



DISCOVER | EXPLORE | ENJOY

Annual Report 2017/18

Chairs Report

Robert Wasson



The last year has been notable, for several reasons. 2017 marked 50 years since the Park's establishment, coming from a visionary idea to establish Regional Parks across the UK – Lagan Valley being the only Regional Park in Northern Ireland, as it is to this day. The Park has over 4,200 acres, a thriving mosaic of riverside habitats; grassland, woodland, wetland, demesnes and farmland. 11 miles of accessible riverside path link the cities of Lisburn and Belfast, with an additional 24 miles of adjoining trails.

Those 50 years were marked in 2017 by a series of 50 events throughout the park, reflecting the many ways in which the Park enhances the lives of people.

Visits to the Park exceeded 1.4m this year; a huge number, the greatest of any outdoor attraction in Northern Ireland.

We also prepared a five-year plan to further develop and enhance the park, for all who use it.

Unfortunately, the last year has also seen our concerns around funding starting to materialise. For the first time, core funding has fallen short of costs, and therefore we have started to depend on reserves. This is without even beginning to make progress on the five-year plan. The situation is clearly unsustainable, and without action we will be in financial difficulties within the next two years. We therefore established a Finance Subcommittee of the Board, tasked with addressing the issue. A dual track approach is being followed. Firstly, by seeking to underpin core funding from our founding partners - Lisburn and Castlereagh and Belfast City Councils, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Secondly, to broaden funding to include individuals, companies and organisations who use the Park and are located on our periphery. This latter strand will also bring much more active engagement with the public, which will be of great benefit. There is much to do, but the Board, and our dedicated staff and volunteers are committed to the challenge.

At a time of immense changes in both our local community and wider afield, it would be all too easy to lose sight of that original vision of 50 years ago. But that would be a mistake; one we do not intend to let happen.

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. The Regional Park's Strategic Vision clearly defines our six focus areas of Biodiversity, Visitors, Community, Landscape, Heritage and Health & Recreation.

Our Aims

- **To conserve and manage biodiversity in the Park**
- **Facilitate research and education about the area's biodiversity and heritage**
- **Encourage community involvement and develop volunteering in the Park**
- **Maintain and enhance the landscape quality for the benefit of all**
- **Proactively conserve and manage the cultural and built heritage of the Park**
- **Promote the health and wellbeing benefits of our green open spaces**
- **Support appropriate recreation activities, events and the development of sustainable tourism for the benefit of the region**
- **Increase public awareness of our natural and cultural heritage**

Outstanding Natural Beauty

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a precious landscape where the distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the public interest to safeguard it. The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order 1985 sets out the main purposes of an AONB which underpin our vision:

- **To conserve and 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**



Partnership

Good partnerships are essential to the governance and management of the Regional Park. Working with our partners we have achieved all the goals laid out in the management plan for this year. It is thanks to the coordinated effort of our partners that we have achieved so much. In addition to our funding partners there are a number of other bodies and organisations with which Lagan Valley Regional Park work. The Rivers Agency for example is responsible for work along the river system and they provide services such as grass cutting along the towpath in close association with the Department for Infrastructure. The Forest Service manages Belvoir Park Forest and the National Trust manages the Minnowburn site.

Our funding partners

Working together in partnership means that all partners benefit from a much greater value for their contribution as it is matched by others who contribute to the pot. The idea of synergy, where the creation of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts is particularly relevant. We seek to continue that approach with our partners in the future. Our key funding partners are:

Department for Infrastructure (DfI)
Belfast City Council
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

Northern Ireland Environment Agency (DAERA)
HLF Legacy

Our management partners

Our key management partners are:

The National Trust
Sustrans
**Council for Nature Conservation
& Countryside (CNCC)**
Forest Service (DAERA)
Transport NI

Lagan Navigation Trust
The Woodland Trust
Ulster Wildlife
Rivers Agency
Lagan Rivers Trust
Butterfly Conservation NI

Planning

Local Development Plans (LDPs)

Lagan Valley Regional Park spans the two council areas of Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. Planning legislation requires Councils to take account of existing policy in developing the new LDPs. In addition the Local Development Plans are informed by the recently launched Community Plans, which have been developed to integrate all facets of community life into a sustainable future.

The LDPs will influence the spatial development of the Council areas as well as providing a framework for development into the 2030's. We have been working with both councils through consultations and have fed into the Preferred Options papers. Many of the existing policies relating to the Regional Park and its protection are important and both councils appreciate the need to protect this valuable resource and asset.

Planning activity

From the Park's founding in 1967 there have been concerns over development pressure, both from large projects and the slow "nibbling away" of encroachment from urban areas. The Park responded to 24 planning applications in 2017, reflecting the continuing development pressure on the river corridor, against which we must be vigilant.

LVRP Management Plan

The five year management plan 2017-2022 was finalised this year, the latest in a series of management plans. The development process has been thorough and has had major contributions from all our partners. This latest plan will give us a firm basis for further enhancing the Park, while meeting the wide ranging objectives of our partners. Its success of course will be dependent on funding.



50 Years of Management and Protection

Imagine what life was like in 1967. Belfast was connected to Lisburn along a beautiful riverside corridor. The area had recently been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; part of several areas in Northern Ireland designated under the Amenity Lands Act (NI) 1965. Urban expansion threatened the area and the post-industrial river corridor had suffered from long term industrialisation.

Local concerns about these pressures prompted grass roots lobbying, led by key activist, John Gilchrist. The then Ministry of Development commissioned a study and development plan for the area. Several options were considered and at that time a new model was being ventured along similar river corridors along the Clyde, and Lee Valley in London. So in November 1967, a committee of stakeholders was established to manage the newly formed Lagan Valley Regional Park, one of the original three Regional Parks.

Lagan Valley Regional Park celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2017 and in May we held a day of celebration with lots of family fun and activities.





Family attractions and fun

16 stalls and activities including falconry, petting farm, wood turning, willow weaving, storytelling, have-a-go canoeing, face painting, kids' crafts and many other activities and entertainments.

Feedback

There were over 2200 visitors to the event; a survey on the day confirmed how much people enjoyed the events, and showed an appetite for similar future events.

Pride of Place

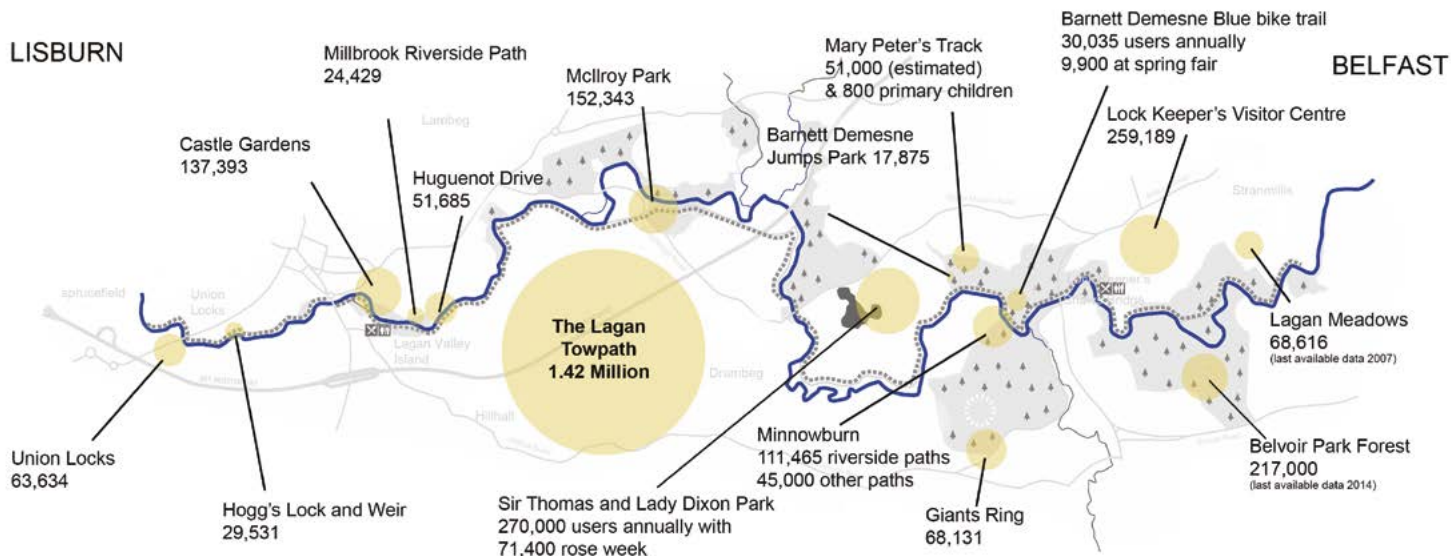
Lagan Valley Regional Park was shortlisted for Co-operation Ireland's Pride of Place awards with the judges visiting us earlier in the year to learn about what we do and our community of volunteers.

Lagan Valley Regional Park: the most popular outdoor attraction in Northern Ireland



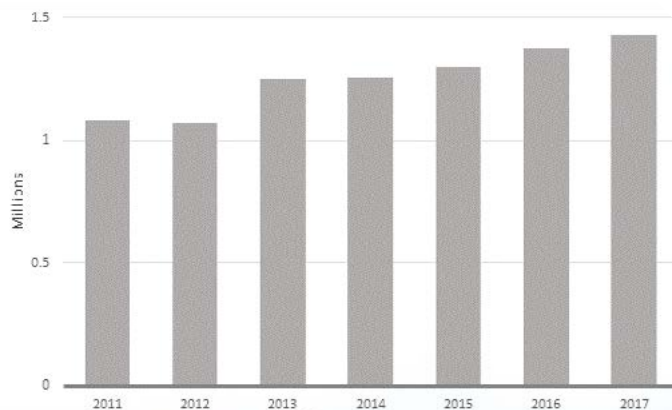
LISBURN

BELFAST



Numbers refer to recorded visits: 1.42 million is for towpath only; the other figures are additional statistics from sites within the Regional Park

The towpath forms a cultural, social and biodiversity link between the cities of Lisburn and Belfast, two of Northern Ireland's largest population centres. It is a quality section of the Ulster Way, a 'quality medium distance walk' under Walk NI and it is part of the National Cycle Network. The past several years have seen steady increases in visitor numbers. This year saw user numbers of 1.42 million for the towpath alone, easily making Lagan Valley Regional Park the most visited outdoor attraction in Northern Ireland.



A Park with People at its heart

The Regional Park has six key focus areas in its Strategic Vision, one of which is community; as such we envisage 'a park with people at its heart'.

We want a park that is people focused, a place where everyone is welcome to visit, get involved and discover the Park on our doorstep. It is a place that connects the hearts of two of Northern Ireland's largest population centres and has strong links with community. The Park has a great sense of cultural connectivity and links to its past. The Park is a hugely valuable resource and we will continue to develop events and other ways for people of all backgrounds and abilities to get involved. A thriving park with community at its heart is also a great economic asset to the region, where tourism can benefit all.

Volunteering is central to the Regional Park. Our volunteer programme prides itself on excellence and has the Investing in Volunteers accreditation, the UK quality standard for the involvement of volunteers within an organisation. Underpinning every aspect of the Regional Park are our volunteers; from heritage guides, to conservation volunteers and rangers, to the directors on our board. We could not operate without our volunteers, but volunteers equally speak of how involvement with the Park benefits them too.



Valuing our volunteers

In thanks to our volunteers, we held volunteer “days out” this year at Hillsborough Castle (for our heritage guides) and Oxford Island (for our conservation volunteers). These days also give the opportunity to learn about other sites carrying out similar work. In addition, we have a tradition of welcoming all our volunteers to a social get together around Christmas time, which this year was on the Industry Lighter.

Type of support	Skill level	Hours contributed	Notional Value
Board of Directors	Professional	118	£5,507
Heritage Guides	Skilled	2116	£42,320
Wildlife Surveyors	Skilled	419	£8,380
Volunteer Rangers	Unskilled	393	£2,830
Conservation Group	Unskilled	915	£6,588
Overall contribution of volunteering during 2017			£65,624

Unskilled £7.20 per hour (national minimum wage), skilled £20.00 per hour (based on HLF recommended £150 per day – 7.5hr days) and professional £46.67 per hour (based on HLF recommended £350 per day – 7.5hr days)



Lagan Valley Regional Park Visitor Centre: **- A heritage and social hub**

The Lock Keeper's Cottage and the Industry Lighter have been managed by Lagan Valley Regional Park for several years now. Coupled with the Lock Keeper's Café the site is a thriving hub of activity, where a visitor can step back in time and see several restored features all on the same site. The Lock Keeper's Cottage was restored through Heritage Lottery and Council funding; the lock and old bridge were restored through Heritage Lottery and Central Government funding and the Industry Lighter was restored through European and Council funding.

Heritage Guides at the cottage and lighter provide visitors with a tailored interpretation of this living history. Many of our Heritage Guides have been with us for several years and have built up an astonishing wealth of knowledge not only about these features and the Lagan Navigation of old, but also the cultural heritage connecting communities with their past.

Visitors to the Lock Keeper's Cottage

The Lock Keeper's Cottage was opened in 2008 following restoration funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which also financed the restoration of the lock; the third lock of the Lagan Navigation. 83,000 people have visited the cottage since it opened in 2008.

At the Lock Keeper's Cottage you can expect a cosy welcome to a piece of Northern Ireland's living history. This is where the Lock Keeper and his family lived and looked after the lock. Join our Heritage Guides for a remarkable snapshot of life on the Lagan Navigation. The cottage is open most weekdays and occasional weekends.



Visitors to the Industry Lighter

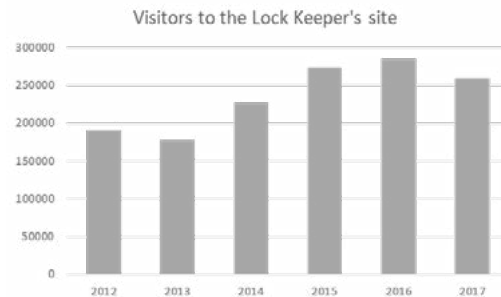
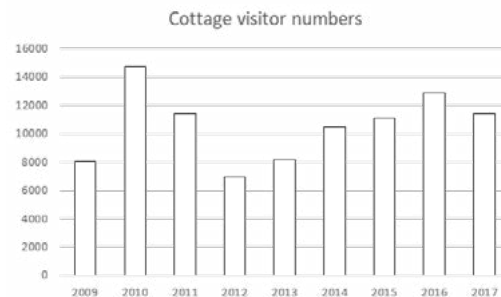
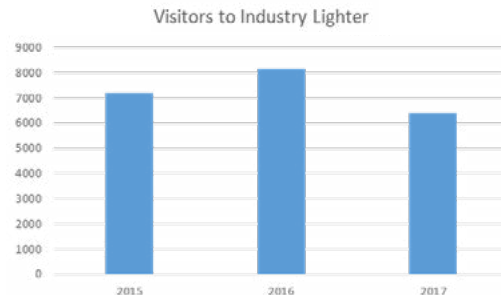
The Industry Lighter was opened in November 2014 and makes this heritage hub complete. Barges on the Lagan Navigation were called 'lighters' and our vessel was built in 1920 by Portadown Foundry. It was used on the Lagan Navigation during the early part of its life to transport mainly coal. Much of its latter days were spent as a sand barge on Lough Neagh.

Visitors to the site

The numbers of visitors to the site have been recorded since electronic counters were installed at the end of 2011. The number of visitors has steadily increased over the 5 years we have been recording and now the site receives over 250,000 visitors each year.

A quick look through the visitor book gives a glimpse into the range of visitors we receive at the cottage and the barge. Most are from Northern Ireland, Ireland and the UK, but we also received visitors from all over the globe including Australia, Canada, China and Europe. Without exception the comments people leave are enthusiastic; 'We are visiting from Canada and found the place simply charming, thank you so much for telling us about the history, our family came from nearby and it is so nice to see how people would have lived in those days'

This year also, two of the three surviving daughters of George Kilpatrick, Margaret and Dorothy, visited the cottage where they grew up.



Raising awareness and understanding

Stands and stalls

The Spring Fair attracted 9,900 visitors and one of the main attractions on our stall was Kelly the Kingfisher, our colourful mascot which was a big hit with the children.

Events programme

This year we delivered 30 public events engaging with 556 people, including guided walks and educational talks. In addition our special 50th anniversary celebration event attracted over 2200 people. Two of our events took place in Rose Week which this year attracted 71,400 visitors.

Supporting the delivery of much more

We have been able to support many groups including several charity walks: NI hospice, Cancer Fund for Children, Parkinsons UK, Christian Aid Ireland, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, Charity Dog Walk.

We supported a number of 10k runs including Dub Runners Giant Trail Race (500 runners), the Resolution Run (300 runners) and the Les Jones memorial race (300 runners). Mary Peters Track is the start/finish of the first of the Run Forest Run series attracting around 650 runners.

Accessible interface

The office is a primary interface for the public. This year we dealt with around 1000 enquiries including providing information on volunteering, access, directions, planning, site security, wildlife and heritage.



Engaging children and young people

Bushcraft events are a great opportunity to engage with children and teach them about our natural environment and how it relates to their lives in a practical way. There are lots of fun activities for the children to get involved with and these events are ideal for birthday parties and groups.

The Ranger Service took the Park promotional stand out to several events this year including QUB Careers and Biodiversity Fair, Health Fair at Seymour Hill, 'Great days out' exhibition at Slieve Donard Hotel and Belfast City Council's Spring Fair.



Masters in Environmental Management and Conservation Biology

In October we facilitated a group of Master's students from Queens University to get close and personal with some of our invasive species. This year the course has had a greater input with over 30 students attending an introductory lecture followed by site visits. The Regional Park has three invasive plant species: Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed. Part of our core remit is provide education on the impact invasive species have on our native flora and fauna as well as supportive control and management with our partners. What better way to spread the message than to raise awareness among students who will go on to work in conservation management.



The Ranger Service

Rangers are ‘the sharp end of the environment industry; skilled people who have to balance the demands, aspirations and curiosity of the public, with protection and enhancement of the physical and cultural fabric of the countryside, with sensitivity, humour and integrity’ - Countryside Commission

Patrolling in the Park, the ranger is effectively the eyes and ears for the Regional Park and its partners. The Ranger Service engages with the community, informing and educating visitors through ad-hoc contact out in the Park, and through organised public events and fairs. The Ranger Service works closely with the Regional Park's funders and partners as well as authorities such as the Police and DAERA on issues such as wildlife incidents and disturbances in the area.



What we do:

- 451 bags of litter collected
- 42 km of paths and trails patrolled weekly
- Responded to numerous incidents and advised relevant partners and authorities
- Carrying out and facilitating surveys and transects for butterflies, badgers, otters, squirrels and bats

Wildlife in the Lagan Valley

Surveys carried out by our volunteers provide records for wildfowl and birds BTO (Waterways Breeding Bird Survey); for the past three years the woodpecker, a newcomer to Ireland, has been seen and heard in the Regional Park regularly and one of our partners recorded video footage of a pine marten near Lagan Meadows.

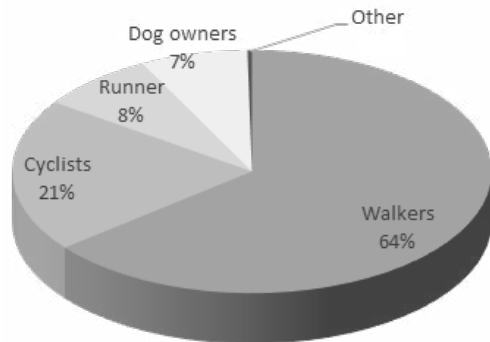
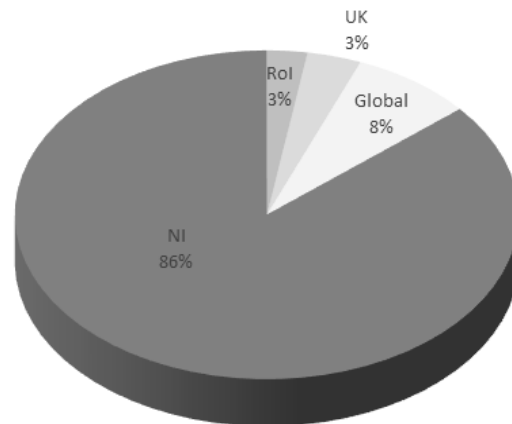
Butterfly surveys have been running in the park now for several years and the data collected helps Butterfly Conservation NI monitor fluctuations and changes. This year recorded similar levels of Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Green Veined White and Specked Wood, with reduced sightings of Large White, Peacock, Holly Blue and Orange Tip.



User Survey

Periodically we survey visitors to Lagan Valley Regional Park to help us understand their needs and views. The year's survey was organized into three sections; the first considered when and where people visit; the second section enabled us to learn about our visitors' profile; whilst the third section looks at attitudes and perceptions, and awareness of the Park and what we do. The full survey results are available from our website. Some of the key findings are shown below.

By far the majority of our visitors are local (86%), but the Park increasingly attracts visitors from further afield; with 3% from RoI, 3% from mainland UK and 8% global.



The most popular reasons that people visit the Regional Park are the Natural Heritage, Relaxation and Fresh Air, Health and Wellbeing, Exercise such as walking and cycling and the Built Heritage.

In general visitor satisfaction was good with the majority of visitors choosing “very satisfied” or above in terms of access and for the various features throughout the Park. The survey also noted suggestions for improvement. Most noteworthy were the need for more resources related to management such as staff, bins, and catering for different user types.

It was clear from the attitudes and perceptions section that visitors feel this resource is valuable in terms of its natural and built heritage and its health and wellbeing benefit. People felt the area should be managed well for the benefit of all especially children, local people and visitors from further afield.

Water quality

The ecological quality is based upon the status of the biological (phytoplankton, macroalgae, macrophytes, benthos and fishes) hydromorphological and physico-chemical quality elements and is recorded according to the scale:

The river basin management plan aims to prevent deterioration of status and reach at least “good” status for all water bodies.

Recorded fish from the upper reaches of the River Lagan (Banoge bridge) include; Trout, Loach, Eel, Sickleback and Gudgeon. Recorded fish from the lower reaches (Shaw's bridge) include; Salmon, Trout Loach, Eel, Sickleback, Lamprey and Pike.

High Ecological Potential

Good Ecological Potential

Moderate Ecological Potential

Poor Ecological Potential

Bad Ecological Potential

River Lagan

Monitoring Station Location	2006-8 Classification	2007-9 Classification	2008-10 Classification	2009-11 Classification	2010-12 Classification	2011-13 Classification
STRANMILLIS	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE
SHAWS BRIDGE	MODERATE	MODERATE	POOR	POOR	MODERATE	MODERATE
WOLFENDENS BRIDGE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE
MOORES BRIDGE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE
YOUNGS BRIDGE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE
DROMORE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	MODERATE	GOOD
BANOGE BRIDGE	MODERATE	MODERATE	POOR	POOR	MODERATE	MODERATE
FORGE BRIDGE	MODERATE	MODERATE	POOR	POOR	MODERATE	MODERATE

Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2018

The summary of Lagan Valley Regional Park's incomes and expenditures are taken from the Unaudited Financial Statements, prepared by Aubrey Campbell & Company, Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditors.

Donations and legacies

Donations

	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2018	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2017
	£	£	£	£
NIEA Environment Fund	13,500	13,500	21,000	21,000
Belfast City Council	58,047	58,047	41,618	41,618
NIEA Environment Fund	2,000	2,000	-	-
Events income	420	420	960	960
Donations	759	759	270	270
Other income	205	205	395	395
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	40,952	40,952	41,410	41,410
Dfl (Cycling & Waterways Unit)	15,000	15,000	15,098	15,098
Heritage Lottery Fund	11,390	11,390	42,480	42,480
	<u>142,273</u>	<u>142,273</u>	<u>163,231</u>	<u>163,231</u>

Other trading activities

	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2018	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2017
	£	£	£	£
Other exceptional income from other trading activities	<u>780</u>	<u>780</u>	<u>15,104</u>	<u>15,104</u>

Costs of charitable activities

Wages and salaries

	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2018	Unrestricted Funds	Total Funds 2017
	£	£	£	£
Wages and salaries	125,243	125,243	127,608	127,608
Rent	5,875	5,875	4,500	4,500
Light & heat	2,248	2,248	3,808	3,808
Repairs & maintenance	1,070	1,070	729	729
Insurance	4,604	4,604	4,918	4,918
Motor expenses	372	372	42	42
Travel & subsistence	1,321	1,321	986	986
Accountancy fees	2,563	2,563	2,500	2,500
Telephone	404	404	658	658
Other office costs	4,424	4,424	3,951	3,951
Depreciation	917	917	923	923
Bank charges	127	127	128	128
Sundry	1,309	1,309	2,724	2,724
Water charges	482	482	511	511
Clothing & uniforms	1,678	1,678	1,350	1,350
Tools	10,481	10,481	8,015	8,015
	<u>163,118</u>	<u>163,118</u>	<u>163,351</u>	<u>163,351</u>



Northern Ireland
Environment
Agency
www.doeni-ni.gov.uk



An Agency within the Department of
Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs
www.doeni-ni.gov.uk



Department for
Infrastructure
www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk



LCCC
Lisburn &
Castlereagh
City Council



heritage
lottery fund

LOTTERY FUNDED

Lagan Valley Regional Park is a charity (NIC103700) and welcomes donations to help us continue to protect and conserve the unique landscape character of the Park, enhance its biodiversity, cultural heritage and promote its benefit to visitors and the community. You can find out more by contacting the office or visiting our website.

Lagan Valley Regional Park

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