

Appendix 3: Belfast City Council's response to the draft 10 year outdoor recreation action plan.

1. Do you believe that the vision and aims capture the expressed wish to further develop outdoor recreation opportunities in Northern Ireland?

Vision

The Council agrees with the vision outlined in the draft action plan in terms of 'a wish to further develop outdoor recreation'. The Council believes this could be stated more strongly and would suggest that the following key statements are reinforced in the final version of the vision:

- Include a clear reference to the value/ benefits of outdoor recreation as it may be more meaningful to the wider public;
- Show greater aspiration that 'the Outdoors' is positioned as a key pathway to improve people's wellbeing and provides greater opportunities for an active community;
- Reinforce the quality of the natural resources readily available to deliver the vision.

Aims

The aims highlight the main areas to be contained within an Outdoor recreation action plan however further refinement of the following aims are suggested:

- The second aim on the list may benefit from becoming 2 separate aims, the first focusing one on sustainable access and infrastructure and the second on participation and use;
- The first aim and the last aim are very similar and could possibly be summarised collectively as: 'People understand, enjoy and accept ownership towards the outdoors building a shared ownership towards respecting the natural environment available'.

The Council seeks clarity on whether the definition of outdoor recreation is sufficient for the draft vision and action plan. It appears to incorporate most types of activities but not motorised activities which are a growing type of activity on the river ways in and around Belfast. There is evidence that in other countries/ regions outdoor recreation is determined as both non and motorised activities and would seek confirmation that the exclusion of the motorised activities from this definition does not create duplication or a lack of co-ordination in the overall management of outdoor recreation in the future.

2. What do you believe are the priorities in terms of legislative or policy reviews that need to take place to develop outdoor recreation?

When forming the Council's response it was noted there has been considerable review of the legislative or policy areas to develop outdoor recreation in recent times. The following is the Council's list of priority legislative or policy areas at present:

- Revision of the current 'The Access to the Countryside (NI) Order '1983, taking account the urban countryside and urban fringe issues in relation to recreation;
- Application of anti-social behaviour programme objectives and related duties or powers to ensure a safe outdoors. Successfully managing ongoing issues relating to public rights of way and domestic dwellings (Public access versus ownership rights);
- The Occupiers' Liability (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 revision needs implemented where it involves the landowner opening land access for outdoor recreation and removing liability;

- Re-imburement for reinstatement of land where public access takes place;
- The draft Programme for Government 2011 - 2015 commitment to complete RPA and any future duty of community planning (and the power of wellbeing) may be relevant to the roll out of the outdoor recreation action plan especially as an affordable pathway to enable wellbeing.

3. Can you suggest innovative solutions to these issues and can you give examples from other areas / countries?

The Countryside Recreation Officer often facilitates disputes in relation to access or ownership some of which may be anti social in nature. The development of an intervention protocol to manage such disputes using an interagency approach may be a useful tool for the ongoing management of the countryside and outdoor recreation. The protocol would reflect existing approaches available throughout NI to manage priorities e.g. ASB protocol.

4. What needs to be done to give outdoor recreation a higher priority within the Executive, Departments and Local Authorities?

The suggestions to the vision in question 1 seem a natural first step to communicate the relevance of outdoor recreation across central and local government. The communication of the relevant benefits and direct contribution outdoor recreation makes to education, participation, volunteering, health and wellbeing and shared space as well as enterprise may be a more relevant approach.

A more representative reflection of all of the types of activity which constitute outdoor recreation is required other than 'organised sport'. (e.g. hill walking; orienteering etc)

The following are further steps that could be taken to raise the profile and the priority status of outdoor recreation across government:

- An appealing vision to inspire ownership articulated in the document or launched;
- Consistent implementation of the agreed action plan;
- 'Outdoor guardians' created within political representation;
- Reinforce the partnership working in place to connect outdoor recreation representatives with government to co produce services and opportunities; (e.g. CAAN and through Sport NI)
- Marketing of the relevant benefits and contribution of outdoor recreation within the political arena;
- Measure and show the value of outdoor recreation to the government departments and councils e.g. tourism potential; safer communities; health promotion, prevention and intervention etc.

5. What structures or partnerships do you believe are required for the delivery of the vision and its aims?

Any future structures may benefit from formalising the links with other structures in council areas e.g. Belfast Strategic Partnership, Active Belfast Partnership etc

The partnerships that are in place are considered sufficient operationally. They may benefit more with greater co-ordination or signposting to resources or facilities effectively across the region.

Greater clarity of the role of NIEA and support from NIEA to Councils would improve delivery through structures and partnerships.

Greater involvement of landowners and business in future structures or partnerships could also be considered beneficial to positively manage access, public rights of way and overall development of opportunities in 'the Outdoors'.

6. What are the key issues that you have faced with respect to current funding arrangements?

Current funding arrangements would benefit from a co-ordinated investment approach from government sources. This would enable programmes to be delivered in a more streamlined way and address the risk to delivery from different funders/ government departments rolling out funding with different deadlines. It capitalises on the Council's existing connection to local communities and neighbourhoods and service delivery expertise.

7. How can the benefits of volunteering be fully realised to developing outdoor recreation?

An effective volunteering policy, plan and framework for outdoor recreation would ensure that all volunteering opportunities, roles and resources are co-ordinated to provide a quality volunteering experience. This would enable employment opportunities, training and development of individuals to be promoted. Links with voluntary groups would also be improved to realise as many opportunities as is feasible, Accredited volunteering schemes would support the quality of the volunteering experience and be an additional incentive to be involved. (E.g. Investors in Volunteering quality standard).

8. What innovative approaches to investment in facilities and programmes could be developed?

There may be potential to explore the following areas:

- Development of sponsorship opportunities;
- Agreed formula where social investment proportionally matches the capital investment or commercial income opportunity available which would complement the Council's neighbourhood agenda and city wide Investment Programme.

9. Are there ways that users and commercial operators can contribute financially towards the "outdoors"?

There may be potential to explore the following areas:

- A scale of entry charges to sustain the natural environment by user groups/ commercial operators.
- Corporate companies contribute to investing resources (finance or people or equipment etc) into delivering the public need as part of the corporate social responsibility

10. How can a more co-ordinated approach to promoting and marketing outdoor recreation or aspects of it be developed?

Currently most of the marketing is delivered through CAAN¹ and its dedicated website

portals (e.g. Outdoors NI). A full illustration of the existing organisations linked to outdoor recreation is included in appendix 2. There is a positive experience from officers of working with CAAN and the marketing approaches appear to have generated great returns. It may benefit from further investment to drive the message.

11. How can a greater understanding of the importance of taking personal responsibility for the environment be achieved and what can be done to translate this into change?

There may be potential to explore the following areas:

- Greater emphasis on lifelong education and sustainable outdoor recreation;
- Remove/ reduce any financial barrier there may be to promote the message;
- Brand it - making the outdoors more attractive to all.
- Support councils in delivering the message of community owned space

12. Do you think that the Leave No Trace ethic is a solution to this or are other measures required?

'Leave No Trace' is a worldwide model and well accepted. It continues to grow in recognition and may benefit from a formal link with the Eco Schools programme. Also:

- It costs to be part of the 'Leave No Trace' scheme which may act as a barrier to the promotion of a global message;
- The model depends on volunteers therefore links to education establishments and programmes or activities may provide a more consistent approach.

13. What measures and activities could be developed to communicate the values and benefits of Outdoor Recreation within Northern Ireland?

An outdoor charter has potential to promote a shared message with all stakeholders across government. It can be broadened to appeal to the general public through general marketing, volunteering schemes and new activities e.g.

- An ambassador project for young people could be progressed.
- A lifelong approach to engaging people into the value and benefits through the education system may plant the seed for ownership to begin at any age.
- Continued support and profiling of OutdoorsNI across all social media.

14. What is required (locations, facilities, services and/or activities) to provide sufficient and sustainable access and facilities for outdoor recreation?

A single co-ordinated strategic approach is sufficient for the development of the outdoor recreation vision across the region rather than individual strategic approaches. It enables greater connectivity of key destinations across the region to meet the needs of users and visitors alike to promote different activities in the best of locations.

The Council is committed to aligning outdoor recreation with all other important policy directions e.g. NI Active travel, NI obesity framework, sustainable development, Active

¹ CAAN was established in 1999 as an umbrella organisation, which brings together all groups and bodies, which have an interest in, or involvement in outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland It is charged with the strategic development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland.

and the draft programme for government. For example promoting active travel where sustainable routes are developed across Belfast and to/ from the city. Public transport improvements to support outdoor recreation across Belfast and to connect Belfast to other key destinations is essential, if we are to capitalise on the day and short stay visitor potential from outdoor pursuits and holidays.

15. How should strategic planning and provision at a regional and local level be developed?

Belfast continues to try to balance the need to preserve open space alongside the need to regenerate the city at the same time. It is committed to an Investment Programme which will help to do this and will leverage central government support to take advantage where possible to meet all of these requirements.

16. What are the current barriers to the development of facilities?

The opportunities in outdoor recreation can equally present as barriers where a consistently applied vision is not in place. It can lead to a lack of resources being secured or people not being outdoors and active or access, ownership and community safety of outdoor recreation being affected. The balance of interests in the development of outdoor recreation and its impact on the natural resource may also present as a barrier.

17. What gaps are there in terms of research into outdoor recreation or key areas where further information is required?

A consistent and co-ordinated approach to researching access and usage and related to the direct benefits of outdoor recreation is required.

18. Are you aware of mechanisms that could bring a more strategic overview to capturing information?

There are a number of emerging models that could be evidenced including the Council/ Queens University Belfast Walkability model, SOPARC Connswater Community Greenway and HEAP cycling model.

19. Have you any additional comments about key issues and challenges or the actions and activities required for the development of the Outdoor Recreation Action Plan?

None