

A Park that offers a thriving, diverse and valued riverside heritage that welcomes exploration, learning and enjoyment whilst ensuring a sustainable environment for all.



At a glance our achievements

Towpath initiative - Winner of the tidy NI award

2012 User Survey Completed

Appointed 6 New Directors

Revised Laganscape timeframe

Hits on the website exceeded 23,000

4 butterfly surveys completed throughout year

Three red squirrel transects continued

4 Daubentons bat surveys completed

Planted 400 mixed native trees patching gaps in hedgerows

Over 100 m of hedge laid in Lagan Lands East

Events program with 28 events engaging with over 400 people

Total of 613 volunteer days recorded

Three volunteer rangers contributing 134 days

305 Conservation Volunteer days

12 Volunteer Heritage Guides Opening the Cottage for 174 days

Survey Volunteers contributed 43 days

Responded to 14 planning applications

Over 400 bags of litter collected

90 incidents antisocial activities

4 information stands at fairs and shows

Over 42 km of trails and Park paths patrolled weekly

Dealt with over 1500 enquires from members of the public

Reported back 46 incidents back to partner organisations

Towpath initiative

Chair's Report

Firstly, I would like to thank the Park Manager, Dr Andy Bridge, for his excellent management of the park during another year, on his tight budget.

Special thanks to Anne Cleland for her admin support, and help with many events.

Also Daniel Clarke, our Senior Ranger, especially for his many much enjoyed discovery walks, Nicola Smyth, our Assistant Ranger, and last but not least, Peter Harper, Laganscape Project Manager.

I would like to congratulate again the volunteers of LVRP, who were awarded the prestigious Queens Award for Volunteering.

Towpath user numbers indicate that the LVR Park remains one of the most popular, free visitor attractions in Northern Ireland. Our events programme is as popular as ever and the Park team

has delivered a range of interesting and creative events, many of which I have attended myself and thoroughly enjoyed. I very much enjoyed completing the towpath challenge, walk from Stranmillis to Lisburn. The beautiful summer day showed the Regional Park off in all its stunning glory.



The Laganscape team in partnership with the core team have continued to roll out the various projects across the Park as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of this board, who give up their time to attend our meetings.

Manager's Report



As we come to the end of the first year our next three year funding cycle we can step back and see how much has been achieved throughout the year. The changes in staff that the Laganscape project has undergone has meant that the Regional Park's team has had to step up to

the mark and keep much of this work going. It is to the credit of all of our team that we have been able to keep many initiatives started by Laganscape not only ticking over but also thriving.

Anne Cleland deserves special recognition as she stepped in and covered a large part of the volunteer management for what was expected to be the short term. As we realised that Jo and David would not be replaced we had to come up with a way of integrating the projects that we could manage into the core teams duties. Special tribute must be made to our team of dedicated staff who despite being so under resourced have been able to support all of the volunteer programs, to provide excellent service and maintain this valuable interface with Park users.

A massive thank you goes out to all our volun-

teers, their level of support and dedication has been outstanding. There have been many occasions when we have been planning and organising an event when it has dawned on me that this would not be possible given our current resources if it weren't for the help and dedication of our volunteers especially our Volunteer Rangers; Genevieve, Michael, Frank and his son Eamon.

As usual all of our team have supported and helped to develop one of the most exciting events programmes to date and we continue to provide a wide range of services working with interest groups, schools and Scouts to name but a few.

Our Ranger Service continues to provide a valuable public service, dealing with enquiries about the region, providing assistance with a wide range of incidents from cows escaping along the towpath to offering first aid support at incidents in the park.

I would like to acknowledge our core funders, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Belfast City Council, Lisburn City Council, Castlereagh Borough Council and Department of Culture Arts and Leisure. I would also like to thank our numerous partners who support the Park in so many other ways. The success of the Park depends on this support and partnership.

Vision and Key Aims

Lagan Valley Regional Park

The River Lagan and its surrounding valley landscapes are renowned for their natural beauty. At the heart of the Lagan Valley are the River Lagan and canal systems that form the main access and wildlife corridor bridging two of Northern Ireland's population centres. This unique area typified by its rolling landscapes, ornamental parklands and farmland was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty under the first round of designations in 1965. Shortly thereafter, due largely to concerns of development pressure, the Lagan Valley Regional Park was established as one of three unique semi-urban designations in the UK at that time. The Lagan Valley Regional Park covers an area of 4,200 acres and extends 11 miles along both sides of the River Lagan between Stranmillis, Belfast and Union Locks, Lisburn. The designated area is rich in natural features and biodiversity as well as having a range of locally and nationally important historical sites. Most protected of these, the Giant's Ring, is an archaeological site of outstanding importance in Northern Ireland and in the UK as a whole. This site is a state care protected monument one of the highest levels of protection afforded for sites of archaeological importance. The area also boasts a local nature reserve at Lagan Meadows and 23 sites of local nature conservation

Guiding Principles

For the Regional Park to realise its strategic vision it has developed four guiding principles:

1. Partnership and inclusivity
2. Conservation and protection
3. Value for money and transparency
4. Sustainability

Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

An AONB is a precious landscape where the distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it (NAAONB, 2003). The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order 1985 sets out the main purposes of an AONB:

To conserve or enhance the natural beauty or amenities of the area.

To conserve wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within the area

To promote enjoyment by the public

To provide or maintain public access to the area

Our Mission Statement

We will protect and conserve the unique landscape character of Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Lagan Valley AONB, enhance its biodiversity, cultural heritage and promote its benefit to visitors and the community.

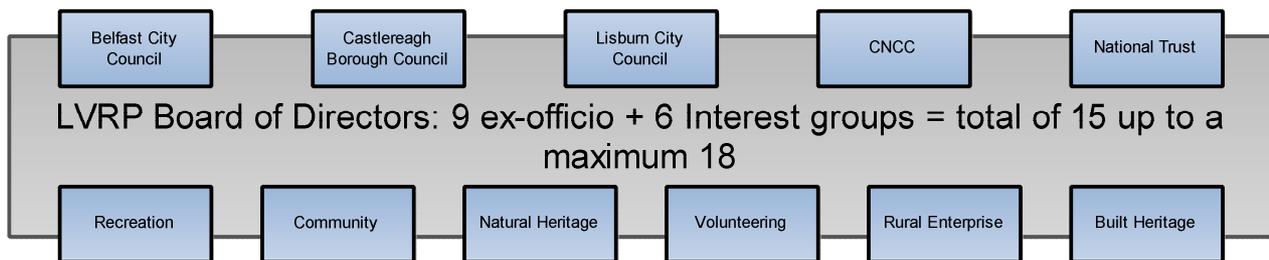


At our AGM in September several new directors were appointed. As the interest in becoming a director was so high, the board passed a special resolution so that we could appoint all of those who applied. This means that we now have 9 public directors and 9 ex-officio directors (ex-officio directors are those directors nominated from the three councils, the CNCC and the National Trust).

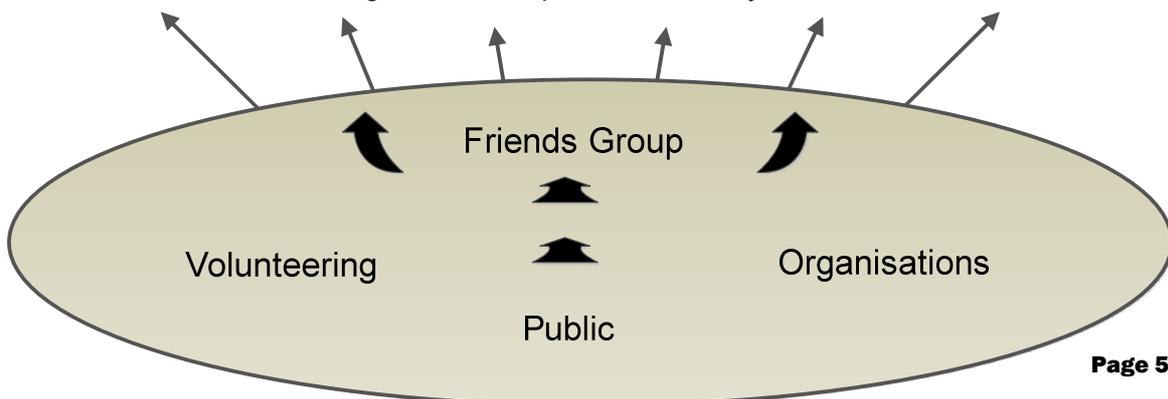
Governance

Our Board of Directors met on six occasions and the Lagscape Sub-committee met on three occasions throughout the financial year. Our Management Committee met on 9 occasions throughout the year.

Director	Representing	Board meetings attended						
		Jun	Sep	AGM	Dec	Mar	EGM	
Alderman Sara Duncan (Chair)	Castlereagh Borough Council	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Clr Ane-Marie Beattie	Castlereagh Borough Council							0
Alderman Tom Ekin	Belfast City Council							0
Alderman Ruth Patterson	Belfast City Council							0
Clr Brian Dornan	Lisburn City Council				✓	✓	✓	3
Clr Jenny Palmer	Lisburn City Council		✓	✓				2
Mr Dermot Hughes	CNCC							0
Mr Jim Jackson	CNCC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Mr Mike Dobson	National Trust							0
Craig Somerville	National Trust				✓	✓	✓	3
Rosaleen Hughes	Public - Community			✓				1
Dr Fred Hamond	Public - Built Heritage	✓	✓	✓	✓			4
Mrs Elvira Tulip	Public - Community	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Jackson Tinto	Public—Volunteering/Natural Heritage				✓	✓	✓	3
David Scott	Public—Natural Heritage				✓	✓		2
Frank Jordan	Public—Volunteering				✓	✓	✓	3
Mags McGarvey	Public—Natural Heritage				✓			1
Michael McSorley	Public—Volunteering/Community				✓	✓		2
Annette O'Donnell	Public—Rural Enterprise and Business							0



Skill and experience categories that support the Regional Parks pursuit of its objectives



Our Partnerships

Good partnerships are essential to the governance and management of the Regional Park. Working with our partners we have realized all of the goals laid out in the management plan for this year and given the spectrum of varying aims and visions of our partners it is thanks to the coordinated effort of our partners that we have achieved so much. Core funding for the Lagan Valley Regional Park comes from four funding partners:

NIEA

Belfast City Council

Castlereagh Borough Council

Lisburn City Council

DCAL

In addition to the funding partners there are a number of other bodies and organisations with which the Lagan Valley Regional Park works. The Rivers' Agency is responsible for work along the river system and they provide services such as grass cutting along the towpath in close association with DCAL. Forest Service manages Belvoir Park Forest, and the National Trust manages the Minnowburn and Terrace Hill sites as well as

Partner Organisations

As well as funding we also work in partnership with a range of organisations:

Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)

Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL)

The National Trust

Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside (CNCC)

Belfast City Council

Castlereagh Borough Council

Lisburn City Council

Forest Service

Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT)

Rivers' Agency

The Lagan Canal Trust

Grass Roots Conservation Group

Volunteer Service Lisburn (VSL)

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Roads Service





Laganscape meets new challenges

The five year Laganscape project has seen many changes this year. David and Jo who were instrumental in the development and delivery of so many of the projects have moved on to other positions. Cathy the project manager also moved on and was replaced by Peter Harper. This left the project shorthanded and at risk of stalling completely especially during the recruitment of Peter.

Commitment to Legacy

Given the loss of three key staff from the Laganscape project and the interim period in replacing Peter, the project was at risk of stalling. Thanks to the commitment of the core team during this time the vital volunteering element of the project was picked up and maintained. Managing the volunteers was temporarily taken on by Anne our admin officer, but as we saw that this was a longer term commitment the volunteer element has been split amongst the core team and integrated into the core operations.

Revised Time frame

Much work has gone into reviewing and finalising the final year of the Laganscape project. Due to setbacks over staff replacements and negotiations over partner agreements the project was extended for several months to December 2013. This means that there will be enough time to complete the three outstanding large projects and to tidy up several small projects.

Projects underway

Laganscape will be delivering a number of projects until its revised end date. The signage in the park is to be audited and the signage strategy reviewed with the logo and style guide freshened up. Priority installation projects will be identified and key signage will be erected in the Park.

The final stage of the Lisburn project and Hugesnot and Millbrook will be the refurbishment of the footbridge completing a whole suite of urban improvements in this area.

Several wetland and grassland sites have been considered and Belfast Council is progressing the improvements in these areas that will complete the partnership support to Laganscape as a whole.



Heritage guides

We would like to send a big thank you to all our heritage guides who have worked relentlessly and enthusiastically to make their expert knowledge of the Lock Keeper's Cottage and its associated history available to visitors to the cottage.

Castlereagh Borough Council Supporting Legacy

This year Castlereagh Borough Council has supported the work we do in opening the cottage to the public and providing a living history of life in the heyday of the Lagan Navigation and has provided us with a small grant. This will enable one of our staff to devote two days per week to managing the Heritage Guides, drawing up rotas and helping with the maintenance of the cottage. This also means that one of the partners of the Liganscape project is committed to the legacy of maintaining the development of this part of the project.

Study Trip to Ulster American Folk Park

This year our Heritage Guides went on a trip to the Ulster American Folk Park. This trip was planned partly in recognition for all the dedicated hard work and commitment that the volunteers have shown, but also as a means of sharing skills and best practice with the guides there. The Heritage Guides found the trip thoroughly enjoyable and interesting and complimentary to their work.

Whilst we currently have 21 heritage guides on our list, in practice there is a dedicated team of around 12 who are regulars and keep the cottage open for the public. We would like to expand this so that we can open the cottage at weekends and have people available to cover when guides are off.

'We didn't know there was so much history about the Park. It was fascinating'

Visitor to Lock Keeper's Cottage



A living history of the Lagan Navigation

The cottage has been open throughout the year most weekdays from 10am to 3pm. The actual number of days is 174 with a total of 869 hours devoted to showing visitors round the cottage.

The cottage received a total of 6889 visitors throughout the year. This included visitors from far and wide, including tourists from the cruise ships arriving in Belfast, European visitors and visitors from as far afield as Nepal, South Africa and Vancouver.

'the cottage is a piece of living history, it's a real pleasure to tell people about the heyday of the Lagan canal. You never know who's going to call in next'

Volunteer Heritage Guide

Investing In Volunteers

The Laganscape's volunteering program is of such a high standard that we now hold the prestigious Investing In Volunteers award which runs to 2015.



Welcome to Lagan Valley Regional Park



Education Resource Pack

Get this trail **guidance notes**
instructions, directions, map etc.

The Education Resource Pack is a fantastic resource for teachers and leaders. Packed with new and innovative ways to teach the 'World Around Us'

Covering :

Language and Literacy

Mathematics and Numeracy

The Arts

The World Around Us

Personal Development and Mutual Understanding



Giant's Ring



Minibeasts



Plants, animals & habitats



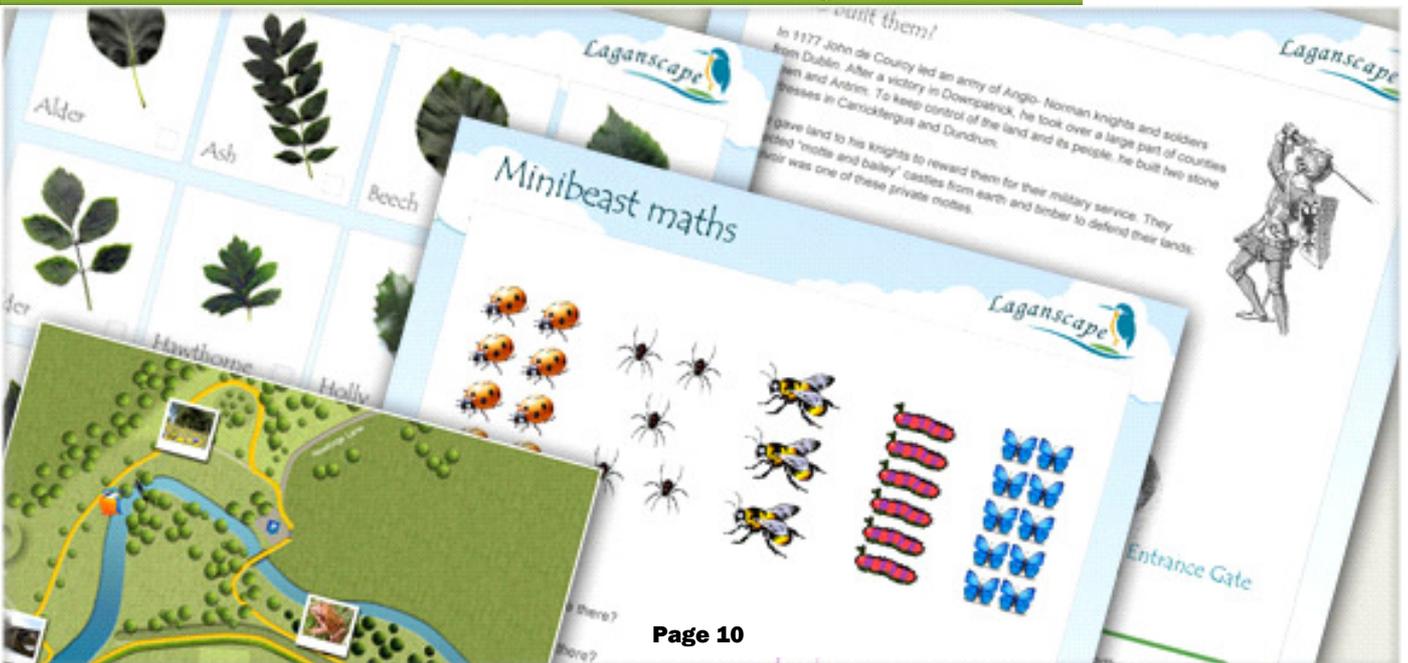
Watch Video



Download your ID charts
HERE...



www.laganvalleylearning.co.uk





OUR VISION :

A Park that offers a thriving, diverse and valued riverside heritage that welcomes exploration, learning and enjoyment whilst ensuring a sustainable environment for all.





Biodiversity

Badger patrol

The Ranger Service continues to make checks on badger setts and monitors other wildlife

Saturday Volunteer Group

Much of our monitoring and research on Biodiversity is carried out by our dedicated volunteers

A total of 866 volunteer days have been recorded for this financial year across several projects including

- Woodland management
- Bird box construction and erection
- Bat surveys
- Seed collection and sowing
- Hedge laying
- Control of invasive species
- Path work
- Wilderness day
- Red squirrel transects
- Butterfly transects
- Bulb planting
- Christmas wreathes
- Scrub clearance



Bats

This year 4 survey routes were covered by 14 of our volunteers in the all Ireland Daubenton Bat Survey.



Monitoring and Research

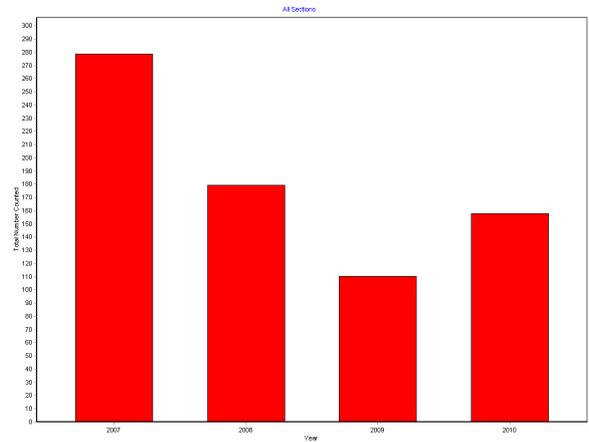
A case study – the Belvoir Transect

The Belvoir butterfly transect is the longest running transect in the Park and both staff and volunteers have been recording butterflies since 2007 and is being used as a standard for other transects. Transects take place from April to October. The Data recorded from surveys of 2007 - 2010 have been transferred onto the 'Transect Walker 2' software to assist in the data repository of Butterfly NI and the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme Headquarters in England. Comprising of five relatively equal sections, with habitats ranging from mature mixed woodland to watercourse herb scrub; it gives a very interesting set of results. The last two years data have yet to be analysed but 2012 recorded a marked decline in numbers with 2013's initial findings showing much higher numbers.

Findings

The overall numbers of the transect have a natural tendency to vary year by year. Local climatic factors, distribution of food plants and predation all play a part. The year on year graph above reflects this fluctuation and as more data become available we will build up an invaluable record of population changes. The species recorded are listed. Individual species fluctuate over the years that the survey has been running. Some species such as the speckled wood and the orange tip remain constant over the survey period, others such as the Small White and the Small Tortoise Shell show considerable variation from year to year. Another interesting finding from the data is how some such as the Meadow Brown show a preference for certain sections of the transect where the habitat suits them in this case open meadow and grassland.

Overall Number's year on year



Butterfly Transects

4 Transects

78 Hours

4 Volunteers



- Small White
- Large White
- Green Veined White
- Orange Tip
- Meadow Brown
- Speckled Wood
- Ringlet
- Small tortoiseshell
- Peacock
- Painted Lady
- Red Admiral
- Holly Blue
- Common Blue
- Gatekeeper
- Small copper



Towpath Initiative

A towpath initiative to reduce the potential for conflict between different user groups on the towpath was undertaken this year; its aim was to promote considerate use by all users.

Partner organisations for the event included the PSNI, Sustrans, local authorities, cycle groups, walking groups and Bikedock supported the event by printing a copy of the towpath code for distribution on the day and by offering to fit bells and provide free safety checks for bikes. The target audience were commuters, young and recreational users and family users. The event was covered by the Belfast Telegraph, Good Morning Ulster and UTV news.

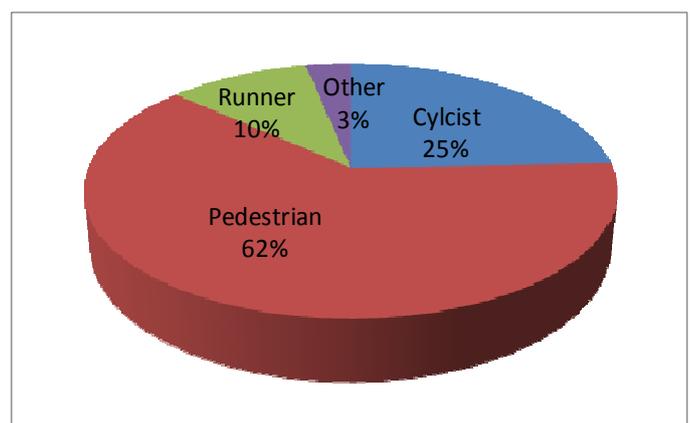
Sadly our office receives complaints particularly through the summer months from both pedestrians and cyclists about inconsiderate use by the other group. This is an issue that we share with towpaths and parks throughout the UK and Ireland. The message we would like to send out to all is to show consideration to all users. Next year should see the installation of signage on the towpath replacing the old signs with new ones setting out the towpath code.

Initiatives, Promotions

Promotional Events

We have been actively promoting the Regional Park throughout the year with information stands at shows and fairs such as the BCC, Spring Fair where our conservation volunteer group put on displays of how the work they have done on hedge laying can benefit Biodiversity. Also the Belfast Zoo's Native species Week and Queen's University Environmental Careers Fair, Stranmillis Fair, our various initiatives and awards.

Towpath users



Awards

This year the big river clean up event, **The Lagan Initiative** was entered into the Brighter Belfast Awards. The awards recognise and celebrate the hard work of community groups in the local environment. The gala evening was attended by Geneveive one of our volunteer rangers, Daniel, our Senior Ranger and Andy, the park Manager. As the runners up in the Nature Conservation category were being announced we expected our chances were over until they announced the winner. Then faces turned to shocked surprise as they announced Lagan Valley Regional Park as getting first prize!

This is a celebration of all the hard work of the various organisations who take part in the river clean up, from the litter collections by the ranger

service including our volunteer rangers to the big high profile event involving the scouts the rotary club and members of the public. The river based event has been coordinated by Mobile Team Adventure who put in a massive amount of effort and time supporting the scouts on the river and making it a great day for everyone.

The river and its surrounding AONB is a wonderful resource for everyone to enjoy. To keep it this way we all need to consider what we do with our litter and dispose of our waste responsibly.

Big river clean up

The annual river clean up has become a successful project involving many partners; this year's clean up took place in May and saw a rewarding day collecting over 40 bags of litter and an eclectic collection of bicycles, mattress's shopping trolley's, wheel's, toys, tables and chairs.





Ranger Service

- Over 400 bags of litter collected
- 90 incidents of antisocial activities
- 4 public information stands
- 42 km of paths and trails and patrolled weekly (That's over 2000km annually!)
- Reported to 69 incidents to partner organisations
- Key role in events program
- Maintaining survey work and transects for butterflies, badgers, otters and squirrels
- Delivering additional events for groups and organisations

Public Contact

Effectively whilst out patrolling in the Park the ranger is a mobile interpretation point for members of the community and visitors alike. The Ranger Service will continue to inform and educate visitors through direct public contact and through promotion at public events and country fairs.

The rangers have worked closely with authorities such as the Police and the Environment Agency on issues such as wildlife incidents and disturbances in the Park.

Public interface

Volunteer Rangers

The Ranger Service is able to facilitate 3 Volunteer Rangers who have supported projects throughout the Park whilst gaining valuable experience in conservation work. We would like to give special thanks to Genevieve, Michael and Frank as well as Eamon for all their hard work and dedication through the year.





The Park Office is prominently positioned on the towpath at the visitor centre with key attractions of the Lock Keeper's Cottage and the Cafe. The office is a primary interface for the public, in dealing with enquiries, provision of information and education.

This year the Park Office dealt with:

over 1500 general queries

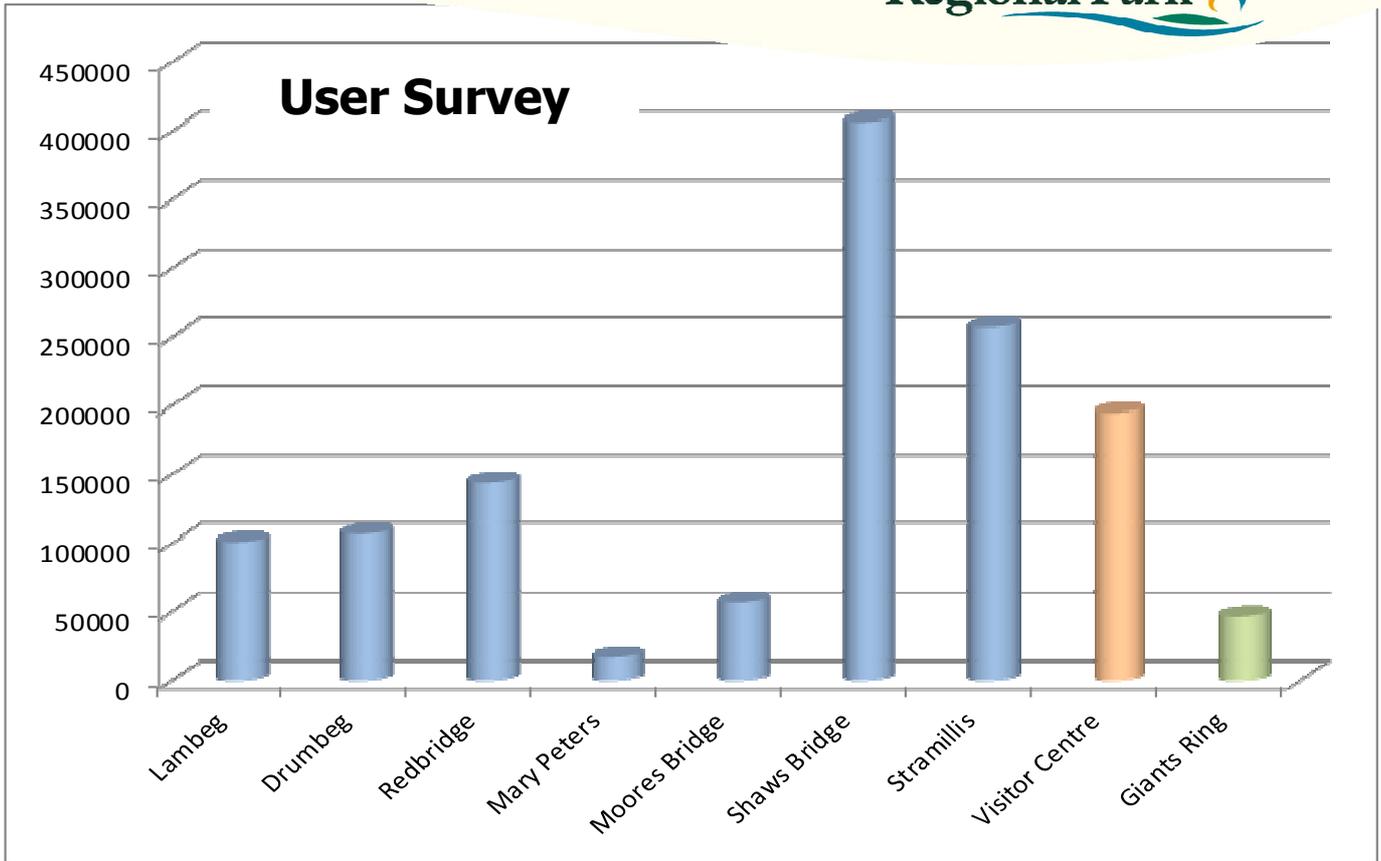
114 antisocial reports

These contacts may be in person, via email or by phone and account for around 30% of office time.

We also received enquires about volunteering, student projects and placements, planning, site security and even offered the PSNI assistance in a missing person search.

All of these require some form of follow up, whether it is site visits, investigation or contacting a relevant organisation. These range from reports and enquires about wildlife and heritage, directions, access issues and recreation to complaints about litter, dog fouling, toilets, maintenance, fallen trees and vandalism.

Whilst it means we are having a good level of public engagement it also means that time taken up dealing with these enquires cannot be spent on the development and implementation of the very projects that would go some way to alleviating the complaints.



User numbers

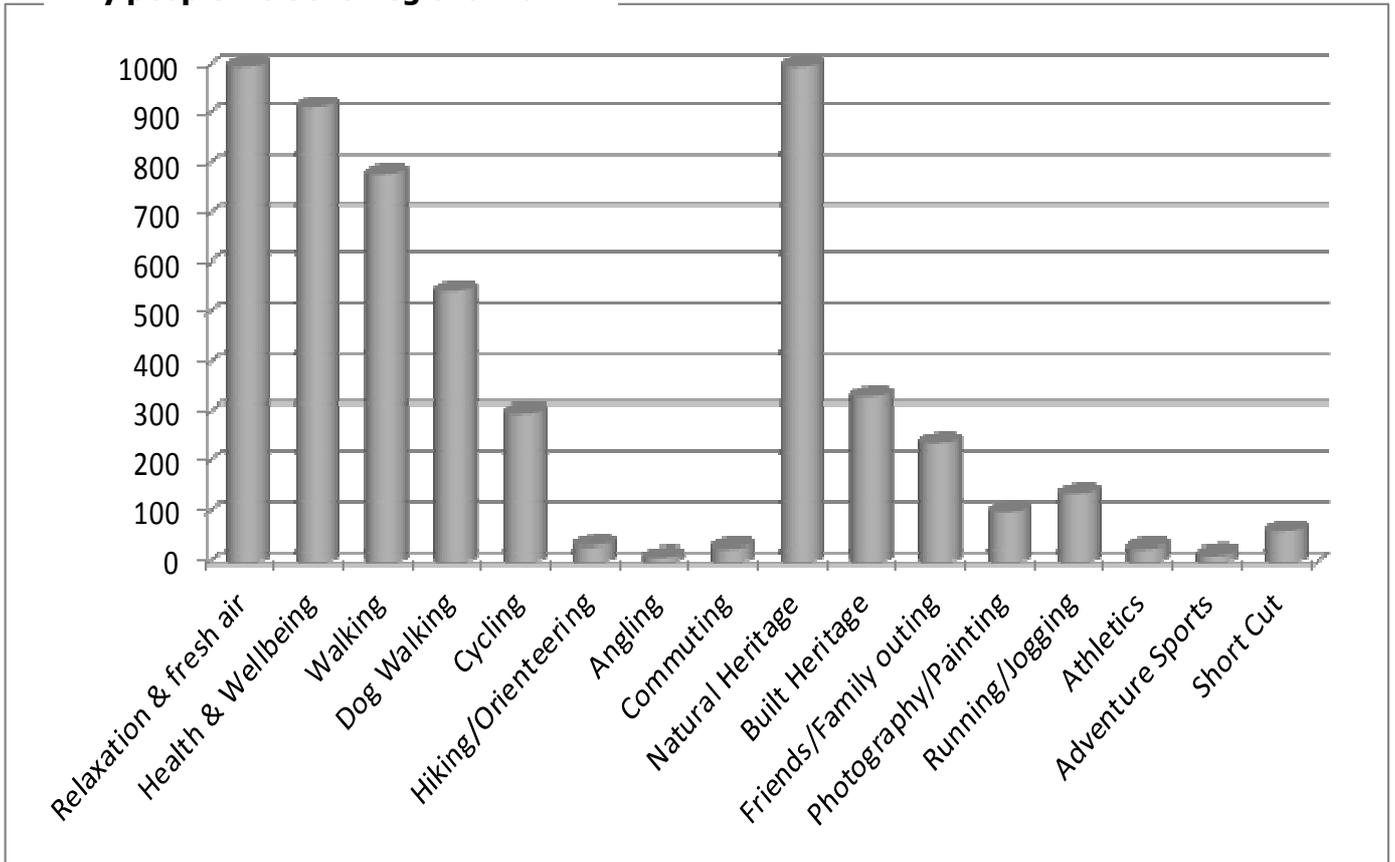
The chart shows the number of users recorded at each of the counters in the park. The blue columns relate to the seven counters on the towpath. The counter at Mary Peters track was installed part way through the year and is aimed at noting any differences in users before and after the off road cycle path is completed at Barnett’s Demesne. If we add all of the towpath data together for the current financial year the total use would be 1,238,875. Whilst this is not a statistically valid approach to analysing the data, it does show a very healthy use of the towpath and if we were to consider the wider Regional Park as a whole is indicative of the use.

Events Programme

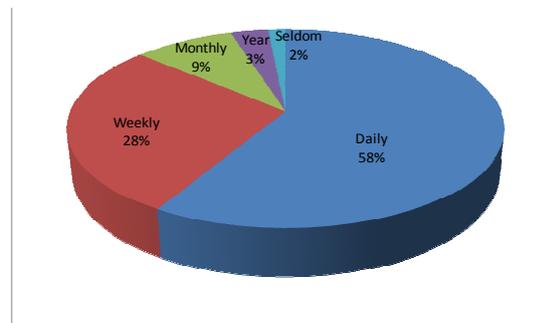
Our events programme included 28 events this year. Our most popular events were the Fungal Forey, the Bat walk, the Dawn Chorus, in the Valley of Giants, the Roost Ramble and the Secret Garden. The events programme had a total attendance of 439 people. This year, due to the changes in the Laganlandscape project staff, we were unable to run the wilderness day. We plan to run the wilderness day in future years, but will run it as a core event with volunteer support.



Why people visit the Regional Park



Most Visitors use the Park daily and weekly



Additional events and further engagement

Developing partnerships and helping to facilitate a wide range of events and organisations not only helps the Regional Park realise its full potential of users, but also maximises our engagement with a broader range of people, providing education and information about the areas natural and build heritage. We have been able to provide 16 additional events including guided walks, talks about the area as well as some of our more well established bushcraft days and river clean ups engaging with 762 adults and children.



Most Popular places in the Regional Park

