.

Respondents were asked if the suggested measures would influence the frequency of their visits to the park. There was a level of support for the following project goals, as indicated in Figure 9:

- More information available to publicise sites
- Reliable sources of information
- Toilet facilities
- Provision of events



**Figure 9 –**  
Facilities which users supported.

Respondents were asked if there were any particular aspects of the towpath which made things difficult for them, and which may affect their enjoyment of the Regional Park. From the 361 respondents surveyed, 74% stated that they had no difficulties with the towpath. Of the remaining 26% the range of responses varied considerably. The full list of responses is presented in Appendix E. The following are some repeated comments observed:

- Tight corners along the towpath,
- Narrow bridges cause some concern especially when cyclists are also using it,
- Some sections of the towpath are rough
- Safety relating to road crossings

The final question on the survey questionnaire aimed to identify what users would like to see money spent on should we secure additional funding. This question was not based on options but allowed individual to suggest projects which perhaps had not been proposed in the Stage1 application. For this reason, a wide range of suggestions were provided. The following list indicates items which received the most support:

- Guided walks
- More information on public transport
- Education on a range of topics including wildlife
- Hides for bird watching
- Identification boards of what is found in the area (e.g. birds)
- Improving 'rough areas' of the park
- Provision of a cafe
- Cleaning of the River Lagan
- Archaeological focussed walks
- Provision of toilet facilities

The full list of suggestions made by respondents is presented in Appendix F.

## **6.0. BARRIERS**

A key aim of the Landscape Partnership Scheme is to encourage more people to utilise the park and to create a sense of ownership within the community surrounding the park. In order to achieve this it is necessary to remove any perceived barriers that have been identified.

The barriers identified are presented under the headings suggested in the Heritage Lottery Fund Guidance notes – ‘Thinking about access’ as noted in Section 6.1.

### **6.1 Barrier Themes**

#### **➤ Organisational**

The image an organisation presents, opening hours, visitor facilities and format of facilities can all have impacts on how much people can enjoy heritage facilities.

#### **➤ Physical**

These may prevent or limit access to a range of people with limited mobility, people with children and older people.

#### **➤ Sensory**

These barriers may limit or prevent access for users who have hearing or visual impairments.

#### **➤ Intellectual**

Intellectual barriers may be experienced by those with learning difficulties, those with limited background knowledge or understanding of how the park operates.

#### **➤ Social & cultural**

Existing facilities within the park may prevent or limit access to people from a range of social or cultural backgrounds.

Sections 6.2 – 6.8 categorize the barriers specific to the Regional Park which has been identified.

### **6.2 Organisational**

The main potential organisational barriers identified were:

- Lack of involvement from local communities and users within the park,
- Lack of information provided on the Regional Park to the users
- Lack of identity of a ‘Regional Park’.
- Lack of toilet facilities

### **6.3 Physical**

- There is a lack of signage outside the park area to provide directions to the Park for the general public.
- There are limited maps providing details on the facilities available within the Park.
- Some areas of the towpath are not conducive to wheel chair access
- Access to the park via public transport is not easily recognisable or clearly marked.

### **6.4 Sensory**

- Some areas of the towpath could present barriers for people with visual impairments due to uneven surfaces e.g. tree roots etc.
- Park information is not provided in a format that could overcome sensory barriers (e.g. large font, Braille)
- No audio information is provided on the Parks' natural or built facilities or history.

### **6.5 Intellectual**

- There is limited interpretation facilities throughout the park, which advise people on the services available within the Park
- There is a gap in the provision of free information on the parks built heritage history.

### **6.6 Social and Cultural**

- People do not see all areas of the Park as safe
- Information is not provided in any language other than English.

### **6.7 Financial**

All guided walks, events and leaflets provided by Lagan Valley Regional Park are done so free of charge. In addition, LVRP does not have any entrance fees to the Regional Park. No financial barriers were identified.

### **6.8 Issues of Conflict**

The 2006 user survey aimed to identify potential user conflicts experienced by current users of the Regional Park. As noted in Section 4.1 a total of 361 surveys were undertaken. The majority (76%) of users had not experienced any trouble with other users.

88 (24%) respondents considered that they experienced conflict issues with other users of the Regional Park. The majority of comments related to dog faeces on the towpath, with some respondents noting the speed of cyclists caused them concern.

## **7.0. WHO SHOULD BE OUR TARGET AUDIENCE?**

The LVRP Landscape Partnership Scheme management group have identified the following groups as requiring specific additional programmes and projects which aims to increase their participation in activities within the Regional Park.

- Local residents
- Businesses
- Disabled users
- Young people
- Community Groups
- Recreational users
- Ethnic minority groups

### **7.1 Local residents**

Comments received during the user survey noted that a high percentage of users lived within close proximity to the Regional Park and used it 'at least once per week' (41%). When local people were asked what would encourage them to use the park more frequently the highest ranking answers were more information to publicised sites (54%), reliable information (51%), better signposting (49%), events (47%) and toilet facilities (47%).

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme will develop opportunities for local residents to enjoy the natural and cultural aspects the Park has to offer through the following:

- Provision of information on facilities throughout the Park - leaflets
- Adequate signposting
- Outreach programme to involve the wider and local community

### **7.2 Businesses**

There are 2 considerations for the Regional Park when attempting to forge links with businesses. The first are those businesses that currently use the park as a place of business e.g. Belfast Activity Centre, Countryside Access and Activities Network. It is important to increase contact with these organisations so that both the LVRP and their business activities can be marketed in a collaborative manner. This may involve joint ventures, co-organised events or guided walks, and advertising through each others publications.

The second aspect of business is alerting businesses throughout Northern Ireland of the facilities available within the Regional Park. This includes the recreational facilities, services

provided by Belfast Activity Centre. In addition it may serve as a source of funding for future ventures within the Park.

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme will develop opportunities for businesses to enjoy the natural and cultural aspects the Park has to offer. This will be achieved through:

- Establishing collaborative links with businesses within the Regional Park (e.g. Belfast Activity Centre)
- Preparation of leaflets to advise the public on the range of facilities provided within the Regional Park and contact details for individual organisations (this may be better achieved through website development).

### **7.3 Disabled users**

Disabled people are unrepresented in terms of recreational use within the Lagan Valley Regional Park. One of the aims of the LPS is to provide opportunities for disabled people to have access to, gain an understanding of and enjoy the regional park.

Many improvements have been made to entrance ways and paths throughout the Regional Park. Much of this has been undertaken by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) over recent years. In addition, much of the towpath is now part of the National Cycle network and this has also created improvements to the surfaces of paths and entrance features.

Owing to the topography of the path some of the paths that link onto the towpath are steep, such as some in Belvoir Forest Park.

Within the recreational strategy prepared for the Regional Park in 2005, it was noted that there were insufficient facilities for people with other forms of disability. Examples included the lack of information panels and leaflets being available in large font for those with visual impairment.

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme will develop opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy the natural and cultural aspects the Park has to offer. This will include:

- Developing outreach programmes
- Provision of fishing platforms which are accessible by wheelchair users
- Provision of information through leaflets and website that satisfies DDA requirements
- Liaising with organisations which represent disabled groups, to ensure proposed measures to encourage involvement are sufficient.

## **7.4 Young people**

During the 2006 user surveys, the questionnaire classified the users into age brackets. The lowest representation was that of the 5-16 year old, as indicated in Figure 2. This is consistent with the findings of both the 2001 and 1998 user surveys.

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme will develop opportunities for Young people to enjoy the natural and cultural aspects the Park has to offer. These will include:

- Working with schools to develop projects that are specifically designed for young people,
- Engaging with youth clubs,
- Providing events which encourage involvement from young people,
- Developing an outreach programme.

## **7.5 Community Groups**

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme will develop opportunities for community groups to enjoy the natural and cultural aspects the Park has to offer:

Identification of

## **7.6 Recreational users**

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme will develop opportunities for recreational users to enjoy the natural and cultural aspects the Park has to offer:

- Establishing links with health focussed groups (e.g. Health Boards)
- Provision of events which facilitate all fitness levels
- Continued supply of information leaflets to visitor centres, tourist information centres to alert recreational users of the facilities currently in the Regional Park,

## **7.7 Ethnic minority groups**

No detailed information is available on current numbers of ethnic minorities that come to avail of the facilities offered by the Regional Park. However, a review of websites such as Youth action Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities noted the consistent

observations that there are few opportunities for active involvement of members of ethnic minority groups

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Landscape Partnership Scheme will develop opportunities for ethnic minority users to enjoy the natural and cultural aspects the Park has to offer by:

- Ensuring that staff are trained in engaging with people from ethnic minorities,
- Development of outreach programmes, which does not exclude ethnic minority groups
- Investigate the potential for supplying information (leaflets & website) in languages other than English.

## **8.0 ACCESS & AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES**

A management plan has been prepared by Lagan Valley Regional Park which commences in 2007 for 5 years. The management plan (2007 – 2011) establishes a clear set of priorities, which have been identified to preside over the work undertaken within the park for the forthcoming 5 years. A copy of the Management plan is presented in Appendix G of the main LPS application.

8 key areas of work have been identified which will direct the operations of the regional park, these are:

### **8.1 Governance Programme**

Development management and administrative structures that are necessary to take the Regional Park into its newfound status as a company limited by guarantee. Integrate LPS into such structures and develop working partnerships throughout; both LVRP and LPS.

### **8.2 Planning Programme**

Develop plans for future conservation management; for future built development and further development of recreation within the Regional Park.

### **8.3 Development Programme**

Delivery of access improvements across a broad spectrum of activities and the completion of built developments.

### **8.4 Conservation Management**

Conservation of existing habitats and species and to identify throughout surveys those species that can be targeted for protection and habitat creation. To improve biodiversity and control invasive species within the Regional Park.

### **8.5 Monitoring and Research Programme**

Both ongoing monitoring of users and activities as well as periodic user survey. Baseline survey of habitats, flora and fauna, data to be used in developing conservation management programmes and plans. Then continual monitoring for reassessment of effectiveness of management and conservation programmes.

### **8.6 Promotion and Marketing Programme**

To promote the regional park and the activities open to the public by a number of promotional events. In addition the park will be promoted through literature and the development of the website.

### **8.7 Information and Education Programme**

To provide information and education on a range of subjects about the local flora, fauna and history through the three main areas of interpretation; guided walks and events delivery and direct public contact.

### **8.8 Community Development Programme**

To involve the local community on a range of issues, including feedback and opinions on planned projects, supporting interest groups within the Regional Park and facilitating community involvement through volunteering.

From these 8 management plans, a series of operational actions have been identified from which the aims and objectives of the Access & Audience development plan will be delivered. These are presented in Section 9.

## 9.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES

The following table outlines the operational actions which will be employed by the Regional Park to implement the policies identified within this report. These operational actions are specific to the Landscape Partnership Scheme. Lagan Valley Regional Park has prepared a management plan for 2007 – 2011, which is presented in Appendix G.

Programme	Operational Action	Performance indicators/ target dates.	Key organisations	Outcomes and impacts
<b>1.Governance</b>	<b>a) Lagan Valley Regional Park Partnership Trust</b>			
	1.7. Establish new staffing structure and recruit new staff.	Director and LVRP structure in place by April 2007 LPS project associated staff following stage 2 agreement	LVRP and LPS	The Director will enable strategic management of the new Lagan Valley Regional Park Partnership Trust, whilst officers will facilitate the delivery of the projects within the Landscape Partnership Scheme.
<b>1.Governance</b>	<b>c) Liaison and working partnerships</b>			
	2.2. Using the results of the bird survey develop plans for future habitat work and conservation programs.	Plans produced as part of Bird Survey by end of 2006	LVRP, LPS, RSPB	Plans in place to develop avian biodiversity, conserve rarer species, and encourage back displaced species.
	2.3. Using the grassland survey a number of key sites will be selected and habitat statements developed for their future management.	Habitat statements produced as part of Grassland Survey by end of 2006	LVRP, LPS, Consultant	Plans in place to manage grasslands for biodiversity and conservation.
	2.4. Identify sites for wetland enhancement and/or additional wetland management and investigate potential public access.	Sites identified by end 2006 Plans developed for their management by late 2007	LVRP, LPS, Rivers Agency, BCC, LCC	Sites identified and plans for wetland management.

	2.6. Develop an initiative to control invasive species within the Lagan Valley.	Invasives initiative to be developed by mid 2008  Targets to be set in invasives initiative for control.	LVRP to develop initiative. All partners to implement	Long term sustainable control of key invasives.
<b>2.Planning</b>	<b>b) Recreational planning and community planning</b>			
	2.7. Identify and promote potential angling areas with consideration for access provision.	sites identified by 2007	LVRP, LPS, DCAL	Improved facilities and access for all and targeting social need.
	2.10. Identify sites and projects for activities that will facilitate community and volunteer involvement.	Identify sites with associated projects by end of 2006	LPS, LVRP, Community and Volunteer groups	Plan to encourage participation, understanding, and ownership of the park's natural and built heritage.
	2.11. Design new and additional signage and identify appropriate sites.	Locations and topics identified annually in 2006, 2007 and 2008	LPS, LVRP, All partners	Plan to enhance visitor experience, increase understanding of the natural and built heritage and to facilitate more visitors and recreational activities.
	2.12. Similarly for display panels and interactive computer systems, layout of interior of cottage site, feasibility study. Plans will be developed through liaison with partners and users	Preferred interpretation and topics identified by 2006	LPS, LVRP, All partners	Plan to enhance visitor experience, increase understanding of the natural and built heritage and to facilitate more visitors and recreational activities.
<b>2.Planning</b>	<b>c) Built planning</b>			
	2.14. Riverside enhancement projects at Millbrook, Hugesnot and Hilden.	Consultation and planning completed by the end of 2006	LCC, LPS, LVRP and all partners	Plans for development in these areas will integrate local needs, conservation and users.

<b>3. Development</b>	<b>a) Access and recreation</b>					
<i>New Trails and Paths</i>	3.1. To identify potential sites for ecotrails throughout the park.	Sites identified by end 2008	LPS, LVRP, CAAN	Providing facilities for educational purposes within the park.		
	3.4. Investigate the scope for sensory walks in the Regional Park.	Outcome completed by end 2012	LPS, LVRP, All partners	Walks in place that will increase visitor experience and interpretation for all users. To improve access to existing and new activities for people with a range of disabilities.		
<b>3. Development</b>	<b>b) Built heritage and development</b>					
	3.19. Restoration of the Lock Keepers Cottage and lock and associated development.	Plans submitted by 2006 Work to start by 2007 All works completed by 2009	CBC, DCAL, LPS	Provide a centre for interpretation, information, toilet facilities, and facilities for Regional park bodies and groups.		
<b>4. Conservation management</b>	<b>d) Habitat creation and aesthetic enhancement</b>					
	4.18. Implement any recommendations from 2.4 (Wetlands)	Wetlands to be created by 2010	LPS, LVRP, UWT, BCC, Rivers Agency	To develop the wetland potential of the Lagan Valley.		
<b>5. Monitoring and research</b>	<b>b) Wildlife</b>					
	5.7. Base line survey of key mammals within the Regional Park.	To be completed by 2006	LPS, LVRP	Provide baseline data on species presence and abundance that can be used to plan future management.		
	5.8. Bird surveys to be carried out throughout the entire park.	To be completed by 2006	LPS, LVRP	Identify sites for giant bird tables and other conservation management programs and habitat work.		

	5.9.Grassland survey to be carried out throughout the park, initially a desktop study will select suitable sites to be included in the survey. The survey will also provide habitat statements for managing sites.	Site selection and survey to be completed by end 2006	LPS, LVRP, Contractor	Provide data on existing grassland species abundance and diversity, whilst providing a baseline to measure any future management of sites. Manage sites to develop biodiversity and conservation of any rare species.
<b>5.Monitoring and research</b>	<b>c) Consultation via forum</b>			
	5.11. Establish a red squirrel group	Group to be set up by start 2006	LPS, All partners	Conservation of red squirrels and control of grey squirrels whilst developing community involvement.
<b>6.Promotion and Marketing</b>	<b>b) Website development</b>			
	6.2. Improve website, links, presentation, information, access, make more visible on search engines.	Improvements by end 2008	LVRP, LPS	Raise the public profile of the Regional Park and create a better-informed audience.
	6.3. Put links maps onto website with all facilities that can be availed of in Lagan Valley Regional Park.	Improvements by end 2010	LVRP, LPS	Raise the public profile of the Regional Park and create a better-informed audience.
<b>7.Information and Education</b>	<b>a) Interpretation</b>			
	7.2. Develop new promotional material (e.g. Guide book) in accordance with signage and interpretation strategy.	New promotional material by 2010	LVRP, LPS, Councils	Continued development of interpretation within the Regional Park.
	7.3. Signage Sign sites, number and content to be agreed and signs erected.	In place by end of 2007 Sites agreed by mid 2007 Signs erected by 2010	LVRP, LPS, Councils	Continued development of interpretation within the Regional Park.

	7.4. Name signs A number of signs to be planned and sited identifying bridge names, lock numbers and any other features within the park.	By 2009	LVRP, LPS, Councils	Continued development of interpretation within the Regional Park.
	<b>7.5. Park identification signs</b> Investigate provision of brown tourist signs to the park.	By 2010	LVRP, LPS, Councils, Road service	Raise awareness of the Regional Park.
	7.6. Lock Keepers Cottage. There are a number of interpretive projects specifically for the lock keepers cottage development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretive display for the lockkeepers cottage</li> <li>• Develop a range of interpretive panels for use inside the interpretation centre together with interactive computer system.</li> <li>• Develop a library about historical landscape and heritage of LVRP – to be kept on appropriate media for school/visitor/group use.</li> </ul>	By 2007 By 2008 Completed by 2011	LVRP, LPS, CBC, DCAL	Improve and raise the visibility of facilities for visitors and provide information for the public on natural and built heritage.
<b>7.Information and Education</b>	<b>c) Public contact</b>			
	7.10. Promote park at events shows etc. Provision to take interpretation to country shows and fairs, mobile interpretation and promotional panels, leaflets and promotional gifts, badges, pens, pencils etc.	Attend at least one event each year	LVRP, LPS	To improve information and interpretation services whilst providing promotion and education about the Park to a wider audience.
	7.11. Engagement with the public via the Ranger Service.	Daily patrols	LVRP	Raise the public awareness of the Regional Park

<b>8. Community Development</b>	<b>a) Liaison and consultation</b>				
	8.1. Development of a volunteer ranger service and support to groups for educational walks, events and talks.	Plans developed by end 2006 Volunteer recruitment to be ongoing over next five years	LPS, LVRP		Promotion of park through enhanced ranger service. Encourage participation, ownership and interest in local natural and built heritage.
	8.2. Consultation with community groups and volunteers to identify skills base and identify training needs. For volunteer and community groups.	Training needs identified by end 2006 Training to be undertaken over next five years	LVRP, LPS		Identify training needs for developing local community and volunteer sector projects in the Park.
	8.3. Consultation with local community groups and public regarding urban improvement sites at Hilden, Millbrook and Huguenot.	Consultation during 2006	LCC, LPS		Greater community involvement and ownership.
	8.4. Consultation with local community groups and public regarding the development of the Lock keepers cottage site.	Consultation during 2006	LCC, LPS		Greater community involvement and ownership.
<b>8. Community Development</b>	<b>b) Interest groups</b>				
	8.5. Ensure opportunities for community groups to be represented on any forums.	Ensure place on forums for community representation	All partners		To encourage participation, understanding and ownership of the regional park, and its natural and built heritage.
<b>8. Community Development</b>	<b>c) Volunteering</b>				

	<p>8.7. Identify a series of projects and tasks that can be used to increase participation of the community in the development and management of the regional parks, both in terms of conservation, local history and recreation.</p>	<p>Projects to be identified by end of 2006</p>	<p>VSL, LVRP, LPS</p>	<p>To encourage participation, understanding and ownership of the site and involvement by the local people.</p>
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