

5.3.24



Dear Stephen

Re: Belfast Hills Partnership request for an increase in funding support

I am writing on behalf of the Belfast Hills Partnership in the light of ongoing cost of living increases.

Belfast City Council has been a key partner within the Belfast Hills Partnership since its inception in 2005. The Partnership has appreciated both the financial and practical support that it has received over the years. This has enabled the organisation to grow and develop from a small staff team of three individuals to today's team of 6 full time and 9 part time staff.

This experienced and motivated team undertakes a wide range of programmes within the Council Area including habitat and species surveys & improvements, environmental education for young people, volunteering opportunities 3 days a week, addressing antisocial behaviour including fly-tipping & wildfires, tree propagation and planting, community support & engagement, information provision, health walks, research, lobbying, joint platform for discussions and work between partners etc. Please click the link to read last year's [Annual Report](#).

Despite this large organisational growth and success, it has been over 11 years since the Belfast Hills Partnership has asked Belfast City Council for an increase in funding support. Between 2011 and 2023 support costs for the organisation have almost tripled, including a rent increase of 82% - about 5½ times. Our rent has also just gone up by a further 8% in January.

With the ongoing cost of living crisis, the Belfast Hills Partnership continues to provide value for money and seeks to cut costs where possible; however, to enable the organisation to continue caring for the hills, their wildlife and people, it needs an increase in its funding support. An increase in support from the NI Environment Agency (37%) has now been secured, and we are approaching all our Council partners.

Both Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council have got back to confirm they have agreed funding increases of 30%. Please note that from inception our funding ask from the Councils has been strictly in proportion to the land area each council holds within the Belfast Hills area and continues as such with these latest changes.

The current level of funding from Belfast City Council is £36,900, the new amount requested would be £47,970 (an increase of £11,070 i.e. 30%). This money helps us lever further match funding and support from other sources, with the Belfast Hills Partnership bringing in over £460k last year alone supporting local improvement initiatives and jobs.

We appreciate that funds are tight for every organisation, including the Council at this difficult time, but feel that the benefits gained through the work of the Belfast Hills Partnership outweigh this modest request for an additional £11,070 per annum.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Bradley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jim Bradley
Partnership Manager