



Belfast Hills
Partnership

Annual Report
April 2005 to March 2006



COMPANY INFORMATION

Directors

G Best
J Blaney
C Calvert
G Campbell
J Crilly
M Dobson
T Duffy
T Enright
J Gray
M Lucas
J M^cMullan - Treasurer
K Murray
I Simpson
E Rainey
J Rodgers

Independent Chair

K Patterson

Company Secretary

J Bradley

Company Number

NI053189

Charity Number

XR70288

Auditors

M^cClure Watters
Thomas House
14-16 James Street South
Belfast
BT2 7GA

Business Address

163 Stewartstown Road
Belfast
BT17 0HW

Bankers

First Trust Bank
2/4 Finaghy Road North
Belfast
BT10 0JA

Solicitors

Cleaver Fulton Rankin
50 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7FW



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I am very pleased to be delivering the Chairman's report for the second time as 2005-2006 was our first full year in operation and followed on from our launch and my taking up the position of Independent Chair in February 2005.

The Partnership has faced a number of major challenges in this past year:

Firstly the loss of two of our three staff leading to a lack of a Projects Officer from June-August 2005 and an Administrative Officer from August-November 2005. This disrupted a range of our development work projects. The loss of 2 out of our 3 staff last summer caused an inevitable loss of momentum but we are very pleased if not highly relieved to report that they have been replaced by two highly committed and capable officers, both of whom have been of tremendous support to our Partnership Manager.

Secondly the unexpected announcement of a temporary closure of project funding by Environment and Heritage Service in June 2005 was another setback. Although this was not a threat to our core funding, a substantial section of our business plan was reliant on this source and a major bid for such funding was in the early stages of being prepared. I believe in the future we must look for funding of our projects not only from the public purse but also from the private sector.



Despite these challenges, I believe we have achieved a great deal in 2005-2006.

The impact achieved by the publishing of our Waste report in particular but also the issue of waste in the Belfast Hills has been substantial, all the more for being well timed just before the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy launch and associated publicity. The Belfast Hills is now well placed in the debate about our waste and the Partnership is now recognised as a key voice and consultee on these issues.

Also as part of our core operations, we have produced excellent events programmes and Newsletters which publicised both our work and the Hills themselves.

Biodiversity work has been particularly hard hit by the withdrawal of EHS project funding, but we hope that our recent application to Better Belfast funding will be successful and launch the next phase of practical work for the wildlife of the hills.

With reference to agriculture, despite the recent upturn in confidence in the beef industry, the marginal farming in areas such as the hills remains difficult, not helped by the gap between the twin urban and rural regeneration funding programmes - a gap much of the Belfast Hills finds itself in. We will continue to work to clarify and resolve this issue, as well as keep a watching brief on the potential development of the Grazing Animal Project within Northern Ireland, which seeks to match & manage conservation grasslands and graziers, highly relevant to the Hills.

The development of a Walking Map and the Access Code might seem a small step but I believe is an example to ourselves of how far we have come as a Board and signals cause for hope in what is achievable in the future.

Remember in these days of SMART targets that the mere fact that we're working together with increasing respect and understanding is a significant achievement in itself. The challenge is to turn that internal success into external results and recognition.

Speaking of visible results, the positive impact of Divis and the work of the National Trust on the site is to be welcomed, particularly the moves to meet the concerns of neighbouring farmers such as the boundary works just about to start. This will hopefully be emulated in Slievenacloy next month.

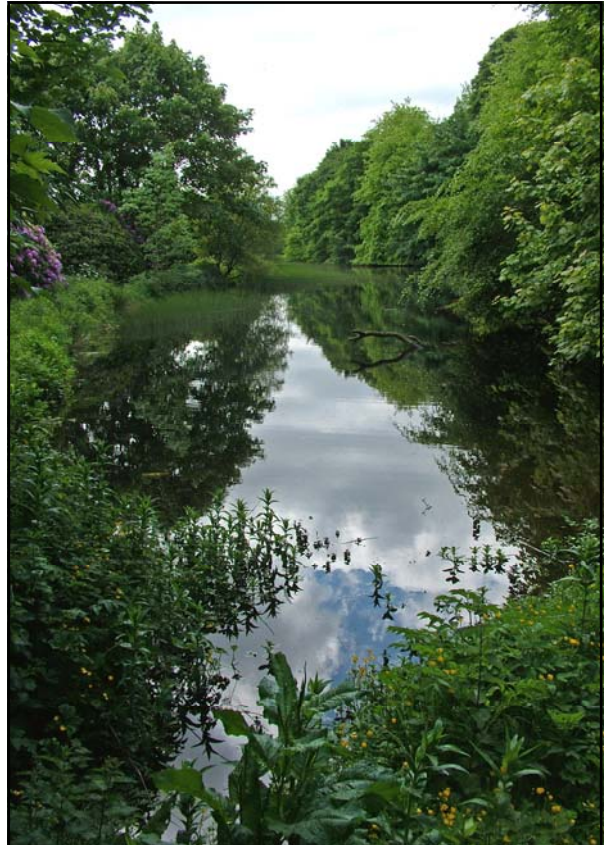
Other positive developments have been the new café at Colin Glen, and the recent well publicised designation of Carnmoney Hill as a Local Nature Reserve.

On a less upbeat note, the general tightening of belts is spelling difficult times for our environmental NGOs as funding gets more and more difficult to secure but I would like to thank our Funding bodies for their continuing financial support with the hope that they will continue to provide this support for the foreseeable future.

The rest of this coming year presents further key challenges, such as

- the public enquiry into the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP),
- securing funding for a further three years from our core funders and
- the impact on the ground when the two major landfills begin receiving municipal waste in November.

Further ahead, the proposed new Environment Protection Agency being considered at the minute and the Review of Public Administration demonstrate the fact that we will rarely enjoy a stable working environment and must be ready to not just adapt to such change, but be ready to take any opportunities as they emerge.



In closing I would like to thank the Board for their support and tolerance for me as Chairman, I have found the year interesting and stimulating and I hope I can continue for a little while yet.

Lastly but by no means least I wish to extend my personal thanks and also those of the Board to the Belfast Hills staff, that is Dr. Jim Bradley the Partnership Manager who works tirelessly for the Hills, Dr. Lizzy Pinkerton the Projects Officer, who in the short time she has been with us has produced work of a very high standard and Therese Bateson the Administrative Officer, who has not only supported the Manager and Project officer but has ensured that The Chair and the Board have had all the necessary information in an accurate and timely manner to make our Board decisions. To all of them I offer my thanks and that of the Board.

I commend this report to the meeting.

K.J.G. Patterson FRICS

PARTNERSHIP MANAGER'S REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Despite a number of issues with EHS Funding and loss of staff, substantial progress has been made on a number of work areas as outlined below.

NEWSLETTER

Our first Newsletter was produced and distributed in October 2005. This was warmly received and has proved to be a vital platform for highlighting our work as well as positive aspects and issues which concern us about the Hills.

IMPROVED WEBSITE

We have a very user friendly web editing system which enables staff to continually improve the site by adding events information, press releases, downloads and photos very regularly. We received over 4000 hits in the year and deal with queries coming from the site on a weekly basis. The recent addition of a Community Page is likely to generate more.

EVENTS

Our Annual Events Programme was launched in June 2005 and successfully introduced members of the public to sites across the Hills such as Carnmoney Hill, Divis, Cave Hill Country Park and Colin Glen. Through this we have built up a working database of those interested in the Belfast Hills and increased awareness of the Hills and the Partnership through press coverage of the events.

COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT TEAM

Funding was a key issue for this, with our EHS Waste Innovation funding bid proving unsuccessful. Although we were therefore unable to execute this project, board consideration of this bid proved very useful in identifying the precise roles possible for such a team and opportunities and concerns associated with these. This project will be revisited as part of the process of assembling our bids for future core funding 2007-2010.

NEW OFFICES

The outcome of the above issue has meant that the need for new office space has been less acute than envisaged. Criteria for new offices have been drawn up and a small number of sites have been investigated but none have proved suitable.

WASTE SEA RECOMMENDATIONS

The Waste Strategic Environmental Assessment report has proved to be an ambitious project with issues concerning basic gaps in data and detailed consultation delaying the final production of the document. This was launched in March, received considerable media coverage and coincided with further press coverage up until the launch of the NI Waste Management Strategy. A working group has been set up to specifically address prioritization and

execution of the reports recommendations.

POLICIES AND PLANNING

Our Policy Guidelines on Planning Responses were revised to encompass all waste management planning applications in the Belfast Hills. We also worked up draft policies on Landscape and on Wind Farms which are still ongoing.

We investigated 20 key planning applications and responded to 11 of these. We also assisted community groups, developers and others in providing information and advice on these applications.

BELFAST METROPOLITAN AREA PLAN & OTHER CONSULTATIONS

Having submitted our own response to the draft BMAP proposals in the previous year, we investigated the 3700 responses published by the BMAP team and counter-responded to 37 of these.

We also submitted a consultation response to the Waste Management Strategy for Northern Ireland.

BIODIVERSITY PROJECT

This was also affected by the closure of EHS Natural Heritage Grant Scheme. As this closure is ongoing, we have applied to Better Belfast for an amended project focussing on surveying and practical projects on the public sites which make up 30% of the Belfast Hills area. In the meantime, staff have carried out ongoing biodiversity work such as substantial data and research gathering, events, and liaison with Local Biodiversity Officers. Through the local universities' Science Shop, we have managed to have useful survey projects on Upland Heath management completed and Marsh Fritillary butterfly initiated in the Hills.

PUBLIC MAP & ACCESS CODE

We set up a working group of Directors, observers and additional EHS and Belfast City Council staff which successfully produced a Belfast Hills Access Code. We have also completed drafting a Belfast Hills Walking Map and need to secure funding for this prior to final design and print.

VOLUNTEERS & FRIENDS

We continued to play our part in the Environmental Volunteer Network (all the main environmental organisations who use volunteers) and have held volunteering events in Slievenacloy, Divis, Glencairn and Colin Glen.

We held 2 open events to encourage volunteers and friends and now have 29 people in our Friends database. These are currently drawing up their own constitution to work with, but independently of, the Partnership.

BASELINE STUDY AND INFORMATION AUDITS

In addition to the Baseline Study produced in June 2005, a number of audits have been carried out which highlighted key information and issues for the Hills, including audits of Visitor Services, Environmental Education and Volunteering.

As well as providing extremely useful information, these audits form the basis for future planning and funding applications to develop these services further.

BEST PRACTICE VISITS

The Wicklow Uplands Council were invited to the Belfast Hills and visited in late October 2005. This proved extremely useful in highlighting alternative approaches to waste and partnership working being used in Wicklow. BHP staff visited Wicklow in February and we plan to hold a return visit to Wicklow in the autumn.

SITE MANAGERS

We facilitated informal networking meetings of the site managers from Slievenacloy, Colin Glen, Divis, Cave Hill and Carnmoney Hill spanning five organisations. These proved extremely useful and practical, sharing knowledge and best practice on issues such as visitor counters and car park design. Staff have consulted with PSNI and the Fire Service and have arranged future workshop meetings on related issues.

OTHER WORK

In addition to the above, a number of key corporate issues took up board and staff time during the year. Minor changes to the Memorandum and Articles of Association were incorporated to simplify definition of membership and trusteeship. Finally, management of BHP finances successfully moved from Bryson House to our own staff during the year.

KEY OUTPUTS

- Belfast Hills Newsletter
- 2005-2006 Events Programme
- Waste SEA Launch & press coverage
- BMAP & Planning Applications Responses
- Biodiversity research & database
- Access Code
- Information Audits
- Wicklow Visit to Belfast Hills
- Site Managers' Meetings

Jim Bradley
Partnership Manager



BELFAST HILLS PARTNERSHIP 2006-2007 WORK PLAN

This year represents the last year of core funding in the present round. Linked with this will be substantial work by the staff in preparing bids along with associated Business Plan and Economic Appraisal for core funding 2007-2010.

The following Work Plan outlines the range of projects and areas of work for the coming year, including those for which operational funding has yet to be secured.

The key projects are:-

Walking Map & Access Code Publication

The great majority of this work has been completed up to external design, printing and distribution. It is proposed to print and distribute 40,000 walking maps as well as make the Access Code as accessible as possible.

Glenside Management & Development Plan

We are currently working on a Plan for the management and development of Glenside Community Woodland for Bryson House to be completed by Autumn 2006.

Biodiversity Project

This will entail research concentrating on an audit of the biodiversity resources of the Belfast Hills with an emphasis on the public sites. This will also include research of the landscape and interpretive potential of the Hills.

Natural Stone

This is a Project currently building up a database of stone from heritage buildings and linking these to old and existing quarry sources. We will be assisting the Natural Stone project with research, permissions and sampling.

Tourism Pack

This will entail the compilation and distribution of existing site information & events leaflets into packs for distribution to outlets such as local accommodation providers, Tourist Information Centres and local tourist attractions.

Other main projects and areas of work include:-

Information

This will concentrate on a range of work areas such as events, newsletters, ongoing audits, website improvements and talks.

EHS Pollution Incident Hot Line

We will publicise & monitor the performance of this free phone service using existing publications, website and staff time.

Planning Responses

BMAP will represent a major area of work when it comes to Public Enquiry stage. Individual applications will continue to be dealt with under current Policy.

Visits to other sites – Mournes & Wicklow

A number of staff and members visits would be highly beneficial in the coming year. One major visit to Wicklow to investigate waste and access issues is proposed for September, while a combined site visit to the Mournes and forward planning away day would also be of benefit.

Policies

Policies need to be drawn up, particularly on issues which are likely to arise in the future and on which a BHP stance will be required e.g. Wind Farms.

Friends & Volunteers

The Friends group should be up and running this coming year and it is hoped would be self-financing if not raising funds for BHP running costs. We will initiate a small number of BHP volunteer days for specific tasks this summer.

Site Managers

We will continue to facilitate site managers' meetings, information talks and site visits.

Waste SEA Recommendations

Subject to the advice of the Waste SEA Recommendations Working Group and approval of the Board, we will execute the recommendations of the SEA as resources are sought and available.



BELFAST HILLS PARTNERSHIP FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Summary for the year ending 31 March 2006

	<u>2006</u> £	<u>2005</u> £
Income		
EHS	74,370	25,030
Belfast City Council	20,000	20,000
Lisburn City Council	10,000	10,000
Newtownabbey Borough Council	5,250	5,250
Antrim Borough Council	1,600	1,600
Better Belfast	-	18,900
Other	<u>2,784</u>	<u>136</u>
Total Income for year	<u>114,004</u>	<u>80,916</u>
Expenditure		
Set-up costs	-	19,513
Consultancy	¹ 10,450	19,975
S&W	77,362	62,354
Rent/Room Hire/HLP	6,987	7,318
Insurance	2,933	874
Travel and subsistence	3,198	1,738
Support services	² 10,584	7,524
Accountancy	1,704	-
Recruitment	<u>2,267</u>	<u>-</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	<u>115,485</u>	<u>119,296</u>
SURPLUS	(1481)	(38,380)
Closing balance of funds as at 31/03/05		34,106
Petty Cash held by Belfast Hills Partnership at 31/03/05		10
Opening balance of funds as at 01/04/05	<u>34,116</u>	
Funds Held By Belfast Hills Partnership	<u>32,635</u>	

This Summary is based on 2004-2005 accounts extracted from the books and records of Bryson House, and the External Audit Report for 2005-2006 carried out by McClure Watters Limited.

¹ Contained within Support Services/Other in External Audit Report.

² Remainder of Support Services/Other plus Telephone & Internet, Stationery etc. and Bank Charges in External Audit Report.

PARTNERSHIP STAFF & DIRECTORS

Staff

There are three core staff as follows:

Dr Jim Bradley - Partnership Manager
Dr Lizzy Pinkerton - Hills Project Officer
Therese Bateson - Administrative Officer

Independent Chair

Ken Patterson

Directors

The Directors on the Board and the bodies they represent are as follows:

COMMUNITIES / USERS

Communities

Timothy Duffy - Colin Glen Trust
Jim Blaney - Glen Road Environmental Action Group

Local Conservation Groups

Terry Enright - Black Mountain Environment Group
John Gray - Cave Hill Conservation Campaign

Recreation Groups

Eric Rainey - The Duke of Edinburgh Council

LANDOWNING / MANAGING

Farmers

George Campbell - Ulster Farmers Union
Ian Simpson - Ulster Farmers Union

Local Economic

Kevin Murray - Belfast Hills Waste Management Operators

Quarries

Gordon Best - NI Quarry Products Association

Nature Conservation

Mike Dobson - The National Trust

STATUTORY

Cllr. Mel Lucas - Antrim Borough Council
Cllr. Jim Rodgers - Belfast City Council
Alderman Cecil Calvert - Lisburn City Council
Cllr. Janet Crilly - Newtownabbey Borough Council

Treasurer

John M^cMullan (co opted director)



BHP MISSION & OBJECTIVES

The mission for the Belfast Hills Partnership is

- To provide a practical and integrated management mechanism for the Belfast Hills thereby contributing to the conservation, protection and enhancement of its natural, built and cultural heritage and providing for responsible countryside enjoyment.
- To contribute to the quality of life of communities on the fringes of the Belfast Hills, to rural residents of the area and the wider urban & rural environment.
- To work in partnership with others towards the realisation of the Belfast Hills vision, within a Belfast Hills Sustainable Development Initiative.



Core funded by:
Antrim Borough Council
Belfast City Council
Environment and Heritage Service
(Department of the Environment)
Lisburn City Council
Newtownabbey Borough Council



The strategic aims of the Partnership are to

- Conserve, protect and enhance the natural, cultural and built heritage of the Belfast Hills.
- Encourage individuals, communities and organisations to care for the Belfast Hills.
- Raise awareness of the value of the Belfast Hills and of issues relating to their protection.
- Manage existing recreational use of the Belfast Hills.
- Support and assist farmers and landowners under pressure from urban development, and from inappropriate forms of countryside recreation.
- Contribute to the economic regeneration of communities in the Belfast Hills and adjoining city.
- Contribute to a positive image of Belfast, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and Antrim through an attractive, well managed and functioning visual backdrop to these areas.

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