

Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Advisory Committees

Liaison Officer's Report – June 2006

1.	<p><u>Binevenagh AONB</u> (LBAC Action 68 & 69)</p> <p>Comments from members were formalised and forwarded to EHS. EHS has indicated that the suggested boundary changes are inappropriate as the land to be included does not meet with the criteria for AONB designation. The actual make up of the Management Forum has not been decided, but it is likely that the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust will take the lead in its formation. There is agreement that there will be a need for local representation. I will forward our interest in being consulted on the make up of the Management Forum to CCGHT. The timescale for re-designation has slipped and it is unlikely to happen before the summer.</p>
2.	<p><u>Water Levels Management Seminar</u> (LBAC Action 70)</p> <p>This seminar took place on 11th April. Henry Thompson (Rivers Agency) gave a presentation on the history of the drainage/navigation system and on current management regime. Bjoern Elsaesser from RPS gave an excellent overview of the results of the hydrological study recently completed for the system. Copies of the presentation on CD and on paper are available from Sperrin House. In summary, the consultants are not recommending any major changes to the current management system. They are recommending the installation of additional water level monitoring stations on the east and west shores of Lough Neagh and upstream of Portna sluice gates. Members raised the need for a review of the operational levels, particularly at the beginning and end of the summer. This is particularly relevant, given that the regime was devised when agriculture was in a serious production phase, and given the present shift in the Common Agricultural Policy and increased focus on the natural environment. The Advisory Committees will follow up the need for this review.</p>
3.	<p><u>Fallen Animal Issue</u> (LBAC 71 & 72)</p> <p>DARDs letter, which highlights the responsibility for the removal of fallen stock from watercourses, was circulated to members. Letters were sent to local authorities requesting their comments on the responsibilities outlined. Ballymena has responded positively and has indicated that it will assist where appropriate to deal with carcasses. The other councils have not responded. The LN/LB Management Committee recommended that a summary of the information/responsibilities/advice is prepared and issued to riparian landowners.</p>
4.	<p><u>Water Drafts on the Lower Bann</u> (LBAC Action 73)</p> <p>A letter has been sent to Waterways Ireland highlighting that, given the delay in the implementation of a strategic dredging programme for the Lower Bann, users should be made aware of the depth restrictions at specific locations. WI has indicated that the draft in the Lower Bann is 1m in its 2006 publications. This 'reference to 1m' should be a temporary measure, should not become an accepted norm and should be rectified after the dredging programme has taken place.</p>
5.	<p><u>Zebra Mussels</u> (LBAC Action 74)</p> <p>Minutes of the Zebra Mussel Control Group in Nov 2005 have been obtained. Indications suggest that the LB is not a huge concern as it is mainly fast flowing although problems could arise in slower moving canal sections. Unbeknownst to the Advisory Committees, they were mentioned at the meeting where it was agreed that they 'should be consulted and kept informed'. The other actions from the meeting include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sampling to take place for spat.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline and costings for a predictive model are being sought. • Need for more detailed zooplankton monitoring is being explored • Options for more detailed, species level, of Chironomid monitoring being explored. • Coarse fish monitoring will be explored. • General information mail shot to be drafted • Leaflet to be edited. • Possibility of employing someone to raise awareness amongst key parties to be explored.
6.	<p><u>Eels and Eel Review</u> (<i>LBAC Action 75 & LNAC Action 63</i>)</p> <p>A letter was drafted and sent to Rev Kennedy outlining the Advisory Committees' interest and approach to eel management and the EU Eel Management Review. There has been no further communication from Rev Kennedy.</p> <p>The LN/LB Management Committee agreed that the commercial in confidence information within the draft document should be respected. David Houston of DCAL has agreed to give a presentation on the Eel Management Plan at the next joint meeting of the LNAC and LBAC. The Management Committee has been invited for this agenda item.</p>
7.	<p><u>Hutchinson's Quay</u> (<i>LBAC Action 76</i>)</p> <p>The conditions associated with the granting of planning permission for the chalet development at Hutchinson's Quay, <u>that are of relevance to the LBAC</u>, are summarised as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. landscaping details, native species etc, to be approved 5. building shall not have a ridge height of more than 6.5m above finished floor level 6/7. roof tiles and rendering shall be in keeping with the surrounding rural area 8. natural screening shall be retained 9. planting schemes shall be approved 11. Buildings should be used for holiday purposes and not permanent residences, Water course legislation should be adhered to, Application to install a septic tank/tanks (one for each unit) should be made to local authority, Application to discharge to a water course should be made to EHS, an approved archaeological survey should be carried prior to work commencing, Consent to discharge the surface water to the River must be sought from Rivers Agency. <p>The property, with planning permission, was put up for sale at public auction, but failed to reach the asking price.</p> <p>The developer has been in touch recently and has indicated that he wishes to proceed with the development and would like to see associated developments on the River bank, including 20 fishing for disabled anglers in the forest. I have asked him to forward written details of his additional intentions and have agreed to get relevant members together to discuss.</p>
8.	<p><u>DARD Rural Development Strategy</u> (<i>LBAC Action 77</i>)</p> <p>Draft comments were updated and forwarded.</p>
9.	<p><u>Travel Expenses for Committee Members</u> (<i>LNAC Action 64</i>)</p> <p>Graham Seymour was not present at the last joint seminar. The issue was raised again at the Management Committee meeting and EHS re-voiced its policy of not to pay travel expenses to members unless the committee was a statutory committee.</p>
10.	<p><u>Sand Extraction</u> (<i>LNAC Action 65 & 66</i>)</p> <p>QPANI is giving a presentation at the June meeting to raise awareness in terms of background details. This will enable members to highlight gaps in information and recommend future actions. The letter to DETI, to encourage it to carry out a survey into the aggregate needs and supply implications for NI, will be drafted in the light of</p>

	information provided by QPANI at the next meeting.
11.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Management Strategy (LNAC Action 67)</u> LNAC meetings will include a dedicated agenda item on the implementation of the LNMS. A group needs to be established to steer/encourage implementation of the recommendations.</p>
12.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Navigation Authority Study</u> DCAL has indicated that it must prepare a business case to secure funding for the preparation of an economic appraisal in relation to the establishment of a navigation authority on Lough Neagh. Prior to initial advice, EHS is now indicating that an environmental assessment will need to be carried out to establish if there will be any negative impact on the designation features of the Special Protection Area of establishing a navigation authority. It is likely that this will be the responsibility of DCAL and will involve time and money.</p>
13.	<p><u>Development in the Wetlands (LNAC Action 68)</u> A letter was sent to Planning Service highlighting the Committees concern at the large amount of development taking place in wetland sites, particularly within the south Lough Neagh Ramsar boundary, and seeking clarification of the policies used in assessing planning applications and in determining the fate of developments that do not have planning permissions. In his response, the Acting Director of Strategic Planning highlighted that the following policies/bodies/documents are used in assessing planning applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPS 2, Planning and Nature Conservation - review to be finished by end of 2006. • Draft PPS14, Sustainable Development in the Countryside – seeks to management development in the countryside in line with the Regional Development Strategy for NI. • Dungannon & South Tyrone Area Plan and the settlements of Derrylee, Tamnamore, Clonoe, Kileen, and Mountjoy • Cookstown Area Plan and the settlements of Ballyronan, Moortown, Arboe, Ballinderry and Ballylifford. • Area of Constraint on Mineral Development in the southern shores. • Countryside Policy Areas to address the pressures of single dwellings • ‘A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland’ • Consultation with EHS <p>He also indicated that when breaches of planning come to Planning Service’s attention, they are fully investigated and depending on the particular circumstances, formal enforcement is instigated. The Ramsar Working Group will further investigate this issue more in the light of the when the forthcoming PPS 2 review.</p>
14.	<p><u>Lough Neagh Wetlands Biodiversity Action Plan</u> The initial year of the three year project is almost complet. Habitat and species audits almost complete and by Sept the key habitats and species will be agreed. Year two will focus on the preparation of habitat and species action plans, with publication in summer 2007. The Officer has been working closely with promoters of biodiversity projects and is working up a number of key projects that are seeking funding from the LNP. An application is also being submitted to the LNP for match funding for the production of literature relating to the biodiversity of the Wetlands and an application will be made to match funding.</p>
15.	<p><u>Tree Sparrow Project</u> Funding has been secured from LNP and all Councils apart from Lisburn and Antrim for the project. The Steering Group is meeting regularly and the project has started in terms</p>

	of highlighting key sites for the erection of nesting boxes and initiation of a feeding programme by next October.
16.	<u>Wetlands Wildlife Recording Project</u> Application to LNP successful. Application to Better Belfast submitted and being assessed for match funding for binoculars and telescope.
17.	<u>Lough Neagh Baseline</u> The Baseline Data Gathering project is almost complete. The information needs to be uploaded on to a computer at the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, where the GIS will be available for public usage.
18.	<u>Lough Neagh Wetlands GIS</u> An application is being lodged with the LNP to provide access to the GIS database at the Advisory Committee Offices and to extend the gathering and recording of data. Match funding will be sourced.
19.	<u>Sustainable Recreation Framework</u> The initial draft of this document has been produced by Judith Annett. It reviews the activity within the Wetlands and highlights that there has been no significant damage to the natural habitat so far, but there is potential to cause harm if development is not targeted and managed. A number of recommendations which will steer future appropriate development are presented. The document will be discussed at the LNAC meeting.
20.	<u>Lower Bann Tourism Conference</u> The LO spoke at this conference in The Cranagh on 21 st April. This timely Conference was hosted by the SDLP and was successful in raising the profile of the River as a tourism product and stimulating future discussions and action.
21.	<u>Tescos New Store in Coleriane</u> LBAC has been involved with discussions regarding the new river front Tesco store in Coleraine and has made comment towards the environmental appraisal requested by DCAL on the potential impact on fish passage etc.
22.	<u>Coleraine Harbour</u> LBAC has input into discussions with consultants regarding potential developments at the Coleraine Harbour site.
23.	<u>Ramsar Boundary</u> Still awaiting being able to input into the review of PPS 2, Nature Conservation & the Countryside, which is anticipated by the end of this year.
24.	<u>Antrim Marina</u> LNAC involved in Antrim Borough Council's discussions re development of Loughshore Park and the proposed marina.
25.	<u>Drumaheglis</u> LBAC attended meetings with Waterways Ireland and Ballymoney Borough Council re the management of Drumaheglis water sports zone. Initial meeting very productive.
26.	<u>Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Management Committee</u> Items discussed at the last meeting include the following:
27.	<u>NIPAN and CAAN</u> LO attends NI Protected Area Network and Countryside Access and Activity Network Meetings. Minutes available from Sperrin House.
28.	<u>Lough Neagh Partnership</u> The latest funding round closed on 9 th June. It focused on allocating the biodiversity pot of funding. The Biodiversity Officer has been doing great work in stimulating and assisting the development of projects. TTC International has prepared a Marketing Strategy for the Wetlands for the LNP. The recommendations in the Staretgy have been

	<p>well received and a Marketing Officer will be employed. The recommendations are realistic and include the establishment of a quality marketing web site, individual product marketing and product guides, employment of an officer, provision of mentoring to product providers and use of existing marketing organisations to maximise effort. Copies of the document are available from Sperrin House.</p>
29.	<p><u>Lower Bann Partnership</u> The Partnership will be formally launched at the end of June in Portneal Lodge. Unfortunately as the location is restricted number-wise, invites can not been issued to all LBAC members, but the initial and continuing input of members will be acknowledged. The initial funding application round has closed. Projects will be assessed in early summer and letters of offer issued. It is anticipated that there will be at least £150,000 for the next round of projects. There has already been great interest. Match funding is being sought for the projects developed and submitted by the LBAC (Biodiversity Action Plan, LB Management Strategy, Publication of User's Code and Navigation Notes and a Baseline study). The LBAC and LBP have jointly submitted applications on Aerial Survey, Historical information publication and erosion alleviation follow up. Development work continues on these projects. Match funding is also being sought for these projects. The LN/LB Management Committee accepted the approach taken to project development and application.</p>
30.	<p><u>Consultations</u> Comments lodged on: Review of Rivers Agency, PPS14, Rural Development Strategy Comments to be compiled on: Marine Bill, Bathing Waters Directive, NI Sustainable Development Strategy, Review of Environmental Governance, Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006.</p>
31.	<p><u>Advisory Committee Staffing Issues</u> Joanne McMullan returned from maternity leave at the end of May, having given birth to Catherine McMullan on New Year's Day. Joanne will be working on a part time basis from 9 to 1, Monday to Friday. Rachel Forde has now left as the full time Administration Officer.</p>
32.	<p><u>Future Funding of Advisory Committees</u> The LN/LB Management Committee has indicated that it will be the responsibility of the Advisory Committees to secure the funding for the next three year term from April 2007. An economic appraisal will be completed and applications made (from Magherafelt District Council) to EHS. Graham Seymour has agreed to write to all the organisations represented on the Management Committee to seek their views on the continuation of the Committee as at present.</p>