



Currently, the River Lagan serves relatively few boat users apart from rowers and canoeists. There are few private boats on the river as there are currently few destinations and limited berthing infrastructure. Rowing is the most common boating activity on the tidal Lagan and canoeing and kayaking are popular activities upstream. These activities generate considerable river interest with competitive events normally held on the river each year.

The Lagan corridor is also very popular with anglers. A designated coarse fishery stretches from the Stranmillis Weir to the first canalised section upstream with the majority of the river through the Park designated as a mixed fishery although it receives more attention from game anglers rather than coarse. A reduction in pollution incidents has also led to the return of salmon to the river.

The river's biggest attraction is its towpath which is fully open for walking and cycling between the Lagan Lookout and the Union Locks near Sprucefield with 500,000 users overall recorded in both 2004 and 2005. A survey amongst walkers established that the most popular area for visits to the towpath was between Stranmillis and Shaw's Bridge. The river is however less accessible on the south bank with only informal paths to Belvoir Park Forest from the Annadale Embankment.

Although Planning Service confirmed that the Gateway proposal did not require completion of an Environmental Impact Assessment, the report suggests that it may be necessary to investigate the specific ecological impacts in more detail to ensure that the necessary precautions have been considered given that Belvoir and Lagan Meadows are designated Sites of Local Nature and Conservation Interest.

This scoping study assumes that a number of the key stakeholders are potential funders having a role to play or will receive a benefit from the project. Possible funding has been identified from Belfast City Council, other Councils, Lagan Valley Regional Park, Department for Social Development, Rivers Agency, Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Ulster Garden Villages Ltd and DCAL Fisheries.

This report establishes that the fundamental elements of the Lagan Gateway Project are achievable within a reasonable period subject to the availability of funding and the necessary agreements. Key issues, which require further action, include completion of an economic appraisal, confirmation of the sources of funding, agreement with all landowners and river users, approval from all statutory bodies, detailed design, tendering and construction.

The Report has identified the opportunity to reuse a very significant element of Belfast's neglected industrial heritage for various amenity uses. In doing so, the project would conserve the key structures from further deterioration for the use of future generations.

The estimated cost of the Gateway Project is £2,900,000.

By adding the cost of the other three locations to the Gateway Project the total cost of the whole project will be in the region of £7,900,000.

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