

# **The Lower Bann Management Strategy 2008 - 2013**

**Version 3  
(Text Only Version)**

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Contents

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	Page Number
1. Executive Summary	4
2. Background to the Strategy	11
2.1 Aims & Objectives	
2.2 How to Use the strategy	
2.3 Partnership Approach	
2.4 Acknowledgements	
3. Methodology employed	14
3.1 Desk top Research	
3.2 Consultation	
3.3 Stakeholders	
4. Strategic Overview	16
4.1 Infrastructure	
4.2 Natural & Built Heritage	
4.3 Recreation	
4.4 Socio- economic development	
5. Lower Bann Infrastructure	18
5.1 Overview	
5.2 How it is managed	
5.3 Vision	
5.4 Programme Aims	
5.5 Programme Objectives	
6. Natural & Built Heritage	25
6.1 Natural Environment	
6.2 Built Environment	
6.3 Vision	
6.4 Programme Aims	
6.5 Programme Objectives	

7. Water & Land Based Recreation	30
7.1 Current Activities	
7.2 Vision	
7.3 Programme Aims	
7.4 Programme Objectives	
8. Socio-economic Development	34
8.1 Overview	
8.2 Social Environment	
8.3 Economic Activity	
8.4 Vision	
8.5 Programme Aims	
8.6 Programme Objectives	
9. Programme of Activities	37
9.1 Infrastructure	
9.2 Natural & Built Heritage	
9.3 Land & Water Based Recreation	
9.4 Socio- economic development	
10. Managing & Evaluating Success	46
 Bibliography	
Appendices	

## **Executive Summary**

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The Lower Bann is a navigable waterway which stretches approx 60 kilometres and for most of its length it is 60 metres wide. From the sea at Castlerock it rises to 12.55metres above sea level at Toome.

The Lower Bann drains the Lough Neagh and Lower Bann catchment which covers 4500 square kilometres and encompasses 42% of the land area of Northern Ireland as well as part of County Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland.

The River flows through 5 local authority areas and includes: Coleraine Borough Council; Ballymoney Borough Council; Ballymena Borough Council; Magherafelt District Council; Antrim Borough Council

Approximately 300,000 people live in the catchment. Over 80% of the catchment area is in agricultural use; only 10% of this is arable, the rest is pasture grazed by cattle and sheep. There is some afforestation in the higher ground. It has five major tributaries; the Clady, Agivey, Aghadowey and Macosquin Rivers all rise in the west and the Ballymoney River joins from the east.

The Lower Bann Advisory Committee (LBAC) was established in 1994 by the Department of the Environment and the now Department of Culture Arts and Leisure to:

- Advise on the conservation of the natural and man-made heritage
- Advise on drainage and navigation and
- Advise on the management and sustainable development of land and water based recreation.

The Committee has approximately 28 members representing local authorities and special interest groups. The LBAC considers relevant topical issues, reaches a consensus view on management and makes recommendations to government through the Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Management Committee.

## **Aims & Objectives of Strategy**

*"To provide a framework for those with management and development responsibilities relating to the River for the development of new and sustainable initiatives"*

The objectives of the management Strategy are: -

- ❑ To develop a 5 year Management Strategy for the Lower Bann which can be used to inform management and promote the sustainable development potential and opportunities along the River and its hinterland
- ❑ To encapsulate the users management and development priorities for the next 5 years
- ❑ To liaise with the statutory bodies to ensure that the proposed initiatives are achievable within their statutory financial and temporal framework
- ❑ To secure private, public and voluntary support for the 5 yr Management Strategy

## **How to Use this Strategy**

The Lower Bann Management Strategy focuses on a number of key themes which contain a series of recommended objectives and indicative actions for the future management and sustainable development of the Lower Bann River.

It is important to note that this is not a statutory document and it is not a river basin management plan. It is a summary of integrated and strategic advice from users, local residents, interest groups, statutory agencies and local authorities that has been compiled and approved by the Lower Bann Advisory Committee.

## **Partnership Approach**

The Lower Bann Advisory Committee by its very nature is a model for co-operative and partnership working in the development and implementation of initiatives and policies. The Lower Bann Management Strategy will require the buy-in of all statutory agencies with a responsibility for the aspects of the Lower Bann Navigation.

## **Methodology**

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There was a three fold approach to gathering all the necessary information to develop a 5 year Management Strategy and included: -

1. Desk top research
2. Public Consultation
3. Stakeholder Meeting

### **Desktop Research**

A review of all documentation relating to the Lower Bann was researched however it also looked to studies conducted on other inland waterways in Ireland and in the UK. This ensures that the Strategy draws on best practice and benchmarked the initiatives on the Lower Bann with other inland waterways.

A short evaluation was carried out also on the previous strategy documents which had been developed for the Lower Bann. This exercise was necessary to ensure that this strategy would complement previous initiatives and avoid any duplication.

### **Public Consultation**

A series of workshops were held along the Lower Bann in Coleraine, Kilrea and Toome. Invitations were sent out through the LBAC Mailing list and advertisements appeared in the local press publicizing the events.

Submissions were also received as a result of these workshops and the views and initiatives have been considered and included into the proposed initiatives.

### **Stakeholder Meetings**

As part of the reasoning for this Management Strategy was the plethora of agencies involved in the development of the Lower Bann, it was imperative to seek their views on future initiatives for this waterway and to ensure that any proposed activities complemented and supported the activities and plans for the Lower Bann from their department.

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## **Strategic Overview**

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Throughout the research and consultation stages a number of issues emerged, which allowed a thematic approach to be taken when developing the Management Strategy.

These themes reflect the nature of the work on the Lower Bann Valley and highlight the priorities for 2008 – 2013. They are:

1. Lower Bann Infrastructure
2. Natural & Built Heritage
3. Water and Land Based Recreation
4. Socio- economic Development

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## **Programme of Activities**

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### **Lower Bann Infrastructure**

The Infrastructure of the Lower River Bann is the fundamental cross cutting theme throughout this Strategy document. If the Resource itself is not effectively managed to meet the needs of its users both in the present and in the future, then the following themes are redundant.

As Waterways Ireland are the statutory agency responsible for the management of the navigation, this section is reliant on the partnerships which have been established to ensure that in keeping with their statutory objectives, users needs are met.

### **Vision**

The continual development and management of the Lower Bann Infrastructure is a statutory responsibility of Waterways Ireland and the River Agency, however a number of other statutory agencies have a role to play. This partnership approach is currently adopted by the agencies and can be further enhanced through new initiatives and continued meaningful, structured consultation from all parties.

The Vision for the long term sustainability of the Lower Bann Infrastructure is to create an open and transparent Regulatory process for Users which does not have a negative impact on the long term sustainability of the Lower Bann River, its habitats and environs. To embed the sustainability of the Valley for all Present and Future Users.

### **Aim**

*"Provision of a top class recreation facility which meets the needs of all its users in the present and in the future"*

### **Objectives**

To ensure that the Lower Bann maintains a high standard of Water Quality in line with the Water Quality Directive

To continually upgrade and supplement the provision of facilities along the River for recreation users

To embed the zoning of the River for Users within a legislative framework

To ensure the accessibility and compatibility of signage and markers along the River for all users.

To provide a structured liaison role with the Planning Service

To provide a framework for all users of the River for recreation purposes.

## **Natural and Built Heritage**

The Heritage of the Lower River Bann Valley is unique and its preservation, management and enhancement is a responsibility of not only the statutory agencies but of all users of the resource.

The heritage is protected primarily by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency but all agencies and user have a role to play in protecting this unique corridor for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations.

## **Vision**

To ensure their central position in future initiatives, management structures must be put in place to raise awareness not only amongst the Statutory Agencies of the issues but for recreational users and local communities along the Valley also. The Local Bio diversity Action Plans (LBAP) will fill the remit and it is envisaged that the entire Lower Bann Valley will be covered by a selection of LBAPs and indeed a Habitat Management Strategy for the Valley will be developed also.

As well as this unique ecology, the built and industrial heritage of the Valley is a valuable resource. As previously mentioned, the site of the oldest settlement in Ireland is located along the Lower Bann, but this is not the only archeological site. The NIEA maintains a database of important sites in NI, however these are classified by Local Authority and their importance and proximity to the Lower Bann can be overlooked.

It is envisioned that the Lower Bann Valley's Natural and Built Heritage will be distinctly and clearly highlighted through accessible and user friendly databases and management plans, to ensure that future initiatives can be sensitively developed and managed.

## **Aim**

*"To protect and enhance the natural and built heritage of the River Bann for today's and for the future generations"*

## **Objectives**

### Natural Environment

To fully engage with all Local Bio Diversity Action Plans

To encourage the development of Local Bio-diversity Action Plans for all Council regions

To develop Management Plans for all ASSIs and SAC

To develop a Habitat Management Plan for the Lower Bann Valley

### Built Environment

To provide up to date and accurate data on the Lower Bann's heritage

To promote the unique heritage of the Lower Bann

To encourage the engagement of local communities in promotion activities

To learn from models of best practice in heritage protection and promotion

## **Water and Land Based Recreation**

When the Lower River Bann is mentioned it evokes images of boats and anglers but the utilization of the River as a recreational resource it growing and new sports are looking to this local resource. However other activities are not so well catered for eg walkers. This section looks to what is actually happening along the River and what opportunities exist for local groups to avail of this excellent resource which is literally on their doorstep.

### **Vision**

It is envisioned that the Lower Bann Valley will be a first class recreational venue for users in the future offering a Premium recreational and tourism product. This can be achieved through co-ordinated management of the Lower Bann usage whilst endeavouring to provide facilities off and on site for all interested parties.

By its very nature, the Lower Bann River is a finite resource with limited capacity for recreation users. The conflict between many of these users has been apparent through the consultation process and there is growing demand for guidance and regulation from the relevant authorities. The main area of concern is the safety considerations for powered watersports users.

Models of best practice need to be assessed and the feasibility of translating these solutions to the Lower Bann need further research, these models include off river watersports facilities which are manmade.

### **Aim**

*"To enhance the recreational resource and its management of the Lower River Bann for the benefit of all users"*

### **Objectives**

To promote the use of Lower River Bann for Private Boat Owners

To develop the Lower Bann Navigation for private cruisers

To enhance the angling facilities and opportunities along the Lower Bann

To develop disabled access facilities on the Navigation for all users

To develop the recreational uses of the Lower Bann

To promote a first class integrated menu of activities

To create networking opportunities for Lower Bann Users

To research the possible exclusion/ restriction of certain users of the Lower Bann

To examine the feasibility of creating new facilities / venues for powered watersports.

## **Socio-economic Development**

The Lower River Bann has traditionally been a vital economic and social resource for the communities through which it flows. Indeed this can be traced back to mesolithic times with the Mountsandel settlement.

Across Ireland, the UK and the world businesses and communities are looking back to the River for property development, leisure and social activities. With the proposed reopening of the Ulster Canal, this section aims to encourage business to look to the River and the business opportunities which it can hold for the local entrepreneur.

### **Vision**

It is envisioned that an educational programme will encapsulate the natural and built heritage of the Lower Bann Valley as well as including sporting and recreational activities which are offered by the waterway.

Economically, the business opportunities created by the waterways has been realized in other regions in Ireland and the UK. These are not only targeting the tourism product, whilst this is important, but domestic users and visitors. The creation and development of local amenities for local day trippers and recreational users will increase footfall in an area and it is the individual businesses responsibility to tap into this emerging market.

### **Aim**

*" To harness the socio-economic potential of the River for the benefits of the local community and private enterprise in an environmentally sustainable manner"*

### **Objectives**

To promote healthy communities through the activities offered by the River.

To encourage local schools and groups to incorporate the River into local curriculum activities

To encourage greater investment in the social economy and private sector for River based initiatives.

To raise awareness of economic potential of the River

To promote the recreation facilities of the Lower Bann.

## **1. Background to the Management Strategy**

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The Lower Bann Advisory Committee (LBAC) was established in 1994 by the Department of the Environment and the now Department of Culture Arts and Leisure to:

- Advise on the conservation of the natural and man-made heritage
- Advise on drainage and navigation and
- Advise on the management and sustainable development of land and water based recreation.

The Committee has approximately 28 members representing local authorities and special interest groups. The LBAC considers relevant topical issues, reaches a consensus view on management and makes recommendations to government through the Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Management Committee.

The Lower Bann Advisory Committee commissioned an independent consultant to develop and prepare a 5 year Management Strategy which would reflect the initiatives and views of the public, private and voluntary interests along the Lower Bann valley with a particular focus on the River.

### **1.1 Aims and Objectives**

To formulate the Strategic Aims and Objectives, it is necessary to identify the overarching aims and objectives for the Lower Bann Valley i.e the River Bann and its hinterland. To achieve this, the Lower Bann Advisory Committee adopted the Environment and Heritage Services 'River Conservation Strategy' (Feb 2001) as an underpinning principle in their work. This strategy aims to

*"To protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built heritage values of rivers in Northern Ireland and facilitate their sustainable use."*

The objectives of the River Conservation Strategy are as follows:

1. To maintain or restore where appropriate, the natural physical structure and function and landscape quality of rivers and their corridors and conserve important earth science features associated with them.
2. To maintain and/or enhance the ecological integrity and biodiversity of rivers.
3. To maintain and, where appropriate, improve the water quality of rivers to meet the needs of conservation.
4. To maintain and protect archaeological features, the industrial heritage and conserve historic buildings associated with rivers and their setting.
5. To increase the potential for public enjoyment of rivers where it is compatible with the other objectives of the river conservation strategy.
6. To promote awareness and appreciation of rivers.

Considering this The Lower Bann Management Strategy aims to:

*"provide a framework for those with management and development responsibilities relating to the River for the development of new and sustainable initiatives"*

The objectives of the management Strategy are: -

- ❑ To develop a 5 year Management Strategy for the Lower Bann which can be used to inform management and promote the sustainable development potential and opportunities along the River and its hinterland
- ❑ To encapsulate the users management and development priorities for the next 5 years
- ❑ To liaise with the statutory bodies to ensure that the proposed initiatives are achievable within their statutory financial and temporal framework
- ❑ To secure private, public and voluntary support for the 5 yr Management Strategy

## **1.2 How to Use this Strategy**

The Lower Bann Management Strategy focuses on a number of key themes which contain a series of recommended objectives and indicative actions for the future management and sustainable development of the Lower Bann River.

It is important to note that this is not a statutory document and it is not a river basin management plan. It is a summary of integrated and strategic advice from users, local residents, interest groups, statutory agencies and local authorities that has been compiled and approved by the Lower Bann Advisory Committee.

The Management Strategy will firstly put the Lower Bann Navigation in to context in terms of landscape – economic, social and environmental and its heritage – natural, built, industrial and cultural. This information will inform the key themes and objectives which will be identified and broke down further into indicative actions which are recommended for the statutory, voluntary and private sector.

This background information will be further enhanced with the results of the research and consultation exercises which was carried out as part of the process. This information informed the decisions made to highlight certain areas for action. The Programme of Activities will highlight the actions and the outputs from each activity over the next 5 years. It also details the groups/ agencies which would be involved in their implementation however this is not an exhaustive list and a partnership approach should be adopted at all times.

## **1.3 Partnership Approach**

The Lower Bann Advisory Committee by its very nature is a model for co-operative and partnership working in the development and implementation of initiatives and

policies. The Lower Bann Management Strategy will require the buy-in of all statutory agencies with a responsibility for the aspects of the Lower Bann Navigation.

This has been achieved by ensuring that all agency representatives and User Groups were able to make an input into the Strategy as it was formulated and given an opportunity to feed back comments and suggestions prior to the Strategy's publication.

This partnership approach will continually be adopted and developed over the lifespan of the Management Strategy and will continue to grow to reflect the interests and needs of all stakeholders.

#### **1.4 Acknowledgements**

The author and organizing committee wish to acknowledge at this stage the invaluable contribution of all the consultees, who took the time to be interviewed and / or attended the public workshops. It is vital that this Strategy reflects the aspiration and plans of all those involved in the management and sustainable development of the Lower Bann Valley.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Terry Steele for the informative and enjoyable boat tour of the Lower Bann Navigation.

### **3. Methodology**

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There was a three fold approach to gathering all the necessary information to develop a 5 year Management Strategy and included: -

4. Desk top research
5. Public Consultation
6. Stakeholder Meeting

#### **3.1 Desktop Research**

A review of all documentation relating to the Lower Bann was researched and included

- Lower Bann Tourism & Recreation Study 1998
- Lower Bann Environmental Management Strategy 2001
- Lower Bann Development Strategy 2002
- Lower Bann Sustainable Development Initiative 2003
- Lower Bann Riverbank Erosion Report 2006
- Lower Bann Marketing Strategy
- Lower Bann Baseline Report 2008
- Lough Neagh Wetlands LBAP
- Coleraine LBAP (in preparation)
- Lough Neagh Management Strategy 2002

This research not only focused on what had been gathered for the Lower Bann Navigation but looked to studies conducted on other inland waterways in Ireland and in the UK. This ensures that the Strategy draws on best practice and benchmarked the initiatives on the Lower Bann with other inland waterways. The reports studied included tourism promotion leaflets for various Council initiatives, Heritage Council's Inland Waterways studies in the Rep of Ireland, British Waterways studies and Waterways Ireland promotional and research documents. A full bibliography of studies appraised is included in Appendix ?

A short evaluation was carried out also on the previous strategy documents which had been developed for the Lower Bann. This exercise was necessary to ensure that the 2008 – 2013 strategy would complement previous initiatives and avoid any duplication of resources.

The desk top research was further enhanced by site visits to important sites and locations along the Lower Bann Navigation. These site visits involved a road side tour of key locations including angling hot spots, watersports zones, jetties and marinas from Toome to the Natural Trust Nature Reserve on the Bann Estuary. This was further enhanced by a boat tour of the Lower Bann from Coleraine Marina along the Bann Estuary to the mouth of the Atlantic Ocean and South to The Cutts.

The site visits were an invaluable aspect to the research to see and experience at first hand the facilities and recreational opportunities created by the Lower Bann.

### **3.2 Public Consultation**

A series of workshops were held along the Lower Bann in Coleraine, Kilrea and Toome. Invitations were sent out through the LBAC Mailing list and advertisements appeared in the local press publicizing the events. The events were scheduled in

11th June at 8pm in Portneal Lodge, Kilrea

12th June at 8pm in Toome House, Toome

17th June at 6pm in Riverside Theatre, Coleraine

A copy of the advertisements and flyers which were sent out are included in Appendix ??

Although there was disappointing attendance at these events, it should be noted that those who did each of the workshops did represent all the User groups along the Lower Bann and there was a lively and informative debate of if the issues affecting the Lower Bann. A full report of these sessions are included in Appendix ?. To ensure that groups still had the opportunity to feedback there was follow up press coverage on the issues raised in the development of the Management Strategy and individual submissions were encouraged also.

Submissions were also received as a result of these workshops and the views and initiatives have been considered and included into the proposed initiatives. The follow up press coverage also attracted feedback from further usergroups.

### **3.3 Stakeholder Meetings**

As part of the reasoning for this Management Strategy was the plethora of agencies involved in the development of the Lower Bann, it was imperative to seek their views on future initiatives for this waterway and to ensure that any proposed activities complemented and supported the activities and plans for the Lower Bann from their department. All agencies were given opportunities to comment on the Strategy prior to publication also.

The stakeholder meetings all followed a similar format which was –

- ❑ What input/ responsibility does your organization have on the Lower Bann Navigation
- ❑ What issues have emerged for your organization
- ❑ Does your organization have any plans for the Lower Bann
- ❑ What would your organization like to see on the Lower Bann in 5 years.

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## **Strategic Overview**

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Throughout the research and consultation stages a number of issues emerged, which allowed a thematic approach to be taken when developing the Management Strategy.

These themes reflect the nature of the work on the Lower Bann Valley and highlight the priorities for 2008 – 2013. They are:

5. Lower Bann Infrastructure
6. Natural & Built Heritage
7. Water and Land Based Recreation
8. Socio- economic Development

### **4.1 Lower Bann Infrastructure**

The Infrastructure of the Lower River Bann is the fundamental cross cutting theme throughout this Strategy document. If the Resource itself is not effectively managed to meet the needs of its users both in the present and in the future, then the following themes are redundant. It is worth noting however that the management of Users needs may not always be in harmony with the management of the River Valley's biodiversity and landscape and therefore unwelcome strategic management decisions may be put in place.

As Waterways Ireland are the statutory agency responsible for the management of the navigation, this section is reliant on the partnerships which have been established to ensure that in keeping with their statutory objectives, users needs are met.

This section looks at ways which the facilities and services along Navigation could be developed and better utilized to provide a greater level of service to the River Users.

It also looks to the management of this resource so that users do not infringe upon the enjoyment and/or the safety of other users. This is primarily a statutory function developing byelaws which can take considerable time to be constituted and implemented within a legislative framework.

### **4.2 Natural and Built Heritage**

The Heritage of the Lower River Bann Valley is unique and its preservation, management and enhancement is a responsibility of not only the statutory agencies but of all users of the resource.

The heritage is protected primarily by the Environment & Heritage Service but all agencies and user have a role to play in protecting this unique corridor for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations.

The initiatives recommended will have some overlap with the Local Bio-diversity Action Plans developed in the River Valley, but the Management Strategy aims to

complement these initiatives and reinforce the LBAP actions with the initiatives proposed.

### **4.3 Water and Land Based Recreation**

When the Lower River Bann is mentioned it evokes images of boats and anglers but the utilization of the River as a recreational resource it growing and new sports are looking to this local resource.

However other activities are not so well catered for eg walkers. This section looks to what is actually happening along the River and what opportunities exist for local groups to avail of this excellent resource which is literally on their doorstep.

Unfulfilled opportunities is also examined and recommendations made to how we can tap into this unfulfilled potential of the River.

### **4.4 Socio-economic Development**

The Lower River Bann has traditionally been a vital economic and social resource for the communities through which it flows. Indeed this can be traced back to mesolithic times with the Mount Sandel settlement.

In modern day there still exists opportunities for communities to gather around this natural resource for social and recreational purposes. It can teach the future generations of the shared history of the community and how it grew around the industries which it encouraged and the livelihoods it gave to local people.

Across Ireland, the UK and the world businesses and communities are looking back to the River for property development, leisure and social activities. With the proposed reopening of the Ulster Canal, this section aims to encourage business to look to the River and the business opportunities which it can hold for the local entrepreneur.

## **5 Lower Bann Infrastructure**

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### **5.1 Overview**

The Lower Bann is a navigable waterway which stretches approx 60 kilometres and for most of its length it is 60 metres wide. From the sea at Castlerock it rises to 12.55metres above sea level at Toome.

The Lower Bann drains the Lough Neagh and Lower Bann catchment which covers 4500 square kilometres and encompasses 42% of the land area of Northern Ireland as well as part of County Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland.

The River flows through 5 local authority areas and includes:

- Coleraine Borough Council
- Ballymoney Borough Council
- Ballymena Borough Council
- Magherfelt District Council
- Antrim Borough Council

Under the Review of Public Administration recommendations this will be reduced to 2 Local Authorities, however at time of print this was still not approved by the Assembly.

Approximately 300,000 people live in the catchment. Over 80% of the catchment area is in agricultural use; only 10% of this is arable, the rest is pasture grazed by cattle and sheep. There is some afforestation in the higher ground. It has five major tributaries; the Clady, Agivey, Aghadowey and Macosquin Rivers all rise in the west and the Ballymoney River joins from the east.

Lough Beg is 3 kilometres downstream of Toomebridge. It is an area of approximately 5 square kilometres and apart from the deeper navigation channel, the lake is approx 2 metres deep.

The water levels on Lough Neagh and water flows and levels on the Lower Bann are maintained by a system of sluice gates and weirs. These were put in place as a result of a number of drainage schemes.

Section 1 of the Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Drainage and Navigation Act (NI) 1955 specifies that the water levels of Lough Neagh should be maintained between 12.45 metres and 12.60 metres above sea level as far as conditions of rainfall, wind and other natural causes allow.

The first large scale drainage scheme was the McMahon Scheme carried out between 1846 and 1856 with a view to reducing the waterlevel of Lough Neagh and making the river navigable. This involved building 5 locks and weirs, the removal of a rocky shoal at Portna and limited dredging of the Lower Bann. Because of the engineering compromise between drainage and navigation requirements the McMahon Scheme was considered less than successful.

The Shepherd Drainage Scheme carried out in the 1930s and involved the deepening, widening and straightening of the drainage channel and replacing the

fixed weirs at Toome, Portna and the Cutts with sluice gates. However In response to continuing pressure to alleviate flooding around Lough Neagh the water level was further lowered in the 1940s and 50s by adjusting the management regime of the sluice gates at Toome.

The net effect of these drainage schemes was a lowering of the Lough Neagh water level by about 3 metres and a reduction in the natural range of high and low water levels.

The water level in Lough Neagh is controlled by the Toome, Portna and Cutts sluice gates. Within the statutory 'control' range of 12.45 metres and 12.60 metres above sea. Whilst the River Agency strive to maintain these levels, in practice it is difficult due to heavy rainfalls and droughts.

The sluice gates are managed by Rivers Agency with the aim of maintaining the level of Lough Neagh within the 15 centimetres control range whilst at all times maintaining an adequate flow in the Lower Bann.

The Lower Bann Navigation operated commercially from the 1850s to 1929 when the Lower Bann Navigation Trust was abolished. There are locks at Toome, Portna, Movanager, Carnroe and the Cutts. The navigation is maintained to provide a minimum depth of 1.5 metres along its full length through the placement of weirs, the management of sluice gates and limited dredging.

## 5.2 How it is Managed

There are a number of statutory agencies with responsibility for aspects of the Lower Bann and can appear confusing to those trying to access information. Below is an outline of the agencies involved and their responsibility.

Principally the Lower Bann Navigation is managed by **Waterways Ireland**, A North South Implementation Body established in 1999. They are responsible for: -

*" the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes."*<sup>1</sup>

Waterways Ireland manages and maintains the physical infrastructure which allows navigation along the River including locks, public jetties and markers. Waterways Ireland also promotes the Lower Bann on a national and international setting with the other inland waterways of Ireland.

The **Rivers Agency** is a branch of the Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development and has statutory authority for the maintenance of water levels on Lough Neagh, the sluice gates and weirs on the Lower Bann and the maintenance of drainage channels

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<sup>1</sup> Waterways Ireland website [www.waterwaysireland.org](http://www.waterwaysireland.org)

**The Honorable the Irish Society** has ownership of the bed and soil of the Lower Bann River. This ownership dates back to 1613 when King James II granted the Royal Charter to a partnership of London Livery companies (private banks) at the time of the Plantations in Ireland. The partnership became known as the Irish Society and still maintains lands across N Ireland today.

The **Bann System Ltd** is a subsidiary of The Honorable the Irish Society and manages the fishing rights and licenses along the Lower Bann.

**Northern Ireland Environment Agency** is a branch of the Dept of the Environment and develops and implement environmental protection legislation along the Lower Bann. This includes monitoring and enforcing pollution control legislation, protection of historical monuments and buildings and conservation of the natural environment. They are also responsible for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive

**Dept Culture, Arts & Leisure - Inland Fisheries Division** is responsible for the development, support and protection of fisheries in N Ireland. It conducts research into fisheries, promotes public angling. It also operates a fishery in Movaghaner.<sup>2</sup>

**Dept Culture, Arts & Leisure - Fisheries Conservancy Board** *Under the provision of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966, the Board is responsible for the conservation and protection of the salmon and inland fisheries of Northern Ireland other than the fisheries of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The Board also undertakes agency work for the D.O.E. and a bailiffing service for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The Board also acts as a water bailiff on the behalf DCAL, and river monitoring and pollution investigation agent on behalf of Department of Environment.*<sup>3</sup>

**Local Authorities (Coleraine Borough Council; Ballymena Borough Council; Ballymoney Borough Council, Antrim Borough Council; Magherafelt District Council)** are responsible for the socio economic development for the jurisdiction and this includes the provision of social and recreation facilities for the local community and visitors alike. At time of going to print the roles and functions of the new Super Councils had not been agreed upon therefore this will change over the course of this management strategy.

**Northern Ireland Tourist Board** are responsible for promoting and supporting the NI tourism product on a national and international scale.

**Sports Council NI** are responsible for the promotion and development of access to sport.

As there are a number of statutory and advisory bodies with a responsibility for the Lower Bann this can be confusing for the wider public and User Groups. To clarify

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<sup>2</sup> Dept Culture Arts & Leisure website [http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/inland\\_fisheries.htm](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/inland_fisheries.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Fisheries Conservancy Board website <http://www.fcbni.com/faboutus.htm>

roles and responsibilities, the following framework tries to visually display each agency's area of governance.

# Users Zone

Wake Boarders

Water skiers

Boaters

Anglers

Walkers

Hunters

# Advisory/ Promotional Zone

# Statutory Responsibility Zone

Dept Culture, Arts & Leisure - Inland Fisheries, Inland Waterways

Sports Council

**Lower Bann Advisory Committee**

Environment & Heritage Service

Planning Service

Northern Ireland Tourism Board

Waterways Ireland

The Honorable the Irish River Agency Society - Bann System Ltd

Local Authorities - Coleraine; Ballymena, Ballymoney, Magherafelt, Antrim

Sustrans

Country Access Alliance Network

Jet skiers

Rowers

Canoeists Archeologists

Environmentalists

### **5.3 Vision**

The continual development and management of the Lower Bann Infrastructure is a statutory responsibility of Waterways Ireland and the River Agency, however a number of other statutory agencies have a role to play. This partnership approach is currently adopted by the agencies and can be further enhanced through new initiatives and continued meaningful, structured consultation from all parties.

The Water Quality Directive is a statutory responsibility of the NI Environment Agency under the EU Directive. This requires that measures are introduced and maintained to ensure that the inland waterways water quality is maintained at a "good" standard under their classification scheme. All stakeholders have a responsibility to ensure that their activities and proposals positively contribute to ensuring that this "good" classification is attained.

The developments along the Lower Bann Valley, whether it be commercial, agricultural or private all have an impact on the Valley's infrastructure. Planning Regulations in Northern Ireland are extensive, particularly in a rural setting, however it is vital for the co-ordinated and sustainable development of the Valley that a meaningful and structured consultation process is put in place with the Planning Service, to ensure that Planning Officers are aware of Development Priorities for the region. This is a mutually beneficial exercise as it will streamline the Planning Approval process for projects along the Valley and assist Developers in being signposted to how and where to access Planning Information.

The sustainable development of the Lower Bann Infrastructure is primarily to ensure that the facilities and services required for existing and future users are in place and meet their needs. This can pose a conflict of interest for the statutory stakeholders and the user groups, as current needs of users may place the natural resource of the Lower Bann in jeopardy. The immediate and short needs of users needs to be continually assessed against the long term sustainability of the Lower Bann Valley.

These facilities include the suitability and long term effects of jetties and marinas along the navigation; the effects of the zoning of users to local habitats; will greater signage levels significantly increase ease of use for all users or alienate particular users. These issues will need to be addressed and can only be regulated and managed through Bye Laws for the Lower Bann Navigation. This is a lengthy legislative process and the consultation exercises will certainly create political debate for the rights and needs of Users versus the long term sustainability of the Valley.

The Vision for the long term sustainability of the Lower Bann Infrastructure is to create an open and transparent Regulatory process for Users which does not have a negative impact on the long term sustainability of the Lower Bann River, its habitats and environs. To embed the sustainability of the Valley for all Present and Future Users.

## **5.4 Aim**

All initiatives to develop the Lower Bann Infrastructure will aim for the: -

*"Provision of a top class recreation facility which meets the needs of all its users in the present and in the future"*

## **5.5 Objectives**

This aim will be achieved by the following:

- 5.5.1 To ensure that the Lower Bann maintains a high standard of Water Quality in line with the Water Quality Directive
- 5.5.2 To continually upgrade and supplement the provision of facilities along the River for recreation users
- 5.5.3 To embed the zoning of the River for Users within a legislative framework
- 5.5.4 To ensure the accessibility and compatibility of signage and markers along the River for all users.
- 5.5.5 To provide a structured liaison role with the Planning Service
- 5.5.6 To provide a framework for all users of the River for recreation purposes.

## 6 Natural & Built Heritage

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### 6.1 Natural Environment

Due to the necessity of drainage, dredging and navigation concerns, the Lower Bann is no longer a truly natural environment.

The 'Bann Woods' along the length of the river date from the 1930s drainage scheme when material dredged from the river was deposited in areas then known as 'The Bann Dumps' and later planted with commercial timber. These woods have a very high landscape value, especially because of the sympathetic planting of deciduous trees along the river edge. The 26 blocks of woodland are managed by Forest Service and occupy 17 kilometres of river bank.

Along the sides of the 60 metre wide open channel there is a generally thin and broken band of reedswamp and rooted macrophytes (underwater plants). Cut-over raised bogs approach the river's edge in the Lough Beg to Portglenone stretch. The largest of these is Ballymacombs More being actively harvested by Bulrush Peat Company.

**Diatomite, or Bann clay** as it is colloquially known as, is made up of the remains of algae that grew in shallow flooded areas. The diatomite material is made up of the silica cases of many different species of diatom (green algae) that have decayed leaving only their hard outer cases behind. Diatomite occurs at locations all along the Lower Bann from Toome to the Ree downstream of the confluence of the Agivey River. The diatomite was laid down between 7,500 and 5,000 years ago in river embayments and shallow lake environments during the time when early people had colonised the area and before peat bogs had begun to form. The diatomite is important as a scientific resource while its exploitation is notable in the more recent history of the Lower Bann valley. Two diatomite localities have been designated as Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

The main river channel is not noted for any concentration of birds. Along the length of the river kingfishers are common. At weirs and sluice gates where there is faster moving water and rocky areas there are grey wagtails and dippers. Lough Beg and the Bann Estuary are both important for birds

Apart from the deeper navigation channel most of Lough Beg is about 2 metres deep. However as a consequence of the drainage schemes on the Lower Bann, the lowered water levels have helped to create an area of wet grassland on the former lake bed one thousand acres in extent on the west shore – known locally as 'The Strand'. This wet grassland is largely flooded in winter providing habitat for wintering wildfowl and as the winter floods recede the wet grassland supports large numbers of breeding waders (redshank, lapwing, curlew, snipe and occasionally dunlin). In spring and autumn Lough Beg is an important staging post for migrating birds to rest and feed on their way through. All of Lough Beg with its marginal habitats is protected as an Area of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Protection Area and a Ramsar Site.

From the Cutts weir to the sea for a distance of 11 kilometres the Lower Bann is tidal. The Bann Estuary remains important for birds especially wintering waders and wildfowl that mostly feed on the mudflats and roost on the shore. The estuary usually supports about 4000 birds each winter and is a part of a Lower Bann migration flyway. Each spring and autumn large numbers of birds on their way to and from countries further north pass through the Lower Bann corridor linking to either Lough Neagh or wetlands and coastal areas further south in Ireland or even mainland Europe.

The Lower Bann flows from Lough Neagh to the sea and the river channel is an important conduit for migrating eels and salmon. The river also has populations of roach (introduced in the 1970s) bream, roach/bream hybrids and pike. There are brown trout in parts of the main channel and all the tributary rivers. Sea trout and grey mullet occur in the Bann Estuary.

Elvers enter the estuary in the autumn having travelled with the Gulf Stream from the Sargasso Sea. In the spring many of them swim upstream aided by special elver ladders at sluices and weirs. To ensure that as many elvers as possible reach Lough Neagh to support the commercial fishery there the Fishermen's Co-operative collect as many of these elvers as they can and transport them for direct release into Lough Neagh. Eels mature in Lough Neagh after 11-14 years after which they descend the river as silver eels to return to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. Silver eels migrate in autumn and will only move when the river is in flood and under conditions of no moonlight.

Salmon ascend the Lower Bann between May and October with a peak in June and July to reach spawning beds in the head waters of the tributary rivers of the Lower Bann and the feeder rivers of Lough Neagh. These salmon populations are subject to commercial fishing pressure along the North coast. Until very recently Bann System Limited operated commercial salmon traps at the Cutts. Although commercial trapping here has been suspended for the time being Bann System Limited have the right to restart. A small number of salmon draft nets are issued in Lough Neagh. Salmon fry spend two years or so feeding in nursery areas close to where they were spawned before descending the system and returning to the sea as smolts.

Little is known regarding the movements and feeding habits of the coarse fish population in the river. It is believed that Lough Beg is an important factor in this context and this could be a reason why the coarse fish resource in an area such as Newferry/Portglenone seems so much better than that in an impounded area such as Kilrea. There are two fish farms on the river.

### **6.1.1 Areas of Special Scientific Interest**

Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) are areas of land that have been identified by scientific survey as being of the highest degree of conservation value. They have a well-defined boundary and by and large remain in private ownership. The underlying philosophy is to achieve conservation by co-operation and in this, the part played by landowners is fully recognised and appreciated.

When an ASSI is declared, owners and occupiers receive a list of notifiable operations. These are activities which the Department considers might harm the nature conservation interest of the site. Should a landowner wish to carry out a notifiable operation and the Department judges it to be incompatible with the conservation interest, the Department may offer to enter into a management agreement, with the possibility of payments on conclusion of the negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

The Lower Bann Valley has a number of ASSI located in its hinterlands and they include: -

- Bann Estuary
- Tully Hill
- Wolf Island Bog
- Dead Island Bog
- Lough Beg
- Toome

### **6.1.2 Special Areas of Conservation**

Under the European Commission's Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (The Habitats Directive) areas were submitted to be protect some of the most seriously threatened habitats and species across Europe. These areas are known as Special Areas of Conservation.

The Habitats Directive is implemented in Northern Ireland through The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 as amended by The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 and The Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007.<sup>5</sup>

In the Lower Bann Valley, the Bann Estuary is a SAC and therefore there are specific guidelines in place for landowners and users of this habitat to protect the natural habitats.

### **6.1.3 Nature Reserves**

A nature reserve is defined as an area of importance for flora, fauna or features of geological or other special interest, which are reserved and managed for conservation and to provide special opportunities for study or research. Environment and Heritage Service declares nature reserves under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985<sup>6</sup>.

To date, 47 nature reserves have been declared in Northern Ireland and in the Lower Bann Valley Lough Beg is identified.

INSERT MAP OF LOCATIONS OF SAC AND ASSIs

## **6.2 Built Environment**

Mountsandel at Coleraine is the site of the oldest human settlement so far recorded in Ireland. These Mesolithic people lived as hunter gatherers 9,000 years ago and were drawn to the Lower Bann as a prolific source of salmon and eels. People

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/biodiversity/designated-areas/area\\_interest.htm](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/biodiversity/designated-areas/area_interest.htm)

<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> ibid

exploited other sites along the Lower Bann for salmon and eels in later Mesolithic times as well. Along the Bann stone and flint artefacts have been found and the Newferry/Culbane area is recognised as one of the richest areas for stone artefacts in the British Isles.

Evidence of human activity was frequently associated with the diatomite deposits laid down 7,500 to 5,000 years ago. Many swords, some of them richly decorated, dating from the late Bronze age have been found in the Lower Bann.

Church Island at Lough Beg probably had religious significance even before the arrival of Christianity when it became, for a time, a monastic site. It is known to have been raided by Vikings who must have travelled upstream.

There are a number of significant plantation buildings along the Lower Bann, for example, Bellaghy Bawn and Movanager Bawn.

The industrial archaeology of diatomite working along the Lower Bann is especially notable. For over a century diatomite was extracted, made into bricks locally or exported for other uses such as making insulation bricks, abrasives (car polish, toothpaste, etc.) and filters (cider, beer production). The first diatomite factories were built at Newferry in 1906 and Portglenone in 1912. During the second World War large quantities of diatomite were exported to English munitions factories to act as an absorbent for explosives (nitro glycerine). Commercial extraction virtually ceased in the 1960s and finally ended in the mid 1990s.

### **6.3 Vision**

The Lower Bann Valley has a rich and valued Natural and Built Heritage highlighted by the fact that there are 6 Areas of Special Scientific Interest and 1 Special Area of Conservation at present. These protected zones are vital to the ecology of the region and the importance of the habitats are nationally and internationally recognized. The protection and enhancement of these areas must remain central to the development of the Lower Bann Valley.

To ensure their central position in future initiatives, management structures must be put in place to raise awareness not only amongst the Statutory Agencies of the issues but for recreational users and local communities along the Valley also. The Local Bio diversity Action Plans (LBAP) will fill the remit and it is envisaged that the entire Lower Bann Valley will be covered by a selection of LBAPs and indeed a Habitat Management Strategy for the Valley will be developed also.

As well as this unique ecology, the built and industrial heritage of the Valley is a valuable resource. As previously mentioned, the site of the oldest settlement in Ireland is located along the Lower Bann, but this is not the only archeological site. The NIEA maintains a database of important sites in NI, however these are classified by Local Authority and their importance and proximity to the Lower Bann can be overlooked.

It is envisioned that the Lower Bann Valley's Natural and Built Heritage will be distinctly and clearly highlighted through accessible and user friendly databases so that future initiatives can be sensitively developed and managed.

#### **6.4 Aim**

All proposals will be focused around the common aim of: -

*"To protect and enhance the natural and built heritage of the River Bann for today's and for the future generations"*

#### **6.5 Objectives**

This aim will be achieved by: -

Natural Environment

- 6.5.1 To fully engage with all Local Bio Diversity Action Plans
- 6.5.2 To encourage the development of Local Bio-diversity Action Plans for all Council regions
- 6.5.3 To develop Management Plans for all ASSIs and SAC
- 6.5.4 To develop a Habitat Management Plan for the Lower Bann Valley

Built Environment

- 6.5.5 To provide up to date and accurate data on the Lower Bann's heritage
- 6.5.6 To promote the unique heritage of the Lower Bann
- 6.5.7 To encourage the engagement of local communities in promotion activities
- 6.5.8 To learn from models of best practice in heritage protection and promotion

## **7 Water & Land Based Recreation**

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### **7.1 Current activities**

There are a wide variety of users along the Lower Bann and these include:

#### **7.1.1 Boating**

There are a number of private leisure crafts which are moored along the Lower Bann. Indeed the moorings in Drumaheglis are fully booked and there was until recently a 4 year waiting list for mooring posts. To date there are no private hire leisure crafts for people to hire and enjoy a cruise along the Lower Bann. For the public to get on to the River, they can access some of the Pleasure Crafts operating on the River from Coleraine and Portglenone.

The economic input of the private boat owners was highlighted in the Waterways Ireland Report in 2006 which showed that

“that the median number of people on each of the last three reported trips was 2 or 3, it is possible to aggregate that a typical trip of 2 people, for 3 days, spending an average of €122 (£83) per person per boating day, the contribution would be €732 (£500) for that trip”<sup>7</sup>

#### **7.1.2 Angling**

The Lower Bann is a popular location for both coarse and game anglers and the four main tributaries are also renowned for game angling. Migrating eels and salmon are to be found as well roach, bream, roach/bream hybrids, perch, rudd, trench, gudgeon and numerous pike. There are brown trout in parts of the main channel and in all the tributary rivers. Sea trout and grey mullet occur in the Bann estuary.

The shallow area of Lough Beg is particularly good for pike, and the canal channels at Toome, Portna and Movanager are well known for all coarse fish species, especially when the river is in flood.

The Lower Bann is very important in an Ireland fishing context as a salmonid river, with historic catch statistics of over 20,000 salmon per annum taken by nets and traps until the mid-20th century. It still remains important as an angling river with between 1,500 to 2,000 salmon caught on the rod each year<sup>8</sup>

These are extensive competition beats near Kilrea, Portglenone, Newferry and Toome, with a strong network of angling clubs in existence along the Navigation.

The Lower Bann is mainly a deep, slow, navigable channel with some fast runs near the weirs. It fishes best in low conditions. The main Salmon areas are at Culliff Rock (movanager), Carnroe, Portna and The Cutts at Coleraine. Carnroe is a prime beat. Angling starts at the start of May and the peak season is from mid-June to mid-July, this is a large run and there is good fishing from then until the end of the season on 30th September.

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<sup>7</sup> “Economic Contribution of Private Boat Owners Report” Tourism Research Centre, Dublin Institute of Technology June 2006

<sup>8</sup> [www.wherewisemenfish.com](http://www.wherewisemenfish.com)

### **7.1.3 Powerboats: - Jet skiing; Waterskiing; Wakeboarding**

Due to the wide variety of users along the Lower River Bann, a voluntary zoning procedure was developed and introduced by the Lower Bann Advisory Committee. The powerboats, which are involved in sports such as jetskiing, waterskiing and wakeboarding have been allocated zones. This voluntary code was introduced to ensure there was a lack of conflict of interests between the users and to promote safety on the Navigation

INSERT Map of zones.

There are a number of private businesses on the Lower Bann which facilitate the water sports by providing facilities and tuition on a private basis. There are also a number of clubs along the Navigation, which monitor and regulate usage by their members. These clubs attract large membership and are proving to be popular sporting activity along the Navigation.

There is no regulation for private owners and their conduct on the waterway, Local Clubs can exert a degree of management but only on its members, however bye laws are needed to provide the necessary regulatory powers.

### **7.1.4 Canoeing and Rowing**

A 58kilometer Lower Bann Canoe Trail is signposted and promoted through Canoe Association NI with local statutory agency assistance. It is promoted as a *"unique way to experience this beautiful river and is suitable for canoeing enthusiasts of all abilities."*<sup>9</sup>

The trail begins in Toome and is promoted at stages and ends at Ballywoolen, 1.5km from Barmouth.

Rowing is an extremely popular sport on the Lower Bann particularly around Coleraine. There are a three rowing clubs based in Coleraine, including the University of Ulster Rowing Club. 2008 Olympians in Rowing began their training and is based in Coleraine. The successes of local rowers has raised the profile of Coleraine as a destination on an international scale.

### **7.1.5 Cycling**

In Summer 2008, a new 45 mile linear cycle route from Toome to Castlerock was developed by Sustrans, in partnership with local statutory agencies.

The Lower Bann Cycleway project has put in place a quality signed cycle route that follows the Lower Bann River corridor from Lough Neagh, to the North Coast where it meets with the Atlantic Ocean at the Barmouth near Castlerock. A series of interpretation panels have been installed along the route and a free Lower Bann Cycleway route map has been produced.

### **7.1.6 Hunting**

The Honorable the Irish Society leases the Shooting Rights along the Lower Bann to the Kilrea Sporting & Conservation Syndicate. The shooting season runs from October to February and the local group will manage the stocks and regulate poaching in the forest areas. Large shoots will be organised by the Syndicate and

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<sup>9</sup> [www.canoenorthernireland.com](http://www.canoenorthernireland.com)

informal liaison is maintained with other User Groups when these are occurring to maintain safety standards. There are also commercial shoots held in Carnroe.

### **7.1.7 Walking**

As the Lower Bann Navigation is not a man made navigation, there are no tow paths along the River and therefore there is no dedicated accessible walking route along the River. However there are a number of walking routes in the towns and villages along the Valley. These routes are used by the local community for recreation and social purposes and in general are maintained by the Local Authorities

## **7.2 Vision**

It is envisioned that the Lower Bann Valley will be a first class recreational venue for users in the future offering a Premium recreational and tourism product. This can be achieved through co-ordinated management of the Lower Bann usage whilst endeavouring to provide facilities off and on site for all interested parties.

By its very nature, the Lower Bann River is a finite resource with limited capacity for recreation users. The conflict between many of these users has been apparent through the consultation process and there is growing demand for guidance and regulation from the relevant authorities. The main area of concern is the safety considerations for powered watersports users. These users includes: Jetskis; Waterskiing; Wakeboarding; Rowers and Canoeists.

Currently there is a voluntary code of conduct and voluntary zoning of usage along the River, however as they are non-enforcable they are not always adhered to. Even if the powered boats are operating in the correct zone, concerns are raised over the suitability of the operators as they can be underage with no statutory license for operation. These zones can be overcrowded with multiple users of jetskis and waterskiers which raised serious safety concerns for individuals. Whilst bye laws and registration of users would contribute to the alleviation of this problem as the popularity of these sports grow, the problem is exacerbated.

Models of best practice need to assessed and the feasibility of translating these solutions to the Lower Bann need further research, these models include off river watersports facilities which are manmade.

Restriction and exclusion of certain activities will be inevitable and consultation is key to ensuring that the best possible solution for all users of today and the future is achieved.

Other proposals for walking, canoeing and cycling routes are realisable. The Cycling route has recently been launched and its success will be monitored. The Canoe Trail is proving successful and will continue to grow. However despite many calls for walking routes, the community demand for such a route is not apparent. It is accepted that there is access to the River if desired and walking routes are available in urban and semi urban locations. At a local users level, the value of a dedicated walking route is not recognised.

### **7.3 Aim**

The aim of all initiatives for land and water based recreation is to:

*"enhance the recreational resource and its management of the Lower River Bann for the benefit of all users"*

### **7.4 Objectives & Rationale**

- 7.4.1 To promote the use of Lower River Bann for Private Boat Owners
- 7.4.2 To develop the Lower Bann Navigation for private cruisers
- 7.4.3 To enhance the angling facilities and opportunities along the Lower Bann
- 7.4.4 To develop disabled access facilities on the Navigation for all users
- 7.4.5 To develop the recreational uses of the Lower Bann
- 7.4.6 To promote a first class integrated menu of activities
- 7.4.7 To create networking opportunities for Lower Bann Users
- 7.4.8 To research the possible exclusion/ restriction of certain users of the Lower Bann
- 7.4.9 To examine the feasibility of creating new facilities / venues for powered watersports.

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## **8 Socio Economic Development**

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### **8.1 Overview**

It is a responsibility of all public sector organization to ensure that their activities have a positive economic and social dividend. In the Lower River Bann corridor, the navigation passes through a number of principal towns, villages and hamlets, all with a social and economic history associated with the Lower Bann.

Mountsandel is the oldest settlement in Ireland and its location is attributed to its proximity to the Lower River Bann. This vital natural resource supported families, communities and businesses from these Mesolithic times to modern day. Now we have businesses focusing on watersports, angling and boating in all its forms.

This section aims to turn the tide of “turning your back on the River” which has happened across the UK and Ireland in the last century and facilitating the resurgence of the Navigation at the heart of the regions socio-economic development.

### **8.2 Social Environment**

The Lower River Bann passes through 5 Local Authority jurisdictions<sup>10</sup> and has a total population of 57,666 as recorded in the 2001 Census.

These Council wards can be analysed using the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005. The NIMDM 2005 comprises 7 domains of deprivation which combine to form the multiple deprivation measure. The NIMDM 2005 is the official measure of spatial deprivation and will be commended for use across NI Government<sup>11</sup>

The seven domains used include income, employment, health and disability, education, skills and training, proximity to services, living environment, crime and disorder.

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<sup>10</sup> Following the Review of Public Administration this will be reduced to 3

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/mapxtreme\\_deprivation2005/default.asp](http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/mapxtreme_deprivation2005/default.asp)

WARD NAME	Council Area	Rank of MDM Score	
Strand	Coleraine	570	<p>The MDM is the Multiple Deprivation Measure and is ranked out of 890 wards with 1 being the most deprived and 890 the least deprived.</p> <p>As shown, Coleraine has the most deprived ward (Strand) and least deprived ward (Churchland) in the Lower Bann Corridor.</p>
Waterside	Coleraine	565	
Knocklynn	Coleraine	541	
Mount Sandel	Coleraine	521	
The Cuts	Coleraine	498	
Dundooan	Coleraine	471	
Grange	Ballymena	459	
Ballymaguigan	Magherafelt	433	
The Vow	Ballymoney	408	
Castledawson	Magherafelt	402	
Castlerock	Coleraine	387	
Seacon	Ballymoney	386	
University	Coleraine	378	
Macosquin	Coleraine	377	
Portglenone	Ballymena	356	
Bellaghy	Magherafelt	335	
Valley	Magherafelt	323	
Kilrea	Coleraine	297	
Killoquin Upper	Ballymoney	274	
Toome	Antrim	231	
Central	Coleraine	95	
Churchland	Coleraine	76	

### 8.3 Economic Activity

There are a number of large towns and villages along the Lower Bann River Valley including Coleraine, Toome, Ballymoney, Kilrea and Portglenone. The local business community is beginning to look to the River by offering watersports equipment etc and riverside bars and restaurants. The accommodation sector benefits greatly by the visiting anglers and canoeists etc.

A 2007 tourism marketing study found that there was approx 1090 bed spaces available in the Lower Bann corridor and this includes self catering, caravan and camping sites as well hotels and B&Bs.<sup>12</sup>

This study also identified 47 tourist attractions along the River corridor which varied from forest parks to bird watching facilities to marinas.<sup>13</sup>

There are a number of private enterprises whose businesses are primarily water based and these include a waterski school, private marinas, private boat tours and angling guides and clubs. There are no exact figures for the economic input these activities bring to the local economy but anecdotal evidence shows that there is a greater economic potential to be exploited.

<sup>12</sup> "Market Development Plan for the Lower Bann Valley" J A Annett & A Balnaves June 2007

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

## **8.4 Vision**

The Lower Bann has been at the center of the socio-economic development of the Lower Bann Valley for centuries and it is envisioned that this will continue for future generations.

The social and educational opportunities for local voluntary groups and schools are largely underutilized at present. It is accepted as best practice in other waterways corridors, particularly by Waterways Ireland and British Waterways, that to include local youth in the waterways will engender pride in the waterway and thereby reduce crime and vandalism. This will have an economic dividend with an increase in visitor numbers and visitor spend.

It is envisioned that an educational programme will encapsulate the natural and built heritage of the Lower Bann Valley as well as including sporting and recreational activities which are offered by the waterway.

Economically, the business opportunities created by the waterways has been realized in other regions in Ireland and the UK. These are not only targeting the tourism product, whilst this is important, but domestic users and visitors. The creation and development of local amenities for local day trippers and recreational users will increase footfall in an area and it is the individual businesses responsibility to tap into this emerging market.

## **8.5 Aim**

*" To harness the socio-economic potential of the River for the benefits of the local community and private enterprise in an environmentally sustainable manner"*

## **8.6 Objectives**

- 8.6.1 To promote healthy communities through the activities offered by the River.
- 8.6.2 To encourage local schools and groups to incorporate the River into local curriculum activities
- 8.6.3 To encourage greater investment in the social economy and private sector for River based initiatives.
- 8.6.4 To raise awareness of economic potential of the River
- 8.6.5 To promote the recreation facilities of the Lower Bann.



## 9 Summary of Activities

### 9.1 Infrastructure

*"Provision of a top class recreation facility which meets the needs of all its users in the present and in the future"*

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Partners*</b>
1 To ensure that the Lower Bann maintains a high standard of Water Quality	1.1 Implement the Water Framework Directive through liaison with the Project promoters within Environment & Heritage Service	River Basin Management Plan for North West.	2009	NIEA
	1.2 Develop a pilot project of training pollution bailiffs within local user groups and reporting to NIEA.	Pilot project of training 10 bailiffs – 2 per annum from local user groups	Commence 2009 for 1 year	LBAC, NIEA, RA, Angling Clubs
	1.3 Awareness campaign on the Water Framework Directive and the implications for local users and landowners	4 awareness seminars specifically relating to Lower River Bann	2010 - 2012	NIEA, LBAC
	1.4 To develop water level management techniques to minimize closure of navigation due to seasonal changes	Localised water level management plan	Ongoing	RA
2 To continually upgrade and supplement the provision of facilities along the River	2.1 To identify locations and install public pump out facilities along the Lower Bann Navigation	2 new pump out stations located on the Lower Bann Navigation	2009 - 2012	WI

3	<p>2.2 To develop Service Level Agreements with local authorities and Local Clubs for the provision and maintenance of service blocks for River Users for a mutually economic benefit</p> <p>2.3 Investigate the replacement of stationary navigation signage which can harm rowers</p> <p>3.1 To embed the zoning of the River for Users within a legislative framework</p> <p>3.2 To develop bye laws on the zoning of the Lower Bann for different recreation users</p> <p>3.3 To publicise the voluntary code on the River bank so that visitors can be aware of the different zones</p> <p>3.4 To raise awareness of the usage of the River and the safety conduct expected</p>	<p>Pilot scheme with 1 club to provide a public service block as part of a partnership agreement with local authority and the club e.g Newferry</p> <p>Replacement of stationary signage with "rower" friendly signage</p> <p>Bye laws on the use of Navigation as a recreational resource</p> <p>River bank promotional campaign on voluntary code – posters, signs</p> <p>5 waterside roadshows on the voluntary code of conduct and safety demonstrations for non-club users of the River</p>	<p>2010</p> <p>2011</p> <p>2011</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>2009 – 2013</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>2009</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>LA and local clubs</p> <p>WI, Rowing Clubs</p> <p>WI</p> <p>LBAC, LBP, LA Local businesses</p> <p>LBAC, LBP, LA WI</p> <p>LBAC, Planning Service, WI</p> <p>LBAC, LBP</p> <p>LBP, LBAC</p>
4	<p>4.1 Establish a formal information flow procedures for proposed riverside planning applications</p> <p>4.2 To create a signposting service for potential developers along the River to access relevant information and support</p>	<p>Bi-annual meeting with Planning Service to discuss planning proposals along River</p> <p>An online signposting map of where to go to when seeking information on planning</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>LBAC, Planning Service, WI</p> <p>LBAC, LBP</p>
5	<p>5.1 To promote a code of safety conduct for River users.</p>	<p>Promotional campaign in local media</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>LBP, LBAC</p>

	5.2	Awareness campaign through local schools on water safety	10 events with local schools along the River corridor	Ongoing	LBAC, Schools, Education Board
	5.3	Awareness campaign through local press on water safety	5 Press events along the River	Ongoing	LBAC, LA, WI, RA

## 9.2 Natural and Built Environment

*"To protect and enhance the natural and built heritage of the River Bann for today's and future generations"*

Objective	Activity	Output	Timescale	Partnership	
6 To fully engage with all local Bio Diversity Strategies	6.1	To participate in the local biodiversity action groups once established	Inclusion of Lower Bann issues in local strategies	Ongoing	LBAC, LA
	6.2	Oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Lower Bann Bio Diversity Strategy 2008	Implementation Plan	Ongoing	LBAC
	6.3	To encourage the completion of LBAP for all council areas along the Lower Bann	Local Biodiversity Action Plan	2009	LA
7 To develop Management Plan for ASSIs & SAC	7.1	To develop a management plan for 6 ASSIs along the Lower Bann	6 Local Management Plans	2009 - 2010	LA, NIEA, LBP
	7.2	To develop a Management Plan for the Bann Estuary SAC	SAC Management Plan	2009	NIEA, LBP, Coleraine BC

	7.3	Develop a Habitat Action Plan for Lower Bann Valley	Habitat Action Plan	2008 - 2009	LBAC
8	8.1	To filter the NIEA listed buildings schedule to give an up to date database of the Lower Bann Corridor's built heritage	Lower Bann Corridor database for its built heritage	2009	LBAC, NIEA
	8.2	To develop and promote a environmental database for the local community.	Environmental database	Ongoing	LBAC
9	9.1	To promote the industrial heritage of the Lower Bann Corridor in particular relating to eels and diacomite through seminars with local heritage groups	5 lectures with local heritage group on the Lower Bann industrial heritage	2009 - 2010	LBP, LBAC
	9.2	To organize a series of events with local schools promoting the Lower Bann Natural and Built Heritage	5 schools programmes focusing on local heritage	2009 - 2011	LBAC, LBP
	9.3	Raise awareness for locals and visitors on specific heritage sites through interpretation and information sources	Awareness campaign on local heritage	Ongoing	LBP
10	10.1	Encourage local communities to look to the river in developing local community initiatives e.g walking tours and history lectures (not watersports)	5 events in local community including the River in its activities	Ongoing	LBAC, LA, Local community groups
	10.2	Develop a living history programme for local communities and schools focusing on the River as a economic resource.	Living history template for groups to adapt to their areas	2010	LBAC, LBP, Education Boards

11	To learn from models of best practice in heritage protection and promotion	11.1	To identify areas of best practice and adopt models to suit the Lower Bann Corridor	Identification of models of best practice	2009 - 2010	LBAC
		11.2	To develop a heritage protection and promotion strategy with all statutory agencies	Service Level Agreement of heritage in Lower Bann Corridor	2009	LBAC, NIEA

### 9.3 Water and Land Based Recreation

*"enhance the recreational resource of the Lower River Bann for the benefit of all users"*

Objective	Activity	Output	Timescale	Partnership
12 To promote the use of Lower River Bann for Private Boat Owners	12.1 To develop a "Gateway to the Bann" pilot programme which encourages private boat owners to enter the Lower Bann Navigation at Toome	A Boat Rally in Toome which would encourage boat owners to travel up the Lower Bann and experience what it has to offer	2010	Local community, IWAI, LBAC, WI
	12.2 To encourage the development of new marinas on the Lower Bann which would facilitate private boat owners	1 new marina proposal for Lower Bann	2012	LBAC, LA, Private business
	12.3 To conduct a feasibility study of promoting Lower Bann Navigation as a cruiser destination.	Feasibility study	2010	LBAC, LBP
13 To develop the Lower Bann Navigation for private hire cruisers	13.1 To encourage a private hire operator to base an operation in Lower Bann	Private Hire Operator on the Lower Bann	Ongoing	LBAC

	13.2	To explore areas of best practice where public private partnership attracted new hire operators - Ballinamore	Develop a public private strategy to commence this social enterprise.	Ongoing	LBAC	
	13.3	To lobby government and private sector to develop tourism package for cruiser traffic on the Lower Bann	Tourism Plan for Cruising sector	2010	LBAC, RTA, WI	
	13.4	To install a host lowering device in Toome to facilitate ease of access	Host Lowering Device at Toome	2010	WI, RA	
14	To enhance the angling facilities and opportunities along the Lower Bann	14.1	To develop disabled fishing stands	10 new disabled fishing stands on Lower Bann	2012	WI, Angling Clubs, Bann System Ltd
		14.2	To develop fly fishing locations	1 new fly fishing location	2012	Bann System Ltd, WI
		14.3	To develop service blocks for anglers along the Lower Bann in partnership with other existing clubs on the River	1 new service block	Ongoing	LBAC, Bann System Ltd, Angling Clubs
15	To develop disabled access facilities on the Navigation for all users	15.1	To develop disabled access routes for visiting the Lower Bann bankside	1 fully accessible walking route along the River Bank	Ongoing	LA, CANI, Interest Groups
		15.2	To appraise all jetties, pontoons for their accessibility for those with special needs	Disability Audit of facilities	Ongoing	WI
16	To develop the recreational uses of the Lower Bann	To conduct an audit of all users of the Lower Bann – their level of use and seasons in use	Users Audit for Lower Bann	ASAP	LBAC	

16.2	To carry out a feasibility study on potential new recreation uses on the Lower Bann which complement existing users	Recreational development proposal	ASAP	LBAC, Sports Council
	16.3 To develop a pilot scheme for a new user group on the River in line with existing users e.g triathlon	1 new competition on the River	2011 - 2013	LBAC, LA, Sports Council, WI
17	To promote a first class integrated menu of activities	Recreation Programme for Lower Bann	2009	LBP
18	To create networking opportunities for Lower Bann User groups	Bi- Annual meeting of Forum	ASAP	LBAC
		Web based database for user groups/ users of Lower Bann	ASAP	LBAC, LBP
19	To research the exclusion/ restriction of certain users of the Lower Bann	Recreational Usage Policy	ASAP	LBAC, WI
		Partnership approach to marketing jetskiing on the sea and in Lough Neagh	ASAP	LBAC, Tourism Authorities
20	To examine the feasibility of creating new venues for watersports	Feasibility Study for off river watersports venue	2009	LBP, LA, WI
		Best Practice report for new venue	2009	LBP, LBAC, WI, Sports Council

## 9.4 Socio-economic Development

" To fully exploit the socio-economic potential of the River for the benefits of the local community and private enterprise"

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Ownership</b>
21 To promote healthy communities through the activities offered by the River.	21.1 To develop an activity guide for local groups to access recreation on the River in their area	Local Residents User Guide distributed to schools and clubs	Ongoing	LBAC, Education Boards
	21.2 To organize a healthy communities challenge for towns, villages and parishes along the River	1 communities competition based on the River activities	2010	LBAC, LA, Local Communities, Schools
	21.3 Incorporate bio-diversity action groups to encourage local community clean up initiatives along the River	5 clean up days along the River	Ongoing	LBAC, LA, Tidy Towns
	22 To encourage local schools and groups to incorporate the River into local curriculum activities	22.1 To develop a Lower Bann Education Programme	1 Education Programme Template	Ongoing
23 To encourage greater investment in the social economy and private sector for River based	22.2 To facilitate a roll out of education programme by seeking relevant funding and support	Rollout of education programme to 20 groups	2010 - 2013	LBP, LBAC, WI, Education Boards
	23.1 To provide an information and signposting service for groups/ individuals wishing to access funding for River based initiatives	Online signposting service for funding applicants to access necessary funding	Ongoing	LBAC, LBP

initiatives.	23.2	To carry out an economic feasibility study for potential investors into businesses along the Lower Bann	Feasibility study for business start ups	Ongoing	LBP
24 To raise awareness of economic potential of the River	24.1	To host a networking event for businesses operating along the Lower Bann corridor with guest speakers from other Inland Waterways	5 networking events for Lower Bann Corridor	ASAP	LBAC, LBP, WI, Invest NI
	24.2	To establish a "River Friendly" business classification scheme which would promote those businesses which look to the River and its users.	A business classification scheme for river orientated businesses	Ongoing	LBAC, LA, WI
25 To promote the recreation facilities of the Lower Bann.	25.1	To adopt the recommendations of the 2007 Market Development Plan for the Lower Bann Valley	Implemented Strategy	ASAP	LBAC, LBP

\* Key

LBAC – Lower Bann Advisory Committee

LBP – Lower Bann Partnership

LA – Local Authorities

RA – Rivers Agency

WI – Waterways Ireland

NIEA – Northern Ireland Environment Agency

LC – Local Community Associations

