

# Belfast Hills Partnership

## Visitor Facility Survey 2008



## **Introduction and Objectives**

In August and September 2008 the Belfast Hills Partnership undertook a short study on visitor facilities available in the Belfast Hills. This study provides an update of the Visitor Facility Survey undertaken by the Partnership in 2005 enabling progress to be examined. The study included information on the total land area open to public access, visitor numbers and the various issues facing site managers as they work to maintain and enhance these sites. Future plans for each site were also discussed, along with the envisaged role of the Belfast Hills Partnership enabling such plans to be successfully achieved.

## **Methodology**

There are six major sites open to the public across the Belfast Hills, namely:

- Colin Glen Forest park, managed by Colin Glen Trust
- Glenside Community Woodland, managed by Bryson House
- Slievenacloy Nature Reserve, managed by the Ulster Wildlife Trust
- Divis and Black Mountain, managed by the National Trust
- Belfast Castle & Estate, managed by Belfast City Council
- Carnmoney Hill, managed by the Woodland Trust

These sites were visited by staff of the Belfast Hills Partnership and a check list of facilities available and site condition was completed. Subsequent to this a meeting with the site manager was arranged to gain incite into maintenance schemes of work, staffing, future plans for the site etc.

## **Summary of Results**

Total area: 1,490 hectares approx (this is an increase of 190 hectares from 2005 due to the National Trusts purchase of additional parts of the Black Mountain).

Estimated visitor numbers: 600,000 to 700,000, not including Belfast Zoo (300,000). This has remained unchanged since 2005, however a number of site

managers have indicated that they have no real means of monitoring visitor numbers, so figures given are only a rough guide.

Facilities available: Due to the individuality of all six sites, facilities available are indicated in terms of the number of sites that offer such. The 'change' column enables the differences between 2008 and 2005 to be seen at a glance.

<b>Visitor Facility</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>Change</b>
Viewpoints	6	6	0
Site signs	6	5	+1
Car Park provided	5	5	0
Accessible by public transport	5	5	0
Organised events for the public	5	5	0
Wheelchair provision in place	4	4	0
Benches provided	5	4	+1
Site brochure available	5	4	+1
Security at Car Park	3	3	0
Signage from the public highway	3	3	0
Self guided trail available	5	3	+2
Toilets *	3	2	+1
Reception area*	2	2	0
Exhibition centre*	2	2	0
Café	1	2	-1
Children's play area	2	1	+1

\* It should be noted that the National Trust are currently undergoing building work to provide toilets, reception and exhibition space (official opening date of March 2009 planned). These were however not available at the time of this survey so are not included in the above table.

Main problems:

Key issues:

- Lack of funding
- antisocial behaviour
- fly tipping
- fires
- flooding & associated path erosion

Other issues:

- mountain bikers
- site maintenance
- vandalism
- staffing
- joy riders
- grey hounds

It is interesting to note that although fires and flooding are new to the list of issues outlined by the site managers there were a number of other issues listed in 2005 which are no longer highlighted as a major problem. The 2005 list included:

- dumping asbestos
- dumping
- poor car parking facilities
- dog fouling
- stray dogs
- Government inertia

For a list of recent and current site developments see appendix 1.

Future plans for the site:

There are a great variety of future plans for these sites within the Belfast Hills including:

- path resurfacing
- drainage work
- additional bridges and footpaths
- removal of invasive species
- replanting
- installing various signs and panels
- installing picnic tables, benches
- self guided trails (including Divis to Lady Dixon link)
- additional access links
- printing brochures
- setting up visitor counters
- new visitor centres
- ongoing maintenance
- biodiversity surveys

For a more comprehensive breakdown of what each site has planned in the immediate future please see appendix 2.

It should be noted that some of the more adventurous plans stated in the 2005 survey such as a mountain bike trail, forming an arena for outdoor festivals, an outdoor pursuits centre and campsite facilities appear to no longer be on the agenda.

### **Role of the Belfast Hills Partnership**

A range of roles for the BHP were envisaged by the site managers, while acknowledging the importance of their current work in bring site managers together to enable the sharing of problems and experiences.

- Undertaking an awareness role
- Undertaking/promoting research projects
- Assisting with fund raising

- Helping advertise the sites
- Providing a strategic overview
- Helping in the production of maps for the Emergency Services
- Lobbying on a wider scale e.g. enforcement of nets on waste lorries
- Facilitating the sharing of information among site managers

## **Conclusions**

The 2008 Visitor Facility Survey outlines not only the wide range of facilities available in the Belfast Hills, but also the progress that has been achieved since 2005. Across the hills there are now increased site signage, seating, toilets, children's play area, site brochures and self guided trails. The only facility to be reduced was a café. The future plans stated are still as numerous as in 2005, with aspirations now including linkages between sites, this may be indicative of a more holistic outlook on the Belfast hills.

The report indicates that although there are still issues and problems to be tackled, the numbers of problems have been reduced. This may be attributed to some extent to the investment made in redesigning a number of car parks, as well as the hard work undertaken by the respective site managers to engage with the general public who use their sites. Despite such progress the site managers were still very positive about the need for the Belfast Hills Partnership particularly in promoting the positive use of the Belfast Hills and in facilitating joint up thinking between the site managers.

There are now a wide range of visitor facilities available in the Belfast Hills; however no site manager has undertaken any visitor surveys to obtain a better insight into how they use the sites and what facilities they would expect to see on site, along with an indication of their satisfaction with the site and area in general. A questionnaire such as given in appendix 3 would help site managers cater better for their current visitors, and subsequently attract more people onto their

sites. BHP therefore endeavours to fill this information gap in 2009 while continuing to carryout its varying roles of site promotion, strategic overview, lobbying and assistance to the site managers.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Breakdown of Recent and Current Site Developments**

#### **Colin Glen Forest Park**

- Major improvements to surfaced paths
- Expansion of Car Park
- Interpretive Signage
- Fossil Exhibition
- Green Flag Award

#### **Slievenacloy Nature reserve**

- New styles, gates, toilets and paths
- Interpretive Panels and Viewpoints
- Car Parks
- Designation as Local Nature Reserve

#### **Divis & Black Mountain**

- Land purchase on Black Hill
- Fencing
- Paths, seats and post signage
- Interpretive Panels
- Wildlife Pond
- Car Park upgraded
- Refurbishment of Missen Huts with toilets
- Refurbishment of Barn, accessible toilet and interpretive exhibition

#### **Carnmoney Hill**

- Gateway development at Knockenagh Avenue entrance
- Wildlife pond

- Interpretive Signage
- Designation as Local Nature Reserve
- Improvement works on some paths
- New fencing at the O'Neil Rd entrance

### **Cave Hill Country Park & Castle**

- Major Path Improvement Programme
- Visitor Counters Project
- Upper Hightown Car Park upgraded
- New boards in Cave Hill Exhibition at Belfast Castle

### **Glenside Community Woodland & Other**

- Paths and drainage upgrade
- New paths and bridge created

## **Appendix 2**

### **Proposed Site Developments**

#### **Colin Glen Forest Park**

- Refurbishment of Colin Glen Forest Park Centre
- Heritage Project including Interpretive Panels

#### **Slievenacloy Nature reserve**

- Link with Cemex-Colin Glen

#### **Divis & Black Mountain**

- Refurbishment of Divis Lodge for public use

#### **Carnmoney Hill**

- Refurbishment of Community Centre to contain interpretive exhibits
- Possible major extension of Country Park across Hill summit

#### **Cave Hill Country Park & Belfast Castle**

- Further path improvements
- Exhibition Upgrade?

#### **Glenside Community Woodland & Other**

- Divis-Dixon Access Link including new steps, upgraded paths, signage and interpretation
- Slievenacloy-Cemex-Colin Glen link including new paths and interpretation
- Ligoniel land purchase, new paths and interpretation.

**Appendix 3**

**BELFAST HILLS VISITOR SURVEY**  
**On behalf of the Belfast Hills Partnership**

Interviewer: .....  
 Date: ..... (Please record if this is a bank holiday or other special period)  
 Time: .....  
 Weather conditions: .....  
 Area on site where interview took place: .....

Hello, my name is ..... and I am doing a survey of visitors to the Belfast Hills on behalf of the Belfast Hills Partnership.

May I ask you a few questions? (It will take about 5 minutes).

a. Are you aged 16+ ?

Yes	Go to Q1
No	Thank and close interview

1. How often do you visit this site?

Everyday	
A few times a week	
About once a week	
About once a fortnight	
About once a month	
About 2-6 times per year	
About once a year	
Not sure/irregular	
First visit	

2. If they have visited before ask – when do you mainly visit the site?

Weekdays	
Weekends	
Holidays	
Special events	
Other (specify)	

3. What form of transport did you use to get here today?

Walked	
Car	
Bicycle	
Bus	
Taxi	
Other (specify)	

4. Where did you travel from to come to the site today?

work	
Home	
School/place of education	
Hotel/B&B/hostel	
Another local attraction	
Other (specify)	

5. Which of the following best describes the type of group you are with today?

Alone	
With family and/or friends	
Part of a club or organisation	
Part of a school group	
Other (specify)	

6. Including yourself how many people are in your group?.....

7. How long are you planning to stay/have you stayed in the site today?

Under ½ hour	
½ – 1 hour	
1 – 2 hours	
2 – 3 hours	
3 – 4 hours	
4 hours +	

8. What activities are you planning to do in the site today?

Walking	
Walking the dog	
Cycling	
Jogging	
Picnic/BBQ	
Other (specify)	

9. Where do you normally live?

N. Ireland – give post code	
Overseas – give country	

10. Where did you get information about the site/area you are visiting?

Live close by	
Been here before	
Word of mouth	
Brochure	
Tourist Info Centre	
Internet	
Advert in paper/magazine	
Other (specify)	

11. I am going to read out a list of items which you generally find in parks and would like you to say how important they are to you.

Now looking at the same list please state how you think this park rates.

	Importance in general			How this park performs		
	V.imp	Quite	Not imp.	V.good	Average	Poor
Signage to get to site						
Car Parking						
Availability of public transport						
Information Boards						
Self guided trails						
High quality paths –suitable for prams & wheelchairs						
Benches						
Picnic tables						
Toilets						
Café						
Organised events						
Obvious staff presence						
Cleanliness/lack of litter						

Overall how satisfied are you with this site?

Very satisfied	
Quite satisfied	
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	
Quite dissatisfied	
Very dissatisfied	
Don't know	

12. Have you visited any other sites in the Belfast Hills?

Cave Hill Country Park	
Divis/Black Mountain	
Carnmoney Hill	
Glenside Community Woodland	
Colin Glen Forest Park	
Slievenacloy Nature Reserve	
Other (specify)	

13. Overall, how satisfied are you with the Belfast Hills Area?

Very satisfied	
Quite satisfied	
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	
Quite dissatisfied	
Very dissatisfied	
Don't know	

Write down any comments as to why they are satisfied or dissatisfied.

---

I would now like to ask you some background questions which will be used for analysis purposes only.

14. Which of the following ethnic backgrounds would you describe yourself as belonging?

White		Other Asian	
Irish Traveller		Black Caribbean	
Mixed		Black African	
Indian		Other Black	
Pakistani		Chinese	
Bangladeshi		Other (specify below)	

15. Which age group are you in?

16 - 24	
25 - 39	
40 - 59	
60 +	

16. Which of these descriptions fits you best?

Full-time student	
Full-time employed	
Part-time employed	
Looking for work	
Home duties	
Retired	

17. What is your highest level of formal education?

Secondary School	
Technical College	
University Degree	

**Thank you for your assistance.**

14. Record gender

Male	
Female	