

DISCOVER | EXPLORE | ENJOY

Lagan Valley Regional Park Strategic Vision September 2013 MISSION, AIMS AND VISION



Lagan Valley Regional Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Foreword

agan Valley Regional Park is known and recognised as Northern Ireland's only Regional Park. Designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it is a place that offers a unique combination of activities, sights and experiences.

For over 40 years Lagan Valley Regional Park has been working to protect the unique landscape features of the Lagan Valley and to promote its enjoyment by the public.

The Regional Park is a mosaic of award winning open spaces and parks, heritage sites, farmland, trails and towpath.

This document forms a framework for our work for the next 10 years and we hope this will also provide inspiration and focus for the future collective efforts of landowners, partners, stakeholders and everyone with an interest in the Lagan Valley Regional Park.

The Park

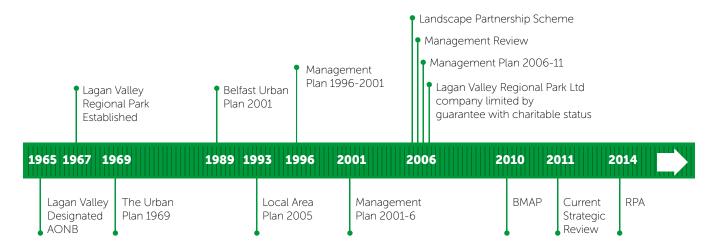
The Lagan Valley was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1965 under the Amenity Lands Act (NI) 1965. Lagan Valley Regional Park was created in 1967 with the two-fold objective to conserve the landscape quality and features of the Lagan Valley and to enhance recreation usage by the public.

The newly established Regional Park's aims and ethos were shaped by the guiding principles of AONB management and this is still the case today. The creators of the Regional Park saw the need to balance the protection of this outstanding area and its rich biodiversity and heritage with the ever increasing demands of the growing population centres of Lisburn and Belfast.



Strategic Background

Belfast Urban Area Plan, developed in 1989, was important in setting out planning policies for the area for the first time, whilst more robust and specific policies were developed in 1993 when a local area plan was drawn up specifically for the Regional Park. This has been an important document in terms of protecting the area from inappropriate development and exploitation of its resources and has only now been superseded by the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan which integrates many of these planning policies to protect the area long into the future.



The first management plan for the Regional Park was developed by the Environment Agency in 1996 which set precedence for the ongoing use of a management plan as a tool for managing the Regional Park and the AONB that lies within the Park. The Park's governance comprised an advisory group and a management group; the advisory group was as its name suggests a committee of strategic advisors who oversaw the governance of the Park whilst the management group was comprised of officers, with executive powers within the area, who along with the Park staff executed the day to day running of the Park.

This structure served the Park well for 40 years until the Park underwent a management review in 2006 to consider the potential options for a new structure. The management review identified the best option for the Park as becoming a

company limited by guarantee with charitable status. In setting up the company, the old advisory group was replaced by a board of directors, with legal responsibilities for the company and its management, whilst what used to be a management group became a management committee with essentially the same executive functions. This structure also meant that the Regional Park was one step away from local and central government retaining a level of political independence.



2006 was a significant year for the Regional Park, not only did the Park undergo a management review and take the decision to become a company limited by guarantee, but it also developed its third management plan. Perhaps one of the biggest influences on the Park and what it does was the Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme. This has facilitated unprecedented changes to the Regional Park. The project has enabled the Park to do much more of what it already did and has led to restoration projects and new developments that could otherwise not have been realised. Perhaps the largest impact however has been the greater involvement of the community, through heritage guides, volunteering and work with schools and community groups.



Strategy Today

During the review process the raison d'être of the Park was scrutinised in order to develop the new company's Memorandum of Association. From the Memorandum of Association a set of key aims could be teased out which are more practical as a working document and from these our mission statement developed with a broadly similar ethos to those aims that the Park became established with in its inception in 1967

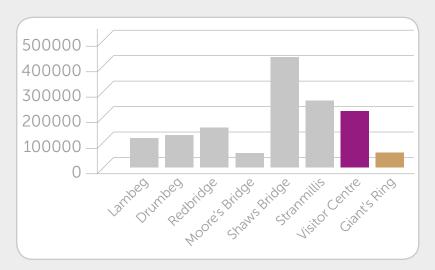
These three guiding documents are an ideal place to start when reviewing where the Park is today and how it may best realise its future potential. When the Memorandum of Association was being drafted during the management review, a comprehensive review of what the Regional Park does as an organisation was undertaken. The Memorandum of Association subsequently developed is therefore extremely broad in remit and offers adequate scope for the Park to adapt its key aims and mission statement and to develop a future vision.

"this is an amazing resource, it should be treasured. Thank you for showing us round"

AONB Conference site visit to Giant's Ring monument

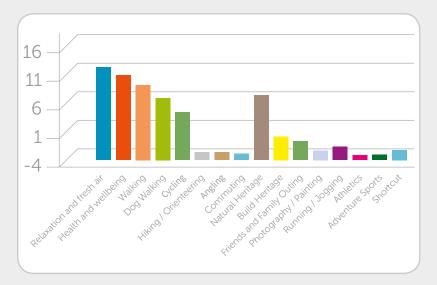


Visitor Figures



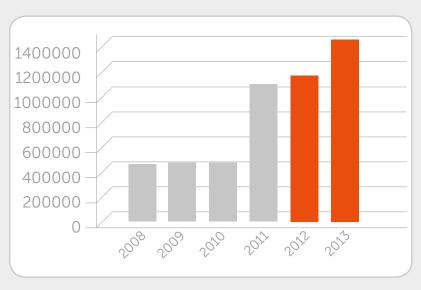
Visitor numbers during 2012 for the Towpath (grey), Lock Keeper's Cottage Visitor Centre (purple) and Giant's ring (brown); columns indicate numbers passing trip points at locations on bottom axis.

Note: counters record a single pass in either direction and do not distinguish type of user.



Why people visit Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Note: preferences are ranked out of 16 and the highest scores collated from a sample size of 83 interviews carried out in 2012.



Visitor numbers along towpath each year based on the sum of six counters along the towpath.

Note: Incomplete data for years 2008, 2009 and 2010. New counters installed in 2012; new counter data in red





- 1 We will proactively conserve and manage the biodiversity in the Regional Park.
- We will support and facilitate ongoing research and education on the area's biodiversity and heritage.
- We will encourage involvement of the community and develop volunteering in the Regional Park.
- We will maintain and enhance the landscape quality of the Regional Park for the benefit of all.
- We will proactively conserve and manage the cultural and built heritage of the Regional Park.
- We will promote the benefits of green open spaces, within the area, for health and wellbeing.
- We will support appropriate recreation activities, events and the development of sustainable tourism for the benefit of the region.
- We will increase public awareness of the natural and cultural heritage throughout the region.







Vision Focus Areas

The Regional Park has defined the areas in which we have a proven track record of delivery and will build on our strengths and continue our work in the future. We recognise that partnership is vital to the future of the Park and we support and recognise the excellent work other organisations are carrying out in the Park.

The six areas we will focus on are:



Biodiversity



Visitors



Community



Landscape



Heritage

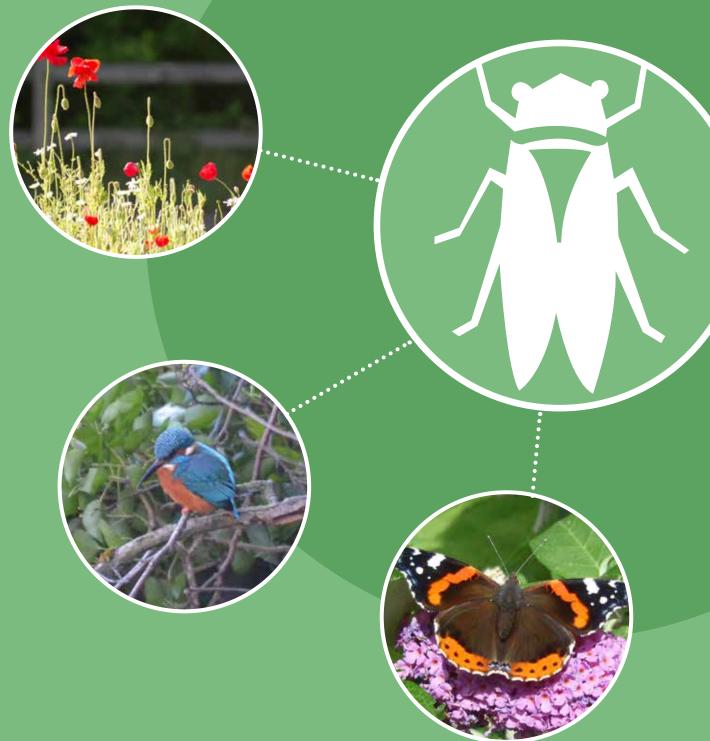


Health and Recreation



A Park that safeguards and delivers a high quality biodiversity resource for the region.

The Park is a valuable biodiversity resource. Large areas of the Park are designated and protected for their nature conservation value. We want to continue to enhance and manage the Park for its special biodiversity value. We want the Park to be a place where plants and animals can thrive and a place where people can experience and enjoy the natural environment.





A Park that is a regional, high quality visitor experience and a valued resource.

We want the Park to continue to be a quality destination, a special place to visit and somewhere people are inspired to return to again and again, because it provides experiences unparalleled across the rest of the region. We believe that to be a valued destination, the Park not only needs great activities, sights and experiences, it needs to be valued and recognised, easy to find and get around and safe and accessible to people of all abilities.





A park with people at its heart.

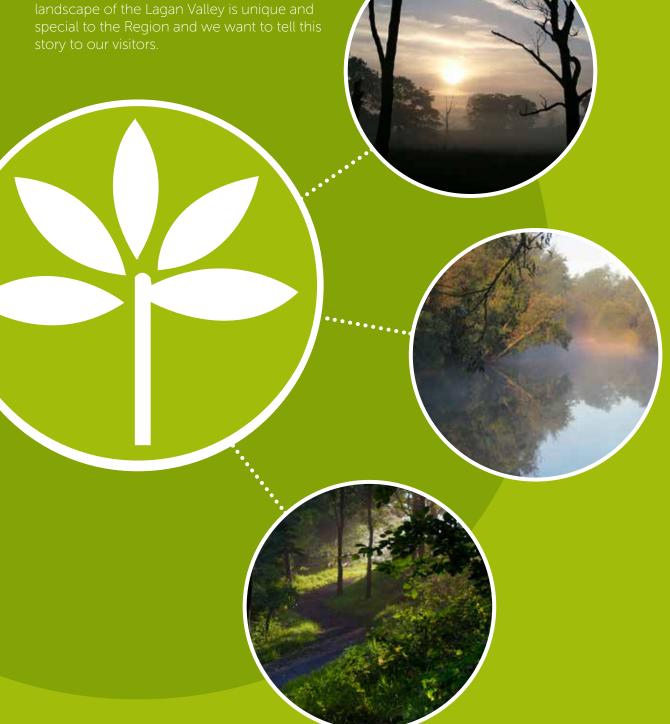
We want a park that is people focused, a place where everyone is welcome to visit, get involved and discover the Park on our doorstep. It is a place that connects the hearts of two of Northern Ireland's largest population centres and has strong links with community. The Park has a great sense of cultural connectivity and links to its past. We believe the Park is a fantastic resource and 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 presents a great economic asset to the region, where tourism can benefit all.





A Park landscape that embraces the cultural and social heritage of the area.

The Park is a wonderful landscape: a place that inspires people. We want a Park landscape that reflects the river valley character and retains the unique connection with the cultural heritage that has shaped it. We believe that the landscape of the Lagan Valley is unique and special to the Region and we want to tell this story to our visitors.

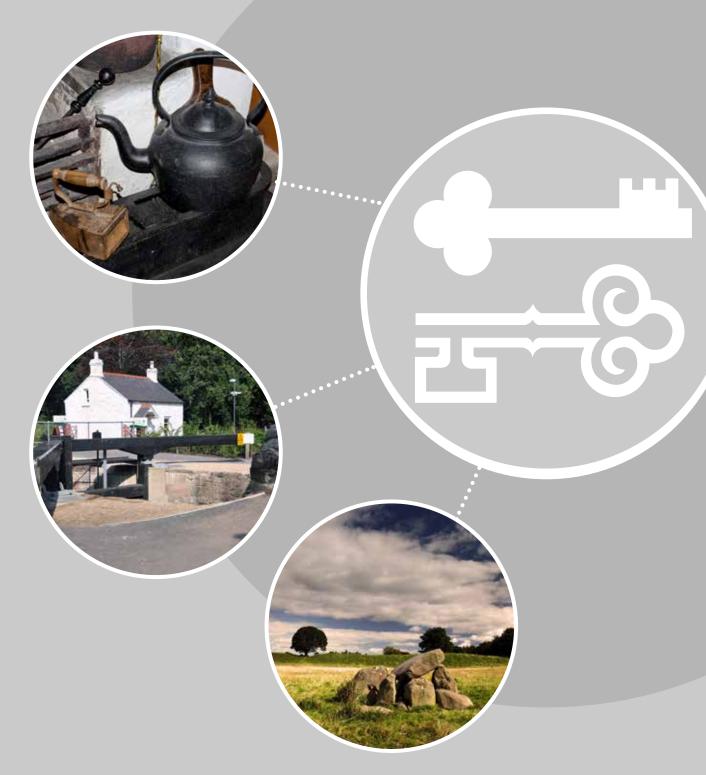






A Park rich in heritage that can unfold the story of Ireland's first settlers through to the present.

The Lagan Valley is rich in shared cultural history, from man's early settlers at the Giant's Ring, through the Anglo-Norman Invasion, the Irish Uprising and the Industrial Revolution. We want to tell the story of our rich heritage and inspire our visitors to discover and learn more.



(**) Health and Recreation

A Park that helps people improve their wellbeing with high quality opportunities for health promoting activities.

The Park was founded in 1967 as a place for leisure, enjoyment and recreation. These activities continue to be at the heart of what the Park is about. We want to ensure the Park is a place that offers exciting and varied activities that attract and are used by as many people as possible. We want people to explore, discover and learn and in so doing develop as happier, healthier individuals, and in turn happier and healthier communities.





Guiding Principles

The Regional Park, as a space is a mosaic of different habitats and land types and has a mixture of land owners, managers and facility providers both public and private. It is therefore clear that for any initiatives to work in the Park a holistic and joined up approach is required. The Regional Park has a proven track record of developing and maintaining partnerships. The Regional Park's committees are by their very nature partnerships comprising of a wide range of stakeholders and managers.

Through consultation and repeated user survey work it is clear that the major attractions of the Regional Park are its open spaces, its landscapes, its beauty, biodiversity and rich heritage. This setting evokes and inspires the visitor to associate the area with peace and tranquillity which is very much associated with this natural element. As such conservation of both biodiversity and of the built heritage within the Park and beyond should

be the driving ethos of our organisation. Recent cuts to government funding and the background climate of austerity have had an understandable impact

on the views of consultees during the strategic review. Whilst the dangers of being under resourced are all too evident the need to provide value for money is perhaps now more important than ever. The Park continues to provide excellent value for money and builds on this by sharing resources on the ground and securing other sources of funding, making the value of the existing funders multiplied several fold.

The Laganscape Project has made a huge impact upon the Regional Park, doubling its staff and bringing a sevenfold increase of income to the Park over the six year life of the Project. A major concern when organisations develop projects through project funding is sustainability. An important area for the Park to consider as the Laganscape draws to a close is that of legacy and sustainability. The Park needs to be able to integrate those long term improvements that this and other funding projects create in such a way that the benefit to the environment, cultural heritage and the community can continue long into the future. Sustainability is something that the Northern Ireland Executive has identified as being integral to developing the future in its strategy: Focus on the Future - sustainable development implementation plan 2011-2014.

The feedback from the consultation from which this strategic vision has been developed show that our guiding principles are best encompassed under 4 key themes: i) partnership and inclusivity whilst developing links with others, ii) conserving



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
- Value for money and transparency
- 4 Sustainability



"in years to come I can proudly show other people the tree or hedge we planted and feel a sense of contribution to this beautiful park"

Saturday Conservation Volunteers







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