



Foreword



On behalf of both the Belfast Hills Partnership and the Belfast Hills Landscape Partnership Scheme Committee, I invite you to read this project evaluation summary which provides a snapshot of the work undertaken through our Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) from 2012 to 2017.

Throughout the 29 projects there has been significant impacts and outcomes achieved. We secured a total of £1.8 million to enable this

programme of works to occur, with £1.1 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and over £650,000 from a wide range of other funders.

LPS projects have directly engaged 17,000 people in activities enhancing the rich heritage and biodiversity of the Hills, including over 10,000 school children. We have trained and built the capacity of all of these participants whether using direct skills enhancing training, awareness raising or increasing understanding of heritage and biodiversity. We have completed 5 significant community archaeological digs across the Hills attracting participation of 3,474 people, not to mention the enhancements of physical infrastructure in the Hills in the form of visitor facilities, information panels, stiles, new paths, fencing, tree planting and removal of invasive species.

We have carried through our commitment to re-connect the Hills with the communities that surround them. We have reinvigorated people's association with the rich heritage, geology and biodiversity of the Hills and engendered a sense of ownership and belonging to this valuable community asset. There now exists greater confidence that this connection will allow the Hills to be maintained for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

As Board and LPS Committee members we are extremely proud and grateful for the dedication and enthusiasm of our LPS staff team who have gone above and beyond our expectations. Their skills, experience and willingness to deliver high quality opportunities for those that have engaged in the programme have been invaluable throughout.

A big thank you must go to our lead funder, the Heritage Lottery Fund and all our other support funders, who are too many to mention here.


As Board and LPS Committee members we have had the pleasure of overseeing and steering the delivery of this ambitious and exciting programme. We now move our attention to offering the same support for the implementation of the 'Our Bright Future' scheme and other programmes which will further enhance the work undertaken through the LPS programme. In addition, we will continue to endeavour to secure new opportunities to enhance and improve the Hills as an asset to its many beneficiaries.



Danny O'Connor

Chair Belfast Hills Partnership &
Belfast Hills Landscape Partnership Scheme Committee





It is our vision that we will restore, both physically and in the minds of our people, the Belfast Hills as a vital living asset for Belfast and beyond; an asset to actively enjoy, gain inspiration from and protect as a living part of our Belfast and Lagan Valley region.

Introduction

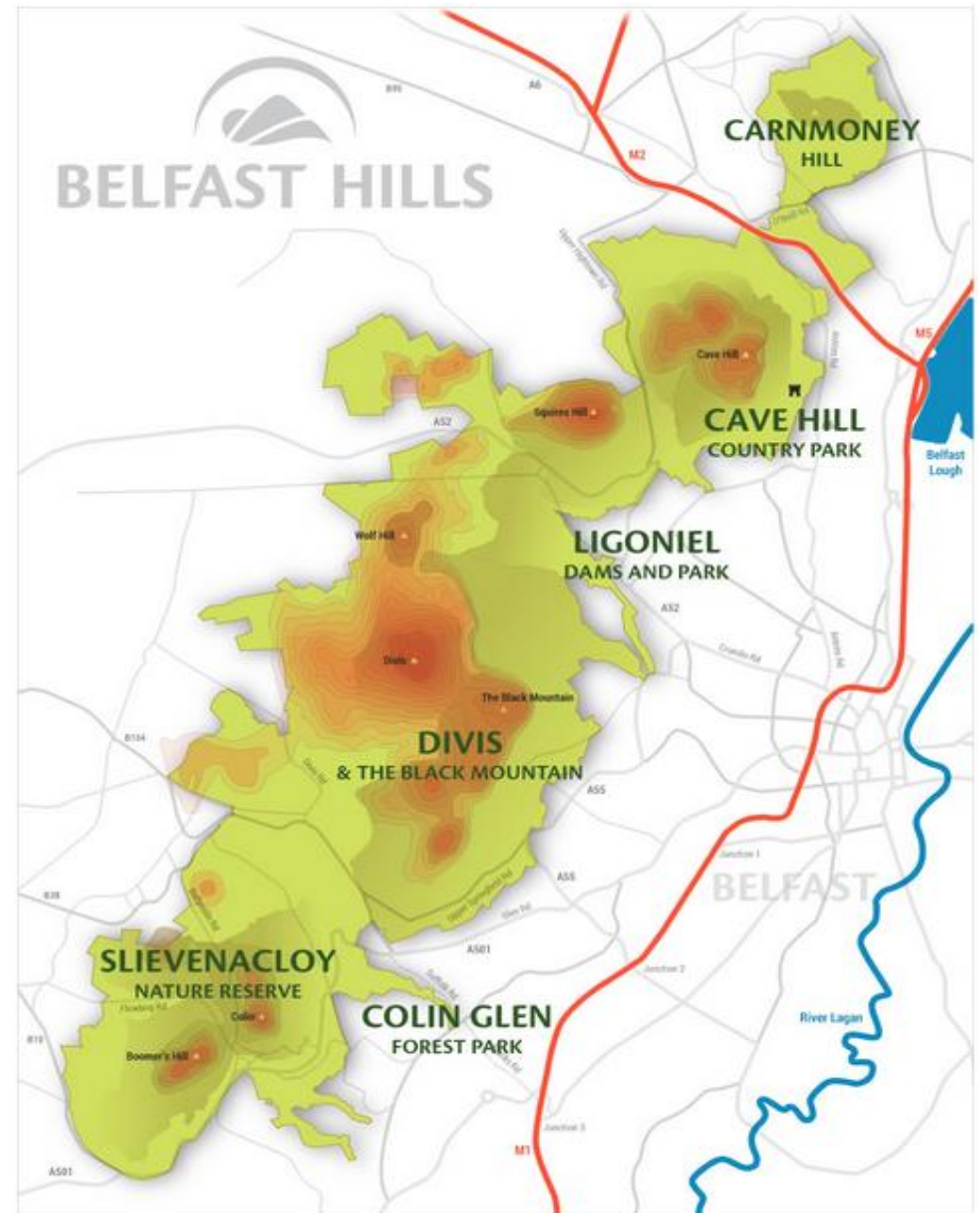
In 2012 the Belfast Hills Partnership was successful in securing £1,157,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the delivery of a Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS). Match funding from a range of sources brought the project total to £1,807,386. The LPS vision for the Belfast Hills is:

That we will restore, both physically and in the minds of our people, the Belfast Hills as a vital living asset for Belfast and beyond, an asset to actively enjoy, gain inspiration from and protect as a living part of our Belfast and Lagan Valley region. It is time to reconnect our people to this great landscape after many years of political strife which left many feeling afraid to visit our surrounding hills.

The programme objectives to achieve this vision are that we would:

1. Directly address the current threats and opportunities to improve the landscape of the Belfast Hills
2. Raise awareness and involvement of local communities in the historic and cultural features of the Belfast Hills
3. Create more opportunities for physical, intellectual and sensory access to the Hills, its recreation potential and local heritage
4. Ensure that high quality up-to-date training and skills required to address the above are locally available

To achieve these objectives 29 projects were undertaken under 4 programme headings. Some highlights and key outputs have been provided in this summary document. A more comprehensive look at the quantitative and qualitative outcomes, consultation with a number of participants, evaluation of achievements, project strengths and challenges, differences achieved, financial management, scheme sustainability and future recommendations are found in the final evaluation document available to download from the Belfast Hills Partnership website.



Project Achievements

Below are the key outputs of the various projects to provide a flavour of the impact that the Landscape Partnership Scheme has had on the Belfast Hills area.

Conservation of built and natural features

1.1 Industrial Site Renovation

There are numerous quarries and industrial sites across the Belfast Hills, both historic and active. The LPS staff worked with site managers to initiate improvements for landscape and biodiversity alike.

- 6100 native trees planted to stabilise the scree slopes, increase biodiversity and enhance site aesthetics
- 10,810m² of wildflower were sown
- Heather transplant trials completed
- 380m² scrub removed
- Invasive sycamores removed
- 1 pond cleared
- Seed collection training at Slievenacloy for volunteers
- 40 students and volunteers trained

1.2 Wildfire Project

Deliberate wildfires are an ongoing issue in the Belfast Hills. Mapping and surveying are essential to better understand the impact of these fires, enabling informed management decisions to be made by site managers.

- 30 individual wildfires mapped across the Belfast Hills from 2012-2016 involving volunteers
- GIS training courses run every year to train people in use of GPS/GIS for mapping purposes
- Wildfire map of areas at risk across whole of Belfast Hills created and information passed to site managers and NI Fire & Rescue Service
- Controlled burn carried out as part of a demonstration event on Cave Hill 2014
- Fire breaks created at Cave Hill 2015
- Meetings with all site managers 3 times a year
- 600 acres upland surveyed
- Schools wildfire DVD project

1.3 Farmland/grassland Habitat Enhancement

Large parts of the Belfast Hills are made up of privately owned agricultural land. A grant scheme was set up to encourage biodiversity and aesthetic improvements.

- 1630m of fencing and hedge planting completed
- 5000 trees planted
- 1600m² wildflowers planted
- Installation of steel protective grills at the entrance to known bat roosts.
- Annual seed collection by volunteers for use in other areas of the Belfast Hills
- Donor green hay provided to industrial sites as a further source of wildflower seed

1.4 Invasive Species Project

Invasive species are a problem throughout the Belfast Hills, particularly along its river corridors. This scheme enabled mapping and systematic removal of invasives.

- Extensive pulling of Himalayan Balsam plants (5000m²) from Colin Glen, Cave Hill and Glencairn with the help of volunteers
- 7400m² Japanese Knotweed sprayed
- Survey of invasive species conducted at Colin Glen, Ligoniel, Glencairn & Cave Hill.
- Contractors employed to spray Japanese Knotweed at Colin Glen, Ligoniel & Glencairn

1.5 Built Heritage

The Belfast Hills are rich in archaeology, however very little information or events were available to engage the general public. Many historic structures are being lost due to neglect. This project aimed to combat these issues.

- Production of a series of detailed surveys across the Hills.
- 5 community archaeology digs, attracting 3474 people
- 10 weeks of school visits in local area around dig sites
- 6 public open days completed
- 6 talks to local groups regarding the history of the Hills
- 6 days of archaeological surveying training for general public
- Farmhouse complex and lime kiln on Carnmoney Hill have been restored/ consolidated and are safe structures



"I think archaeology is awesome, it's better learning here instead of school because you can see it up close."

Local School Child who attended Archaeology Dig



Project Achievements

Community Participation

2.1 Hills Heritage Awareness Project

To combat the lack of awareness regarding the heritage of the Belfast Hills.

- 10,000 heritage booklets produced and distributed
- Reconstruction heritage images created
- 10,000 townlands and website material leaflets / posters produced
- All information made available within the BHP website

2.2 Hills Geology Awareness Project

To combat the lack of awareness regarding the rich geology of the Belfast Hills.

- 'Rocky Road Show' initiative which visited 29 local schools engaging 925 pupils
- 4 geology themed events delivered engaging 163 people
- 21 local people attended 6 week geology night class
- 10000 copies of Belfast Hills geology leaflet / poster produced and distributed
- Geology info now available on the BHP website

2.3 Oral History Project

To ensure that local stories about the Belfast Hills are not lost over time.

- 26 people recounted their oral histories about the Hills covering a wide area and range of topics. Over 3 hours of oral histories put on website as sound bites

2.4 River Awareness Project

To increase awareness of the importance of local rivers which have their source in the Belfast Hills but suffer from pollution, invasive species, culverting etc.

- Total of 1972 people engaged (657 pupils and 1315 general public)
- 10 Salmon / Trout in the classroom projects
- 1 discovering rivers workshop for 8 schools
- 8 heritage talks / lectures
- 8 reminiscence workshops
- 1 river clean up with four communities along the river
- 1 historic landscape rivers poster produced and distributed (1000 copies)
- 13 biodiversity and heritage themed events delivered across various locations
- Week long River Festival delivered
- Schools GCSE river studies work and creation of loan box

2.5 Innovative Artwork and Interpretation

To interpret the landscape of the Belfast Hills through art.

- One art sculpture standing 4m high developed and installed
- Engaged with 26 school children from St Vincent De Paul Primary School
- Creative consultation with Mountain Hill Youth Group, Ligoniel Improvement Association Committee and Ligoniel History Group

2.6 Signage and Interpretation

To generate a greater awareness of the area through an identifiable Belfast Hills brand.

- Production of a large 'pop-up' heritage interpretation panel which has been on display in 23 different venues with an estimated total audience of 164,000 people
- 5000 printed OS maps covering the Belfast Hills area
- Interpretation strategy developed and informing ongoing BHP / LPS work
- Created a new brand identity to promote the Hills to visitors and promote a greater sense of identity
- Each sign in the Belfast Hills now have completely welcoming signage, heritage panels, way marking and view point signage with the distinctive Belfast Hills brand

2.7 Community Built & Natural Heritage Project

To involve the local community in their local heritage through creative means.

- 6 heritage information panels produced
- Heritage patchwork quilt produced by 8 ladies from Hannahstown
- 2 Seating areas designed by Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, Rathfern Community Group and local school children
- 2 mosaics produced involving the Lenadoon Community Forum, Friends of the Half Moon Lake and local school children
- 11 people involved in heritage surveys in the Belfast Hills

2.8 Planning Issues Project

To protect the hills from inappropriate development, and to encourage local community groups to respond to applications pertaining to their own area.

- One public information and training session on the changes to planning and community planning attended by 13 people
- 111 applications responded to and relevant local groups / individuals informed about application and any matters for concern



"They developed a real empathy while looking after their salmon. This totally engaged them & encouraged them to find out more."

Teacher talking about Salmon in the classroom project



Project Achievements

Access and Learning

3.1 Access routes and links installed and improved

There is a high demand for access across the Belfast Hills. The installation of quality upland paths is essential to ensure that visitors to the sites are not negatively impacting upon the habitats they are there to enjoy.

- A network of paths which are built to a high standards at Divis summit, McArt's Fort, Ligoniel Park, Limestone Quarry, Slievnacloy, Upper Colin Glen, Carnmoney Hill and Horseshoe Bend and Ligoniel Dams
- The combined lengths of the paths are approximately 5600m
- Replacement fencing installed at Glen Road, branded with BHP and National Trust logos, with pedestrian access and lockable vehicle gates
- Relocation of visitor counters to more accurately count visitors
- Wildflower meadow created at the Horseshoe Bend site, incorporating new fencing, wildflower plugs and tree / shrub planting to ensure path blended with surrounding environment
- New car park off Dunanney Lane, Carnmoney
- New entrance way for Horse Shoe Bend site

3.2 New recreation project

Encouraging recreation appropriate to the area that will benefit the users physical and mental health.

- A new Junior Orienteering map developed for around Belfast Castle grounds
- An updated Orienteering map for the whole of Cave Hill Country Park developed
- New permanent orienteering markers – three new schools courses installed
- 199 young people used the new orienteering trail with BHP staff during the LPS

3.3 Getting to know the hills

Large parts of the Belfast Hills had no means of accurately recording visitor numbers, with very little know about the users to the sites.

- 21 visitor counters installed
- 250 visitor surveys undertaken and information provided to site managers

3.4 New heritage site access

Much of the rich heritage of the Belfast Hills are hard to access. A number of innovative measures were undertaken to increase this accessibility.

- 4 new stiles and 1 pedestrian gate installed for heritage access
- 16 360 degree photography images recorded and available online
- 10 artefacts turned into 3D images available online

3.5 New website material

In order to present the wide array of information produced through the Landscape Partnership Scheme and its partners to the general public in a clear and appealing manner new online resources were required.

- New Belfast Hills website produced, providing a simple platform for users to access information on everything from sites and projects, to funders, volunteering opportunities and events
- The new app provides a convenient pocket guide for users when out and about in the Hills, covering how to get there, attractions, walks, events and maps
- The Belfast Hills website in 2017 had over 53,000 individual people accessing the site (with almost 106,200 page views), a significant increase from the previous website which at its peak had 13,000 hits per annum
- 2963 followers on Facebook and 2083 on Twitter as of Dec 2017



"Thank you very much for making my mountain, which I view every morning, an exciting as well as a beautiful place"

Local Community Group member



Project Achievements

Heritage skills and training

As part of the Landscape Partnership Scheme a series of training events were held on a regular basis with the aim of engaging local people to get involved and upskilling of volunteers. Volunteering, schools and events programmes were also undertaken.

4.1 Walking the hills training

- 4 training courses held, attended by 42 people
- 19 people attended a first aid course

4.2 Biological surveying training

- 22 courses held, attended by 225 people

4.3 Archaeology training skills

- 9 survey days (training and implementation), attended by 84 people
- 6 talks held, attended by 206 people
- 3 heritage walks held, attended by 57 people
- 3 heritage surveys & reports produced (available on BHP website)
- 3 photographic surveys of heritage sites (available on BHP website)

4.4 Practical conservation skills training

- 15 courses held, attended by 252 people
- 10 volunteer rangers trained (7 currently operating with 3 moved on).

4.5 GIS/Google earth mapping skills

- 11 different 1 day GIS courses have been held, attended by 86 people

4.6 Tourist guide training

- 4 week part time tour guiding course held, 11 people attended
- Series of talks delivered to Visitor Welcome Centres staff
- 10,000 copies of a Belfast Hills recreation guide produced and distributed

4.7 Hills apprentice project

- 53 students from 7 local colleges & universities participated week long courses

4.8 Landscape photography & recording training

- 10 people attended a three day training course.

4.9 Events and talks

- 65 heritage themed events delivered, 3616 people attended

4.10 Volunteering

- 2138 volunteer days achieved
- 681 different individuals involved
- 30 regular volunteers
- 14 volunteers progressed into employment
- Achieved nationally recognised quality standard of work 'Investing in Volunteers'

4.11 Schools landscape and environment

- 80 different schools involved
- 10,233 young people reached over 6 years



*"I had great fun and learnt a lot,
and the craic was always good"*

Volunteer with the Belfast Hills Partnership



Conclusions

The Landscape Partnership Scheme has clearly improved the landscape throughout the Belfast Hills, not only enhancing the physical infrastructure at various sites, but also improving how local people view and treat the Hills, as well as increasing their capacity to conserve and manage its local heritage.

The programme raised the awareness of the Hills, particularly within those communities that surround them. People expressed a greater appreciation of this natural asset on their doorstep, enhanced involvement in activity throughout its various sites. There was also an increased understanding of how to enjoy the Hills whilst minimising any negative impacts on their landscape and environment.

By opening up the physical infrastructure across the Hills, significantly enhancing the number and quality of access points into the Hills, as well as improving their features to increase their attractiveness, the Hills are now more widely used and utilised. Thousands more people have taken advantage of the projects delivered through this programme, and evidence also suggests more people are accessing the Hills independently of the Belfast Hills Partnership. A key aspect of this increased capacity to use the Hills is greater awareness of their offering, improved understanding and capacity to access them safely without negatively impacting them, and a greater appreciation of the wider benefits that can be gained by this increased access including physical and mental health benefits.

As well as increasing the understanding and appreciation of the Hills by local residents / communities the programme was also extremely successful in delivering a programme that built the capacity of a pool of motivated and enthusiastic volunteers through the provision of a dedicated training and capacity building programme, importantly led by the Volunteer Officer. This effort was independently verified through the external assessment carried out by Volunteer Now of the volunteering programme. This resulted in the achievement of the Investing In Volunteers Award, a quality standard mark for organisations working with volunteers.

The programmes' sustainability and legacy has been ensured by a number of important elements including:

- Funding support from the HLF 10 year maintenance budget (2018-2018).
- 10 year maintenance agreements with site owners.
- An enthusiastic and motivated volunteer pool providing a dedicated resource that can be used across all aspects of the BHP LPS's work.
- Funding from Big Lottery Fund's Our Bright Future Programme which allows continuation of delivery across key LPS projects until 2021.

Additionally, the Board has continued to develop its relations with important stakeholders across all aspects of the Hills work, ensuring opportunities can be accessed and maximised as they become available.

This programme was undoubtedly a huge success for all stakeholders involved, not least the Belfast Hills Partnership and its direct partners (i.e. site managers, statutory agencies, local authorities etc.). Those communities within and surrounding the Hills and the interest groups (i.e. landowners, farmers, community and voluntary groups, schools, universities, students etc.) have all benefitted immensely through their engagement and participation in the LPS programme. The impacts and outcomes of this programme will be felt for years to come, but it is critical to ensure the foundation developed by the BHP LPS programme is built on and maximised in the future.

The wide ranging benefits of this scheme have been as a direct result of all partners hard work, dedication and enthusiasm for the project. It is this partnership working that will ensure that the legacy of the scheme will be experienced by many for years to come.

Recommendations

Recommendations

To strengthen the future legacy of this Landscape Partnership Scheme delivery the following recommendations should be undertaken:

1. To ensure all relevant maintenance agreements are appropriately managed and overseen ensuring effective delivery.
2. To link in with other key projects that impact the Hills.
3. To continue to communicate effectively with others across the Hills area.
4. To secure additional funding where relevant to offset any costs associated with ongoing legacy delivery.
5. To maintain all regular methods of evaluating and monitoring LPS and BHP delivery.
6. To continue to seek support to address issues that are not currently included in the OBF programme.
7. To further consider and implement appropriate actions suggested by the Investing in Volunteers assessment and report.
8. To develop new projects which build on the LPS to the benefit of the Belfast Hills, its people and wildlife.

"My view of local history has changed, lived nearby for 40 years and wasn't even aware of it"

Local resident to the Belfast Hills

