**SESSION NOTES**

**Group:** Lagan Valley Regional Park

**Facilitator:** James Laverty

**Date:** 27th July 2015

**List of Participants**

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| --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Name** |
| 1 | Dermot Hughes |
| 2 | Orla Maguire |
| 3 | Fred Hamond |
| 4 | Andy Bridge |
| 5 | Ross Gillanders |
| 6 | Tracey Connolly |
| 7 | Stephen Toal |
| 8 | Sandie Howie |
| 9 | Clare Hamilton-Sturdy |
| 10 | Jenny Palmer |
| 11 | Jackson Tinto |
| 12 | Michael McSorley |
| 13 | Dan Clarke |
| 14 | Anne Cleland |
| 15 | Genevieve O’Reilly |
| 16 | Jim Jackson |

**Session Objectives**

* Assess current funding
* Focus on potential way forward and opportunities
* Engage discussion and explore ideas
* Firm up possible ways forward

**Current Funding Situation of Lagan Valley Regional Park**

Andy gave an overview of the current funding situation in relation to Lagan Valley Regional Park and key aspects are highlighted below:

*Annual Budget*

The Annual Budget including running costs and salaries of the organisation is in the region of £150k per year – all management and board are aware of the current funding situation.

*Current funders*

Funding currently comes from the following sources:

* Lisburn City Council & Belfast City Council make up almost half the total £82k.
* Input from the Heritage Lottery Fund (legacy) £25k and also DCAL (£15k).
* However the concern is that NIEA is reducing its contribution from £51k to £37k and this might be reduced further.
* Added to this is income from the cottage and barge of approximately £15k.

This funding is guaranteed until April 2016 and there are reserves of circa £90k which means that the organisation now has an opportunity to proactively look at potential income generation and funding/fundraising options looking to the future.

Andy presented 4 potential options going forward (prepared in advance) prior to looking at anything related to today’s workshop:

* Status Quo - Unlikely to remain the same
* Option 1 - NIEA funding shortfall met by other funding sources and councils (LVRP operational extent 100%)
* Option 2 - No NIEA funding means a reduction of £51k (LVRP operational extent 17% = Could not function)
* Option 3 - Worst case - further cuts all round: NIEA, Councils and DCAL (LVRP operational extent 10% = Could not function)
* Option 4 - NEF operated through new DEARA - unknown but reduced (LVRP operational extent uncertain from 71% = reduced operations)

**Council Overview**

Ross with input from others gave a good overview of the Councils strategy and where their funding priorities currently are. There are certain issues which will impact on Council priorities and spending which include:

* RPA has recently been implemented and that means added responsibility and more roles for Councils
* The year 2016/17 will be a transitional year that will try and maintain the current status quo
* The year 2017/18 will see things settle down and give a truer picture of where and what commitment that Councils will proceed with
* Councils are supportive of the regional park and there is no lack of commitment on their part

**Outside Environment**

Some other issues to consider that impact upon the park are:

* Government departments are also changing with the dissolution of NIEA and DCAL and a new Department of Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs being established
* 2016 is an interim year of great uncertainty
* The Voluntary, Community and indeed environmental sector is compacting and competing more and more against each other for fewer resources
* Uncertainty of political structures at Stormont
* There is also a worry that this crisis especially with regard to the environmental sector will be over in 2 years
* The Minister has been impressed by the Park and there might be the scope for grant provision in some way towards the park.

*External View / perceptions*

Jimmy gave an overall external point of view that the park is seen primarily as a statutory body by most in N.I. He also explained that there are three ways for the park to raise money namely:

* Restricted Funding
* Unrestricted Fundraising
* Income Generation.

Currently the Park has an over-reliance on Restricted Funding from primarily Statutory Funds so there are opportunities to explore within the other sectors.

**Future Options – Ideas workshop**

Participants were split into three groups to discuss how Lagan Valley Regional Park could move forward and also look at some income generation ideas in order to access and raise funds outside of statutory grant provision.

Jimmy explained that Lagan Valley Regional Park had some major positives:

1. The fact that the Park has charitable status and yet this was hard to identify on any literature and on the website.
2. Very little fundraising had been generated regarding raising unrestricted funds for the park and also very few funding applications to Charitable Trusts, Foundations and funders outside of the statutory sector (apart from the Heritage Lottery Fund) had been completed.
3. The Park has access to at least 40 regular volunteers and the possibility of a bank of another 30 meaning the opportunity to avail of a network of 70 volunteers.
4. There are 2 million plus visitors to the park per year.

**Income Generation Ideas:**

10 main areas were identified as follows:

1. **Charitable Status**

* Raise profile
* Donate online
* Gift Aid
* Legacy Giving
* Will to Give

1. **Tourism**

* Link with adjoining hotels and businesses
* Meet with and promote the park via Tourism NI
* Outdoor recreation to be promoted
* Promote Giants Ring
* Tell the Lagan Story
* Link with Visit Belfast – use Belfast Hills Partnership advertising as a good example

1. **Activities**

* Company Away days
* Up the Lagan in a Bubble
* Canoe Cruises of the Lagan
* Charge a fee for talks, walks, bush-craft and demonstration events

1. **Merchandising**

* Donation Boxes
* Sell “kingfisher” pin badges
* Promote books
* “Kenny the Kingfisher” costume promotion
* Activity Packs
* Postcards
* Membership schemes
* Corporate sponsorship from environmental companies
* Uniforms with company/sponsorship logos
* Books

1. **Education Sector**

* Wildlife, Archaeology and Industrial Heritage Tours and Talks
* Use students as volunteers to develop social media
* Work in partnership with schools

1. **Business Sector**

* Business Sponsorship – Coca Cola, Hilden Brewery – Park Porter – 5p in each pint donated to the park
* Charity of the year
* Staff link with businesses
* Recruit a Director to sit on the Board from a business perspective in order to utilise knowledge and links
* Rotary/Probus to Adopt the Park
* Business in the Community
* Run events on the barge

1. **Fees/Charging for services**

* Members
* Car Parking Charges
* Campsite
* Franchise
* Concessions for members
* Bike Hire

1. **Volunteers/Volunteering opportunities**

* Establish fundraising sub-group
* Revamp the Friends of Lagan Valley Regional Park Group
* Use volunteers and give them titles/roles relating to fundraising
* Advertise for Volunteer specialisms
* Audit skills of current volunteers

1. **Landowners/Statutory**

* Arrange meetings with Council Chief Executives to make representation as to how relevant and important the park is in their respective areas and the opportunities it affords them to link with and promote
* Service level agreements with landowners/adjoining interests
* Link with Canal Trust
* Service Level Agreements

1. **Additional/miscellaneous Fundraising Ideas**

* Table Quizzes
* Service Level Agreements
* Crowd Funding
* Landfill Tax
* Collaboration with other NGO’s
* Establish Memorial Fund
* Link with Communities along the park with a view to applying for Interreg and Peace Projects
* A ranger Dan blog
* Case studies of Park users.

**Potential Grants/Sources of Funding**

Jimmy gave an overview of grants available that would be relevant to the park namely:

* Ulster Garden Villages Ltd
* the Tudor Trust and;
* Garfield Weston Foundation.

It was explained that the Park hadn’t applied to any Trusts and Foundations bar the Heritage Lottery Fund therefore it was in a good position to consider this alternative funding source as a very viable option.

This funding could be used for specific projects even salaries and equipment if necessary but the Park would need to evidence the need for any projects. The fact the Park has 2 million+ visits in a year stand it in good stead.