





## COMPANY INFORMATION

at 31/3/2021

### Directors

C Chisholm  
A Crean  
E Cunningham  
M Donnelly  
R Drew  
N Enright  
N Fraser  
C Hamill  
D Kinahan - Co-opted  
V McAuley  
I McCurley  
A McFarland – Co-opted  
M Morgan

### Independent Chair and Director

D Flinn

### Company Secretary

J Bradley

### Treasurer

P McCloskey – Co-opted

### Company Number      Charity Ref Numbers

NI053189                  XR70288    NIC100859

### Auditors

MTS Accountants  
1 Lanyon Quay  
Belfast  
BT1 3LG

### Bankers

First Trust Bank  
35 University Road  
Belfast  
BT7 1ND

### Solicitors

Cleaver Fulton Rankin  
50 Bedford Street  
Belfast  
BT2 7FW





## CHAIR'S REPORT 2020-21

Every Chair across the world must be starting their 2020-2021 Annual report with the word – “unprecedented”. This is of course no exaggeration in what has been such a tumultuous year for us all across the globe.

Nevertheless it is my job to attempt to summarise what this year has meant for Belfast Hills Partnership. It started with an empty office and what can only be described as confusion and questions as to what to do next. Jim Bradley and the team responded very quickly to a new regime of working from home and developed and maintained good management and communications systems for staff working remotely and the Board. With a good proportion of staff employed to work face to face with the public, unfortunately and inevitably BHP had to put 4 of the 9 staff on furlough for varying times.

Early on, BHP worked with all of our funders on restructuring of funding and redrafting of 20-21 Work Plans. I would like, on behalf of the Board, to thank all of our funders who showed great understanding and support to get us through these strange times and circumstances. It is also a testament to both staff and the Board that with the exception of those targets requiring face to face interactions such as volunteering and habitat improvement task, virtually all of our other targets were achieved plus new targets pertinent to Covid19 and its effects.

For instance, we carried out new remote survey work amongst young people and the impacts Covid19 was having on their lives and concerns. We compiled a Belfast Hills Walks Booklet for Belfast Health Trust so that individual users and bubbles could do their best to get outdoors and stay active as much as possible. We carried out additional surveys on issues which were suddenly spiking across the hills such as flytipping and wildfires. We delivered a range of talks and walks remotely and

even managed to hold two walks in Ligoniel and Slievenacloy between lockdowns.

Other planned work less impacted by Covid19 continued as planned – the Tree Nursery development continued apace with staff needing to come in regularly to water the saplings and wildflowers during that incredible heatwave. The administrative staff and Treasurer worked hard to set up and adapt our financial procedures to a new Xero software system which has proved a very positive change. The new partnership with the Woodland Trust was launched, albeit slightly delayed, with the appointment of our new Woodland Officer in the autumn and planting of thousands of trees over the winter.

In Year funding was awarded to begin work on hosting a major Wildfire conference planned for November 2021, although this has understandably been postponed until 2022. On a final note regarding funding, we did manage to submit an Empowering Young People application which we are happy to report was successful this year. Congratulations to the team particularly Lizzy Pinkerton on achieving this.

It is clear that against the odds this has been a good year which has demonstrated the Partnership's resilience. In no small part this has been due to the dedication and hard work of the Partnership Manager Jim Bradley and our staff, and Board members and all of our volunteers and so many more partners and supporters who have played their part in keeping us on course and moving forward. I would like to sincerely thank you all and commend this report to the Board.



## MANAGER'S REPORT 2020-21

The year started as it did for so many of us with a flurry of rapidly changing systems and adjustments to working from home and trying to find new ways to deliver on a range of work areas. With our Tree Nursery and outdoor sites needing regular care and attention we could never be completely absent from our offices, and managed to re-start some volunteer activities with smaller numbers on open sites as government guidelines constantly evolved and changed.

We also found new directions to work in, such as sending over 200 wildflower packs to individuals and schools in spring 2020 which were very gratefully received during lockdown.

We developed a range of virtual site walks and events to encourage people to discover the lesser known public sites as the major sites saw very substantial increases in their visitor numbers. It became clear that the Belfast Hills have a vital role to play in the physical and mental health of our communities. Along with a wave of new first time visitors seen right across the hills, we also saw parking, litter and vandalism problems. We had to focus resources on flytipping survey and reporting, reporting of unauthorised motorbike scrambling and updating our information for visitors.

There were however landmark changes beyond Covid19, one of which was the start of our Belfast Hills Woodland Project with a new officer and funding from the Woodland Trust.

As well as these highlights, other key works we carried out are outlined below:



## **IMPROVING – making positive changes on the ground**

This was particularly hard hit by Covid19, as we rely so heavily on our volunteer groups to deliver on these practical improvements. We have continued our programmes of improvements across a broad range of habitats, species and our local landscape:-

**Woodland Creation** - 6ha woodlands planted across a number of sites - mostly by contractors due to Covid19 restrictions

**Ponds** – Two wildlife ponds cleared

**Wildflowers** – propagation and wildflower plug planting at 2 sites

**Invasives** – controlled or removed at least 6 invasive species including Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, Laurel, Winter Helleborine and Snowberry at 5 sites

**Tree Nursery** – with the help of the volunteers we collected and then propagated acorn, hazel, crab apple, rowan and hawthorn seeds

**Swift Towers** – after 8 years swifts have finally begun nesting in our swift tower at Collin Allotments.



## INVOLVING – getting people directly involved in managing their places

We have engaged directly with a wide range of people to ensure they appreciate, use or help to manage areas in the Hills:-

**Field Volunteering** – despite the restriction in volunteering activities due to Covid19 an equivalent of £10,975 value was gained

**School Grounds** – engaged with 48 pupils from 2 schools and 1 GAA club, helping them to improve their own local environment & school grounds while making sure they understand how their patch links in with the Belfast Hills. Reduced numbers as schools closed for much of the year

**Trainee Rangers & Environmental Skills** – due to restrictions on numbers 5 young people took part in a 16 week training programme to introduce them to careers in the Environmental Sector (compared to 14 in previous years). We did however manage to hold a completely outdoor based Environmental Skills Course over 10 weeks with a further 8 young people

**Health** – this was curtailed significantly due to Covid19, although within a short window of September to November 2020 we managed to carry out 13 walks for 37 adults with learning disabilities from 2 day centres, plus produced a Belfast Walks booklet

**Training** – trained 46 volunteers and members of the public in topics such as wildflower and tree seed collection and propagation techniques, pond creation, lizard, badger and habitat surveying and willow fence making.





## LEARNING – gathering and disseminating more information to help engage people and make changes

1. Firstly we must tell people about the Belfast Hills and our work, which we have done through:-

**Young People** directly involved via Our Bright Future Project and LPS legacy programme – combination of online and face to face interaction. Face to face work with 400 young people, estimate of over 3000 online via various social media campaigns such as ‘Hills at Home’

**Youth consultation** – 200 pupils from a wide range of schools, asking them what impact Covid19 has had on their lives, and what they would like to get involved in going forward, used as the basis for applying for funding for a youth project

**Events Programme** – much of the planned events programme did not happen due to Covid19, however staff held a number of online events and 2 smaller in person events as regulations allowed. 1836 people attended the online events either live, or later via YouTube while 21 people attended the in person events.

2. We also involve people in surveying and monitoring programmes in the Hills so that we have the raw data to show what’s good and also what threats we should prioritize and protect the hills from:-

**Mapping Wildfires** – we mapped 9 wildfires in the hills (a relatively quiet year). Social media via photos or video continues to be invaluable. Local Wildfire Stakeholders Meeting met to consider actions.

**Biodiversity Surveys** – surveys were carried out of 6 priority or protected species and 5 priority habitats in 2020.

**Ash dieback surveys** – continued on 4 surveys of ash dieback in woodlands were carried out at Ligoniel, Belfast Castle Grounds, Upper Colin Glen and Lower Colin Glen. It was present in all sites.

**Pine Marten Surveys** - New Surveys found Pine Marten across front of Black Mt. A prototype Pine Marten nest built & erected.

**Fixed Point Photography** – we completed 4 seasons of Fixed Point Photography visits, taking repeat images from 6 locations to record long term changes and impacts.



## PLANNING – working out how to manage the hills better in the future

As well as producing and carrying out our more general strategic plans, we have taken part or assisted in forward planning in the following ways:-

**Environmental Farming Scheme** – Contact with farmers was very limited due to Covid19 however we worked with Lough Neagh Partnership on a proposal to extend their EFS Group Scheme up the rivers into southern end of Belfast Hills 2021.

**Local Development Plans** – we have been monitoring the ongoing council development plans including Belfast City Council Planning Appeals Commission Hearing stage in November 2020.

**Other Consultations** – we took part or responded to a number of consultations on issues including NI Climate Bill and the NI Environmental Policy & Governance consultation document.

**Planning Proposals** – we responded to 4 key planning applications in the Belfast Hills area and also reported on a number of potential breaches of planning usually relating to construction soil dumping. We were also consulted at pre-application stages on a number of planning proposals in and around the hills.

**Carbon Assessment** - Peat samples were taken at Slievenacloy and sent to QUB for carbon analysis. Further peat depth samples were taken at Divis & Black Mountain to verify previous data. Data from Cave Hill and Divis and Black Mountain were analysed and findings presented for consultation. Discussions on extending study to Collinward with Woodland Trust.



**BELFAST HILLS PARTNERSHIP  
INCOME & EXPENDITURE  
2020-2021**



	<b>2020-2021</b> £	<b>2019-2020</b> £
GROSS INCOME	332,743**	294,852**
GROSS EXPENDITURE	314,488	386,131
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	18,255	(91,279)
TOTAL YEAR END RESERVES	548,394	530,139

\*\* This summary is based on the Independent Assessment for 2020-2021 carried out by MTS Accountants. (See full Assessment for details)

## **PARTNERSHIP STAFF & DIRECTORS** at 31/3/21

### **Staff**

Dr Jim Bradley	Partnership Manager
Dr Lizzy Pinkerton	Scheme Manager
Michelle McClafferty	Administrative & Finance Manager (PT)
Sara McCloskey	Administrative Officer (PT)
Judy Meharg	Hills Project Officer (PT)
Laura Shiels	Environmental Outreach Officer
Jo Boylan	Woodlands Officer
Patricia Deeney	Youth Development Officer
Noel Rice	Wildlife Connections Officer

### **Directors**

The Directors on the Board and the bodies to which they belong are as follows:

**Independent Chair**     David Flinn

### **COMMUNITIES / USERS**

#### **Communities**

Aidan Crean (*Friends of Falls Park*)

Niall Enright (*Upper Springfield Development Trust*)

#### **Local Conservation Groups**

Cormac Hamill (*Cave Hill Conservation Campaign*)

Maria Morgan (*Ligoniel Improvement Association*)

#### **Recreation Groups**

Alan McFarland *Co-opted (Northern Ireland Sports Forum)*

### **LANDOWNING / MANAGING**

#### **Farmers**

Eugene Cunningham (*Ulster Farmers Union*)

Neale Fraser (*Ulster Farmers Union*)

#### **Local Economic**

Russell Drew (*Belfast Hills Waste Management Operators*)

#### **Quarries**

Craig Chisholm (*Mineral Products Association NI*)

#### **Nature Conservation**

Ian McCurley (*Woodland Trust*)

### **STATUTORY**

Cllr. Victoria McAuley (*Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council*)

Cllr. Micheal Donnelly (*Belfast City Council*)

Vacant (*Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council*)

Danny Kinahan (*Co-opted Director*)

#### **Treasurer**

Peter McCloskey (*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.
- Contribute to the quality of life of communities on the fringes of the Belfast Hills, rural residents of the area and to the wider urban & rural environment.
- Work in partnership with others towards the realisation of the Belfast Hills vision, within a Belfast Hills Integrated Management Plan.



Core funded by:  
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Belfast City Council

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council  
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Department of Agriculture,  
Environment and Rural Affairs)

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.



9 Social Economy  
Village,  
Hannahstown Hill,  
Belfast BT17 0XS  
Tel: (028) 90603466

Email:  
info@belfasthills.org  
www.belfasthills.org



# Belfast Hills Partnership

thanks the following funders:-

