

ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE SERVICE



THE MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRY PARKS A STATEMENT OF POLICY



March 2004



An Agency within the Department of the
Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Contents

	Page
Executive Summary: the Definition, Vision, Mission and Ethos for Country Park Management by Environment and Heritage Service	4
1. Introduction	6
2. Historical Overview	8
3. Vision Statement	12
4. Management Values	14
4.1 A stimulating and safe environment in which to enjoy the countryside	14
4.2 Sound environmental principles with a presumption towards management to conserve the natural and historic heritage	15
4.3 Working in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders	16
4.4 A professional, friendly and efficient service consistent with the Customer Care Policy	18
4.5 A supportive working environment for staff to deliver the vision	18
4.6 Equality – a commitment to all	19
4.7 Best value for money	19
5. Mission Statements	20
5.1 To provide a quality, safe environment for all to enjoy and appreciate countryside recreation	21
5.2 To provide appropriate countryside facilities	25
5.3 To provide exemplary habitat and heritage management to enhance biodiversity and to conserve the landscape and built environment	32
5.4 To provide enhanced appreciation of the countryside and opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment needed to protect and improve the environment	34
5.5 To provide inspirational interpretation of the (natural and built) environment	34
5.6 To provide a positive “interface” between EHS and the public	37
Appendices	40
Appendix 1 Bodies which commented on the first draft of this document Government Departments and Agencies	41
Appendix 2 Historic Structures at EHS Country Parks	42

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) has adopted the following, widely used definition of a Country Park:

A Country Park is a Place that provides Easy Access for Countryside Recreation in a Managed Environment

THE VISION

The vision statement for the management by EHS of its Country Parks is:

Natural Inspiration

THE MISSION

EHS will apply sustainable, best practice techniques to the management of its Country Parks to provide:

- ❖ a quality, safe environment for all to enjoy countryside recreation***
- ❖ appropriate countryside facilities***
- ❖ exemplary habitat and heritage management to enhance biodiversity and to conserve the landscape and built environment***
- ❖ enhanced appreciation of the countryside and opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment needed to protect and improve the environment***
- ❖ inspirational interpretation of the natural and built environment***
- ❖ a positive “interface” between EHS and the public***

THE MANAGEMENT ETHOS

EHS will apply the following values in managing its Country Parks:

- ❖ A stimulating and safe environment in which to enjoy the countryside***
- ❖ Sound environmental principles with a presumption towards management to conserve the natural and historic heritage***
- ❖ Working in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders***
- ❖ A professional, friendly and efficient service consistent with the EHS Customer Care Policy***
- ❖ A supportive working environment for staff to deliver the vision***
- ❖ Equality – a commitment to all***
- ❖ Best value for money***

1. INTRODUCTION

Opportunities for countryside recreation in Northern Ireland are more limited than in other areas of the United Kingdom. It lacks the extensive network of public rights of way and permissive paths typical in rural areas of Great Britain, so there is little opportunity for roaming through open countryside except in upland areas and specially managed sites.

This deficiency has, to a large extent, been met through the management by public bodies of areas of countryside as parks. The Forestry Division of the Department of Agriculture (now Forest Service) established the first Forest Park in Northern Ireland at Tollymore near Newcastle in 1955. Several National Trust properties also came to fill a similar role.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Department's Conservation Branch undertook an acquisition and development phase of Country Parks. This represented a significant proportion of the total work of 'The Branch' and was guided by the statutory Ulster Countryside Committee (UCC). Policy evolved on an *ad hoc* basis but was carefully considered by staff and the UCC. However the rationale behind the management decisions and some policy itself was not well documented and was never set out in a single statement.

Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) is the Agency within the Department of the Environment (DOE) which now manages the state-run Country Parks acquired and developed by its predecessor bodies. A few local authorities have also established Country Parks. Nature Reserves managed by EHS, Forest Service, local authorities, the National Trust, Ulster Wildlife Trust, and Woodland Trust add to the pool of sites used for countryside recreation.

During the late 1980s, the emphasis for DOE, the government department responsible for the conservation of the natural heritage of Northern Ireland, shifted markedly towards the designation of Areas of Special Scientific Interest and European nature conservation imperatives. Having been acquired and developed, Country Parks faded from the spotlight. A similar loss of priority took place in Great Britain. There is now a movement to revitalise the country park movement right across the United Kingdom.

This is particularly important in Northern Ireland, where there is a great need for those traumatised by decades of urban violence to reconnect with nature on non-threatening, neutral territory. Country Parks help provide for this need. They also provide scope for healthy, informal exercise to counteract the increasingly sedentary nature of the 21st Century lifestyle.

Throughout the past thirty years, access to DOE Country Parks has been free. Though many visitors questioned in surveys would be willing to pay admission to EHS Country Parks, there has been little pressure to introduce charging because of the logistical challenges of multiple entrances at several Parks. They are significant tourist attractions, enhance the health and well-being of the community and provide EHS with the opportunity to promote environmental conservation. At Visitor Centres, exhibitions, interpretation and education are provided about the Parks themselves and about the local wildlife and heritage, enabling promotion of environmental messages.

EHS properties in the countryside (including country parks, nature reserves and the grounds of historic monuments in state care) are currently managed by Regional Operations Unit. An internal requirement to document detailed management plans for each EHS-managed Country Park drew attention to the lack of clearly stated, guiding principles for staff to use in developing their management proposals. This prompted the preparation of this document.

It should be understood that this document is **not** a statement of wider government policy on the provision of managed access to the countryside, but relates exclusively to the management by EHS of its own properties and the delivery of its countryside agenda to the visiting public. However others in the field of countryside recreation may find it includes some useful ideas which they may wish to incorporate into their own management regimes.

The EHS Management of Country Parks Policy Statement is intended:

- ❖ ***to inform the preparation of country park management plans by regional EHS staff;***
- ❖ ***to guide the day-to-day management of country parks by EHS regional staff;***
- ❖ ***to provide a clear record of policy for EHS staff based in headquarters and for government auditors; and***
- ❖ ***to clarify, for others with a 'stake' in EHS country parks, the purposes and policies governing their management and use.***

'Stakeholders' include those visiting and carrying out contract work in EHS Country Parks, neighbouring landowners, local authorities and community groups, partners in management, specialist conservation, recreation and equality bodies, and other government departments and agencies involved in providing countryside recreation and management.

EHS has developed the management policies in the Statement:

- ❖ ***from existing, but often unrecorded policy;***
- ❖ ***in consultation with regional management, wardens, country park and headquarters staff through visioning workshops;***
- ❖ ***in consultation with statutory advisory councils:***
 - ***the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside,***
 - ***the Historic Monuments Council and***
 - ***the Historic Buildings Council;***
- ❖ ***in consultation with partners in management, user groups and other stakeholders including local authorities, equality organisations, voluntary conservation bodies and country park networks in Great Britain.***

A list of those who commented on an earlier draft is provided as Appendix 1.

2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The first Country Parks in Northern Ireland were established in the early 1970s under the Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1965, which set up the Ulster Countryside Committee (UCC) charged with advising Government, *inter alia*, on the purchase and management of Amenity Lands. The UCC recommended the acquisition and development of a suite of country parks which would provide for safe, countryside recreation, primarily for urban dwellers, in a variety of natural settings including the coast, woodland, river corridors, lakesides, hills and peatland.

Over about ten years Government acquired the following properties:

❖ Crawfordsburn Country Park Helen's Bay, Co Down	(sea coast and wooded glen)
❖ Scrabo Country Park Newtownards, Co Down	(hilltop, scrub and woodland)
❖ Castle Archdale Country Park Irvinestown, Co Fermanagh	(lake shore, woodland and parkland)
❖ Roe Valley Country Park Limavady, Co Londonderry	(river corridor, woodland and wooded gorge)
❖ Peatlands Park Dungannon, Co Tyrone	(intact and cut-over peat bog, woodland, orchard, pasture)
❖ Redburn Country Park Holywood, Co Down	(parkland, woodland and meadow)
❖ Ness & Ervey Woods Country Park Brackfield, Co Londonderry	(wooded glens)



Natural Assets and Facilities

Each park is of high amenity and scenic quality by virtue of its setting and the natural or semi-natural habitats present. Woodland is found in all the parks.

The facilities provided at individual parks were dictated by the size, natural assets and level of use of the park. All sites were provided with car parking, a network of paths, mown grassland for informal recreation, seats and picnic tables. Larger parks were also provided with public toilets. The provision of directional signage and information panels was variable and a bit inconsistent.

Where suitable buildings existed (at Castle Archdale and Scrabo), these were developed to provide visitor centres with interpretative exhibitions describing the natural and human history of the park and its surroundings. At Roe Valley, Crawfordsburn and Peatlands, visitor centres were purpose-built. Cafés were provided at Crawfordsburn, Roe Valley and Castle Archdale, and a reception building at Peatlands was converted into a café.

Some parks were suited to the provision of additional facilities. A large caravan site was developed at Castle Archdale on the concrete basis left from a World War II military camp. A marina on Lower Lough Erne was also built in a sheltered bay there. Initially managed by DOE, management of these facilities is now franchised. A small touring caravan site developed at Roe Valley was subsequently closed. Youth campsites were developed at Crawfordsburn and at Castle Archdale, but only the latter remains in use.

Historic Heritage

The EHS Country Park properties include a range of historic structures. For example, several old buildings relict from water-powered industry, associated lades, historic bridges and castle ruins survive at Roe Valley. Some have been restored. Scrabo Tower (The Londonderry Monument) is a focal point for Scrabo Country Park and has strong associations for the local community. Its conservation has been costly but much valued. There are walled gardens at Castle Archdale, Crawfordsburn, Scrabo and Redburn. An early 20th Century fort is a feature of Crawfordsburn and many World War II structures remain at Castle Archdale. A fuller structures list is provided as Appendix 2.

Legislation and Central Policy

The seven EHS Country Parks were acquired under The Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1965. The current legislation enabling EHS to devote public funds to country park management is The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended 1989) (abbreviated as NCALO) which replaced the Amenity Lands Act. Articles 3 (2) (d) and 6 (1) (a), (c) and (d) give Government powers to acquire 'amenity lands' to 'conserve their natural beauty or amenity', provide 'means of access' to such areas and 'facilities for' their use and enjoyment by the public.

The provision and management of country parks is consistent with the Rural Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025, which was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly. It identifies the links between country parks, sustainable countryside access and raising urban environmental quality. EHS must also comply with legislation on Health and Safety and on Disability.

Education

Since the mid 1970s, EHS has encouraged the use of its Country Parks by visiting schools for field study. The Wardens and their staff led guided walks and gave talks to school and other groups. Some of the exhibitions and publications were prepared with school children in mind.

In recent years EHS has adopted a more professional approach by engaging trained teachers as Environmental Educators through an Employment Agency. The Educators provide a variety of curriculum-linked topics for visiting schools to choose from. An initial focus on primary age children has now expanded to both pre-school and secondary field study.

Management

At the time the first state Country Parks were acquired, the managing body was entitled 'Conservation Branch'. Over the years expansion and mergers took place, first with Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch and then with Environmental Protection Division. Titles progressed through 'Countryside and Wildlife Branch' and 'Environment Service' to the present 'Environment and Heritage Service' (EHS).



Our aim is to protect and conserve
the natural and built environment
and to promote its appreciation for the
benefit of present and future generations

An Agency within the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland

The Country Parks were managed initially by Wardens drawn from a range of disciplines, including forestry, horticulture, industry and science. Each Park had its own industrial squad. Management was undertaken in consultation with Headquarters-based Field Officers on the advice of the UCC and was strongly oriented towards countryside recreation, except at Peatlands Park where the emphasis was on environmental education.

Responsibility for country park management now lies with the Regional Operations Unit of the EHS Natural Heritage Directorate. It is clear from the mission statement of the Agency that country park managers have an important role in delivering all aspects of the EHS mission. The natural and built heritage of the country parks must be protected, conserved and promoted for public benefit.

EHS has recently assumed from Belfast Regeneration Office responsibility for ensuring the management of Colin Glen Forest Park in Dunmurry. This Park is essentially the same as a Country Park and is managed under a contract agreement by the Colin Glen Trust very much along the lines of EHS Country Parks. Management, which has also been supported by Belfast and Lisburn City Councils, is focused on providing countryside recreation and environmental education for the people of West Belfast and the Lisburn City Council area, and on restoring degraded areas to semi-natural woodland.

3. VISION STATEMENT

EHS Country Parks already provide visitors with a pleasant and enjoyable experience enabling them to relax in a countryside setting. This service will be maintained and enhanced.

In addition to the passive provision of a pleasant place for a walk, EHS will seek to engage the visitor in a way that adds to his or her knowledge and awareness of the park itself, of the countryside and of wider environmental issues. We aim to do this in a way that will inspire appreciation for the environment and active involvement in its conservation and enjoyment. The phrase chosen to encapsulate this aim is:

Natural Inspiration

This document sets out both the values that will guide EHS management of its Country Parks and the objectives that EHS has set to deliver this vision. The vision statement itself will also serve as a catchphrase in the promotion of EHS Country Parks.



4.0 MANAGEMENT VALUES

EHS has adopted seven values to guide the management of its country parks. These are set out and discussed before the Mission Statements as they provide cross-cutting principles that apply to all those Statements.

EHS will apply the following values in managing its Country Parks:

- ❖ ***A stimulating and safe environment in which to enjoy the countryside***
- ❖ ***Sound environmental principles with a presumption towards management to conserve the natural and historic heritage***
- ❖ ***Working in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders***
- ❖ ***A professional, friendly and efficient service consistent with the EHS Customer Care Policy***
- ❖ ***A supportive working environment for staff to deliver the vision***
- ❖ ***Equality – a commitment to all***
- ❖ ***Best value for money***

4.1 A stimulating and safe environment in which to enjoy the countryside

EHS will seek to manage its Country Parks to provide visitors with an environment which is visually, physically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally stimulating. Outdoor recreation is widely considered to provide significant health benefits. It can both lift the spirits and exercise the body. Its Country Parks enable EHS to provide its visitors with the opportunity to take healthy outdoor exercise in a safe environment.

EHS is committed to ensuring the health and safety of those who visit its properties and its staff. It employs a Health and Safety Advisor to make recommendations on safety standards and has produced a Health and Safety Manual and a Child Protection Policy.

To maintain high standards of health and safety, at its country parks, EHS will:

- ❖ provide opportunities for outdoor exercise suited to a wide range of fitness and mobility
- ❖ maintain current risk assessments for all authorised activities in its country parks and comply with the procedures set out in them and with the recommendations in the EHS Health and Safety Manual;
- ❖ comply with its Child Protection Policy, taking extra care to ensure that children and other vulnerable groups visiting its parks are not put at risk;
- ❖ conduct daily safety checks and monthly safety audits of its buildings, amenities and facilities;
- ❖ take immediate action to protect the public from any unacceptable risks, defects or hazards identified and remedy these promptly.

4.2 Sound environmental principles with a presumption towards management to conserve the natural and historic heritage

EHS is committed to managing its Country Parks using sustainable principles which will, as far as practicable, minimise environmental costs through careful choice of materials and procedures. EHS will also keep abreast of current estate management practice and will apply the best practice available within its resources. In managing its Country Parks, EHS will draw up and implement management plans which give full regard to sound environmental principles.

- ❖ A Best Practice Team will identify an accredited system for delivering Sustainable Management, based on Environmental Principles, and will provide Best Practice Guidelines that will serve as a common standards for country park management.
- ❖ The use of chemicals, particularly biocides, will be limited to situations where this represents the most sustainable means of achieving an essential objective, for example for stump treatment in the removal of invasive, non-native shrubs.
- ❖ 'Green Auditing' will be carried out to ensure that 'green' materials and construction techniques will be used and demonstrated wherever practicable and the use of peat products and tropical hardwoods will be avoided.
- ❖ Energy and water conservation, re-use and waste recycling practices will be adopted and interpreted.
- ❖ There will be a presumption towards management of most of the Park as natural habitat, such as broadleaved woodland, unless there are good reasons, for example built heritage conservation, to do otherwise.
- ❖ Park management will seek to conserve the landscape, the existing built and other historic heritage and the natural biodiversity.



4.3 Working in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders

EHS will engage with others with a 'stake' in the use and management of its Country Parks and seek to accommodate their aspirations where these are compatible with the aims and policies of EHS.

'Stakeholders' at EHS country Parks include three main groups:

- ❖ **our customers** - those visiting the park to enjoy its amenities and facilities, including local residents, visitors, school and other groups, people with disabilities and people representing minority interests;
- ❖ **our partners in management** - those carrying out contract work or providing a service in the park under a concession arrangement with EHS;
- ❖ **our neighbours and associates** - those whose interests in the park overlap with those of EHS, including neighbouring landowners, local authorities and community groups, specialist conservation and recreation bodies, the Police Service and other government departments such as Rivers Agency where rivers flow through a Park, and agencies involved in providing countryside recreation and management.

This engagement may take several forms including day-to-day contacts with the visiting public and service providers, structured customer surveys to determine attitudes and aspirations, and scheduled meetings of 'Stakeholder Forums' at which EHS objectives can be explained and aspirations considered.

Within Country Parks there are contract, concession and lease agreements. The parties to these arrangements differ from other stakeholders in that they provide a service to and have a direct interface with the public coming into the Country Park and so should work within the framework of this Country Park Management Policy Statement.

To inform contractors, lessees and concessionaires of EHS management standards, as contracts are let or come up for renewal, EHS will:

- ❖ use a standard contract which includes a requirement to comply with EHS country park management policies;
- ❖ provide all third party contractors with a copy of the Country Park Management policy Statement, drawing particular attention to the Environmental Ethos; and
- ❖ set out within the contract the Customer Care standards expected by EHS.

EHS will develop and seek to maintain a partnership approach with user-groups to its country park management. Those using the EHS Country Parks are primarily individuals and families enjoying a walk or picnic in the countryside. There are, however, significant numbers of more or less organised groups on outings. These include schools on educational field work, youth groups, church outings, joggers, and specialist activity groups such as ramblers, cyclists, canoeists, rock climbers, anglers etc.. Most of the Country Parks are also seen as important destinations on tourist trails within their local authority area.

EHS will convene, at least annually, Stakeholder Forums for each Country Park. It is intended that these will serve to:

- ❖ create a sense of ownership among user groups;
- ❖ enable EHS to provide management information to Stakeholders;
- ❖ enable customers to provide feedback on its management to EHS;
- ❖ enable stakeholders to propose new management projects within the terms set out in the Management Ethos
- ❖ act as a mechanism to hone EHS management; and
- ❖ provide for liaison over the delivery of shared objectives.

The composition of these groups will vary between individual Country Parks, but should include representatives from the local authority, local community groups, schools and police, specialist activity groups which regularly use that Park and at least one member with serious sight loss and one with serious mobility loss to advise on provision for those with disabilities.

Stakeholder forums will also provide for structured dialogue between EHS and its partners in management. This is likely to take place in separate meetings.

Potential management partners and issues for discussion could include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ❖ Local authorities: | Tourism, events and access routes |
| ❖ Community groups, NGOs and special interest groups | Use of facilities and amenities, use of plots for projects such as community gardens, participation in Country Park management, lease of premises (such as the Weaving Shed Museum, Youth Hostel, CVNI base and Scout Centre). |
| ❖ Environment bodies | Joint promotion of 'green messages' |
| ❖ DEL, Schools and LEAs | Environmental education, school gardens |
| ❖ Contractors, lessees and concessionaires | Aspects of park management including cafés, cycle hire, horse riding, caravan park or marina management |
| ❖ Other countryside recreation site managers (eg: Forest Service, Water Service, local authorities, and the National Trust) | The promotion of EHS messages on the environment at sites managed by others where EHS does not have a Country Park near the community using these sites. |
| ❖ Commercial Enterprises | Sharing of facilities, provision of services |

4.4 A professional, friendly and efficient service consistent with the EHS Customer Care Policy

EHS has published a **Customer and Environmental Standards** booklet that sets out its commitment to customer care. Staff at EHS Country Parks will make every effort to conform to the standards set in this publication so as to provide an excellent service to the public and will contribute to any reviews of customer care policy.

To provide a quality experience for visitors and service providers at its Country Parks:

- ❖ EHS Staff will be courteous, helpful, and will seek to maintain the Parks in a safe and attractive condition, with adequate provision of well-maintained toilets with facilities for people with disabilities and baby care;
- ❖ where practicable, EHS will provide access to and within its Country Parks and information on them for disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities, the young and old, ethnic minorities and foreign visitors and to seek to ensure equality of provision;
- ❖ EHS will determine the views of existing customers and potential customers through visitor surveys and Stakeholder Forums to ensure that the service it provides at its Country Parks meets their needs;
- ❖ EHS will contribute to the establishment of and will participate in a suitable Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme.

4.5 A supportive working environment for staff to deliver the vision

EHS, as an accredited Investor in People, will comply with employment legislation and with best working practices for the management and development of its staff.

To achieve this end EHS will:

- ❖ foster an open and participative working environment in order to maintain and enhance high levels of motivation, skills and performance in its staff;
- ❖ maintain a high profile for Country Park staff within the organisation through regular contact with the EHS Board, including an annual 'open forum';
- ❖ employ good management practice such as regular Team Meetings at which all have a voice and agreed actions are followed up promptly, and through team building events and focus days;
- ❖ maintain and seek to build on high professional standards in its Service, and to strive for quality improvement in its working practices and the delivery of services to its customers;
- ❖ identify and provide appropriate training, mentoring and technical support;
- ❖ comply with Government policy on fairness, equality, human rights, targeting social need and rural proofing; and
- ❖ ensure the provision of adequate staff accommodation and working conditions.

4.6 Equality – a commitment to all

EHS recognises its responsibility under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure equality of treatment for all, regardless of religion, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependents or sexual orientation.

EHS Country Parks are freely open to all, but by nature of the distribution and topography of the Parks and the transport links to them, some communities and 'section 75 groups' are less well served or have different amenities than others.

To further its commitment to the whole population:

- ❖ EHS will ensure, wherever practicable, that disadvantaged groups, notably those with disabilities, the old and the young, have safe access to the buildings, amenities, facilities and services of its country parks;
- ❖ while EHS considers that in the actual management of its country parks no other 'section 75 groups' suffer disadvantage, it will seek, through stakeholder meetings, customer surveys and market research, to obtain evidence of the levels of use of its country parks by all potentially disadvantaged groups, and of any particular needs or priorities they may have;
- ❖ where deficiencies in EHS country park provision are identified, EHS will take practicable steps to redress these;
- ❖ where EHS cannot provide a direct service to communities or groups unable to access its country parks, it will liaise with, and may provide support in the form of advice, materials and modest grants to, others managing more accessible sites for countryside recreation to ensure that all sections of the population enjoy a similar range of countryside recreation opportunities.
- ❖ Though its Country Parks have been developed primarily with the urban population in mind, EHS will seek to ensure that opportunities for use by the rural community are freely available through 'rural proofing of its policies and practices.

4.7 Best value for money

EHS recognises that its Country Parks are operated using public funds and will seek to secure best value for money in all its operations. It will comply with all government tendering and accounting policies and procedures and will operate and maintain open and transparent financial and management information systems to the satisfaction of government auditors.

In seeking best value for money, EHS will not, however, compromise on the high standards of management, service, design and safety to which it aspires, and will seek to maintain the quality of its operations.

5.0 MISSION STATEMENTS

Country Parks have been defined as places that provide easy access for countryside recreation in a managed environment. EHS has five main aims for its Country Parks as follows:

EHS will apply sustainable, best practice techniques to the management of its Country Parks to provide:

- ❖ a quality, safe environment for all to enjoy countryside recreation***
- ❖ appropriate countryside facilities***
- ❖ exemplary habitat and heritage management to enhance biodiversity and to conserve the landscape and built environment***
- ❖ enhanced appreciation of the countryside and opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment needed to protect and improve the environment***
- ❖ inspirational interpretation of the natural and built environment***
- ❖ a positive “interface” between EHS and the public***

A Management Plan will be maintained for each Country Park using the format of the Countryside Management System (CMS) pioneered by the Countryside Council for Wales. This system involves a rigorous process by which the main features of the property and the objectives of management are identified. Projects are described to achieve the objectives and entered in a project register together with their priority, estimated cost, staff commitment and timing. CMS also enables the keeping of a record of management and events at the managed site.



EHS will review this Policy Statement and its Country Park Plans on a six year cycle.

5.1 To provide a quality, safe environment for all to enjoy countryside recreation

The NCALO Article 3 (2) (d) enables the Department of the Environment to provide facilities for recreation in the countryside.

Northern Ireland lacks the network of rights of way present over much of the British countryside. Most of its urban population is disconnected from the countryside and may be reluctant to venture onto farmland, even where access paths are available.

EHS Country Parks and similar sites managed by others provide for town and city dwellers an invaluable resource where they can go for a pleasant walk or jog, have a picnic, enjoy the scenery and wildlife, etc., knowing that the area is being managed for those very purposes. These Parks can also deflect visitor pressure from farmland and sensitive habitats. There is probably less demand for such opportunities in rural communities where the population can enjoy such experiences on a daily basis. However EHS intends to add value (*Natural Inspiration*) to the experience of visiting its Country Parks which may also attract those who live in the countryside.

In the management of its Country Parks, EHS will follow best management practice in providing for the recreational needs of all visitors. Parks will be developed and maintained to provide both for quiet, gentle pursuits and for a range of more energetic activities in a safe and scenically attractive setting. It will provide information through signage, and through contact with its staff so as to enhance the visitor experience and stimulate exploration of the countryside further afield.

In determining best management practice, EHS will take account of standards set by:

- ❖ The Visitor attraction quality assurance schemes of the English Tourism Council, and Scottish and Welsh Tourist Boards;
- ❖ The Countryside Agency and its publications, including *Visitor Welcome Initiative* and *Design of Rural Workplace Buildings*;
- ❖ The Country Parks Network;
- ❖ DFP Construction Service guidelines;
- ❖ The Fieldfare Trust;
- ❖ The Countryside Commission publication *Informal Countryside Recreation for Disabled People*;
- ❖ The *BT Countryside for All* practical guide;
- ❖ The Green Flag Award Scheme;
- ❖ The Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group publication *Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside*;
- ❖ UK WAS and Forest Stewardship Council woodland management standards.

EHS will also liaise with the Countryside Access and Activities Network and with local government officers involved in outdoor recreation and site management.

EHS will consider the accessibility of its Country Parks both to those using private motor transport and to those using public transport or coming on foot or by bicycle. Access and signage to and within the park and facilities for outdoor recreation will be of high quality and maintained to a high standard. As far as is practicable, specific provision will also be made to enable those with limited physical ability and other disadvantaged groups to enjoy the assets within each park. For example tactile maps and audio descriptions could be provided for those with sight loss.

To provide safe access for all to and within its country parks, EHS will, as far as is practicable:

- ❖ liaise with Roads Service over road access for vehicles and bicycles and the provision of road signs;
- ❖ liaise with Translink over access links to railway stations and provision of bus stops on bus routes;
- ❖ liaise with Local Authorities over links to way-marked ways such as the Ulster Way, to public footpaths and bridle paths;
- ❖ liaise with disability and other special interest groups over meeting their needs;
- ❖ seek to separate pedestrians from vehicle and cycle traffic, especially where potential hazards exist;
- ❖ slow vehicle traffic throughout parks through traffic calming or one-way systems and have warning signs at crossing points;
- ❖ where justified by the level of use and where space is available, provide coach parking separate from car parking areas;
- ❖ provide well sign-posted car parking with at least 5% of spaces, sited close to amenities marked for use by people with disabilities, with cycle parking and with reasonable security through measures such good visibility, staff presence and CCTV at main car parks;
- ❖ provide links from recognised cycle routes, including Sustrans routes, to Country Park car parks;
- ❖ provide clearly-signed, smooth paths with a gradient no steeper than 1:20 between car parks and main facilities where topography allows;
- ❖ provide a network of paths with control points at junctions with vehicular traffic, information points and way-marking to indicate their lengths, surface quality, difficulty and suitability for the less able, and with rest stops, benches and shelters spaced out along them, more closely in difficult terrain;
- ❖ make available to the less mobile, on a deposit basis, wheel chairs and 'mobility tricycles' where the terrain is suitable;
- ❖ make special provision at some locations for the visually and hearing impaired, with sensory exhibits and trails;
- ❖ provide adventure trails in safe areas for young children.

The suite of EHS Country Parks was chosen because the properties had 'intrinsic appeal' in terms of their scenic quality and special features including seashore, rivers, woodland, panoramic views, interesting buildings and natural habitats. EHS will seek, through multidisciplinary working groups, to ensure that developments do not significantly detract from the attractiveness of these sites. The appearance of amenities, including buildings, car parks, paths and areas of recreational open space and the materials and design chosen for park furniture, fencing and other infrastructure will be appropriate to the setting, of high quality. All facilities will be maintained to a high standard.

To ensure the quality of visitor experience, while seeking to maintain a 'natural', countryside feel to its Country Parks, EHS will:

- ❖ soften areas managed primarily for their amenity, including hard landscaping and regularly mown grass, by planting with flowers, shrubs and trees;
- ❖ restrict the planting of non-native ornamental subjects largely to the proximity of buildings, car parks, etc., and to historic features such as old gardens, orchards, arboretums and parkland;
- ❖ control planting to avoid the creation of extensive thickets that could provide cover for undesirable activities;
- ❖ choose materials and designs for buildings, park furniture, fencing, path surfaces, signage, etc., both to be serviceable and to be in keeping with the countryside so as to blend with the surroundings.

EHS will set standards for the quality and range of facilities available at its Country Parks and their management. At the time of writing, not all EHS sites provide the full range of opportunities available at the larger Country Parks. Where an existing Park fails to meet these standards, management will decide whether to dispose of the property, to manage it for another purpose or to upgrade the provision through, for example, additional land-purchase and improvements to access and through creating amenities such as public toilets or visitor centres.

Case Studies

Redburn Country Park at Holywood offers little more than a network of paths through woodland and meadow with fine views for those able to reach the upper paths. If not upgraded, it could be transferred to the Council or other body for management as a Local Nature Reserve or Civic Park.

Ness and Ervey Country Park south of the City of Londonderry has paths linked by bridges over the Burntollet River through steep, wooded glens of high quality for nature conservation, but with little amenity grassland and no other facilities. The site would qualify for reclassification as a National Nature Reserve.

Both sites lack many of the amenities such as toilets expected at Country Parks.

EHS is committed to equality of provision, as far as is practicable, for people of all ages, abilities and groups as defined in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In deciding its Country Park provision across Northern Ireland it will aspire to provide for all sections of the population, either directly or through support to other providers.

Case Studies

North Down residents have a choice of Crawfordsburn and Scrabo Country Parks, should Redburn Country Park not meet their needs. Residents of the City of Londonderry, however, have only Ness and Ervey Country Park, seven miles away and off public transport routes, so inaccessible to those without personal transport.

Reclassification of Redburn as a Civic Park or a Local Nature Reserve would make little difference to the status quo. However reclassification of Ness and Ervey as a National Nature Reserve would change EHS emphasis from public access, could be construed as depriving residents of Londonderry, an area with significant social need, of access to their local Country Park.

EHS will give careful consideration to the social consequences of decisions it makes about the management and future of all its Country Parks and will take careful note of the views of local authorities and community groups.

In areas where there is no EHS Country Park provision, many non-EHS sites provide similar recreational opportunities to those available at EHS Country Parks. Not all, however, supply the other benefits provided at most EHS sites, including, for example, countryside interpretation and environmental education. Where EHS has no local Country Park, it will consider providing appropriate support to other bodies managing properties for countryside recreation in these areas. EHS will join with other providers such as DARD Forest Service, DRD Water Service, local authorities and voluntary conservation bodies in studies into the provision of opportunities for countryside recreation across Northern Ireland.

Case Studies

The current suite of EHS-managed Country Parks is not evenly distributed. There are no EHS Country Parks in Counties Antrim and Armagh, in central or south Down, north Tyrone, south Londonderry, west or south Fermanagh.

However the people of south Antrim have access to local authority-managed Country Parks at Cavehill and Carnfunnock, and to Colin Glen Forest Park. In north Antrim, there are Forest Parks at Glenariff and Ballypatrick. North Armagh is near Peatlands Park, with Gosford and Slieve Gullion Forest Parks in central and south Armagh. Central and south Down have local authority-managed parks at Delamont and Kilbroney, also Tollymore and Castlewellsan Forest Parks and the Silent Valley, managed jointly with Water Service by the Mourne Heritage Trust. North Tyrone has Davagh and Gortin Glen Forest Parks.

In Londonderry better provision could be made at Banagher Glen where there is an EHS Nature Reserve adjacent to Banagher Forest and Altnaheglish Reservoir. Muff Glen, Creggan Country Park and destinations in Donegal are other options. Recreation provision is supplemented by National Trust properties such as Crom Estate in south Fermanagh and other Water Service sites.

Individual land-holding government departments are internally resourced to manage their properties, though EHS may provide management advice and environmental information for use in displays. Local authorities and NGOs can also benefit from EHS advice but may, in addition, be eligible for grant-aid towards the provision of Countryside access and recreation, interpretation and environmental education.

Feedback from Visitor Surveys has shown that there is widespread public concern over dogs and dog fouling at Country Parks, even though visitors are required to keep any dogs under control and ensure that public areas are not fouled.

EHS will address the issue of dogs in Country Parks by developing a specific policy that may, for example, provide for zoning and other measures as follows:

- ❖ liaising with dog-owners' and residents' representatives;
- ❖ the banning of dogs from some areas and at certain times of year;
- ❖ restricting some areas to dogs on the lead;
- ❖ providing some areas where dogs may run free;
- ❖ publishing information leaflets for dog-owners setting out EHS policy;
- ❖ providing dog-waste bins at Parks where these are needed and promoting their use;
- ❖ providing this information in a form accessible to guide-dog owners.

Another issue which causes much public concern is litter management.

EHS will seek to maintain a high standard of cleanliness at its Country Parks through:

- ❖ regular and frequent litter collection;
- ❖ education of visitors to encourage them to take their litter home for recycling;
- ❖ providing, where experience proves the need, regularly emptied litter bins.

5.2 To provide appropriate countryside facilities

EHS will provide and maintain, to a high standard, at least a minimum suite of basic facilities at all its Country Parks to provide for visitor comfort and a variety of countryside recreation pursuits.

EHS will work towards providing at all its Country Parks a safe and well maintained essential infrastructure, which will include:

- ❖ access roads and parking, including cycle parking, and disabled provision;
- ❖ a structured network of paths that includes provision for those with disabilities, rest stops and benches;
- ❖ public toilets with provision for those with disabilities and for baby-care;
- ❖ clear, attractive and informative signage; and
- ❖ picnic areas with picnic tables and barbecue stands.

Where visitor numbers and the nature and facilities of an individual Country Park merit it, EHS will provide additional facilities for the public.

Among the facilities and provisions that EHS may make at chosen Country Parks are:

- ❖ staff dedicated to that site and staff office accommodation;
- ❖ opportunities for environmental education, both on-site and through out-reach;
- ❖ opportunities for specialist recreational pursuits;
- ❖ environmental interpretation, through staff, panels, literature and visitor centres;
- ❖ a range of natural habitats where visitors can experience nature;
- ❖ a 'shop window' for EHS messages where EHS can interface with the public in an inspirational way;
- ❖ countryside heritage features such as
 - collections of traditional livestock breeds (with also can be used for habitat management),
 - gardens, orchards and vegetable plots growing traditional varieties of produce,
 - collections of rural and countryside implements and other memorabilia.

EHS Country Parks have been selected and managed so as to be able to absorb large numbers of visitors engaged in a wide range of activities.

The amenities and facilities at EHS Country Parks provide scope for visitors to engage in a variety of recreational countryside pursuits.

5.2.1 Countryside Centres

At EHS Countryside Centres, the public will have access to EHS or contract staff who will be able to provide them with information about the adjacent Country Park (or Nature Reserve), about EHS itself and about the wider environment, and supply interpretative and educational materials on the environment.

Case studies

EHS has Countryside Centres at: Crawfordsburn, Castle Archdale, Roe Valley, Peatlands, and Scrabo Country Parks. Two additional Countryside Centres not associated with country parks are located at Bath Road, Portrush and at the Quoile Pondage, Downpatrick.

These Centres provide countryside information and education in the form of exhibitions, audio-visual displays and through personal contact with EHS and contract staff. They may also provide toilet, café and sales outlet opportunities.

5.2.2 Open Space

At most Country Parks, EHS will maintain areas managed as open space. Most of these areas comprise amenity grassland, maintained to enhance the landscape and to provide robust spaces where visitors can enjoy ball games, kite-flying, frisbee-throwing, and other informal activities that they organise and provide for themselves.

EHS will maintain sufficient areas of mown grass to provide visitors with spaces for relaxation and informal games. Where grassland is managed for landscape rather than recreational purposes, the frequency of mowing may be reduced to enhance biodiversity.

EHS will ensure that there are safe areas for young children to play and will consider the provision of environmentally themed, adventure-type play areas or trails, where these complement natural and existing features or where their availability is likely to attract target audiences to whom an environmental message can be provided.



Case Study

At Castle Archdale Country Park only there is a large mown area which serves as a football pitch ancillary to the youth camp site, providing a recreational outlet for the campers. This amenity reduces the tendency for groups to use facilities provided for those at the caravan site. This area can be used as a sports field by visitors, and is also available to local residents, who may book it for sports training over the winter months.

5.2.3 Specialist Facilities and Activities

The natural features and amenity provisions at some Country Parks lend themselves to specialist countryside activities. EHS is pleased to facilitate many such activities where these are compatible with the management values for the Park and can be accommodated without impinging on the enjoyment of others.

EHS may, however, choose to regulate certain activities by requiring advanced booking or application for an activity permit to ensure safe practice and so that participants do not interfere with the activities of other groups whilst enjoying their own.

EHS will liaise with the Countryside Access and Activities Network, local authorities and other recreation bodies to facilitate the provision of those activities considered compatible with its Management Ethos and safety considerations.



5.2.4 Classification of Countryside Recreation Activities at EHS Country Parks

Activities and facilities deemed appropriate where they can be provided safely

- Adventure play park or trail
- Bird watching
- Canoeing
- Camping for youth groups
- Caravan Park - short stay / touring
- Caravan Park long stay
- Cycling and Mountain-biking
- Dog-walking
- Earth Education
- Field study days
- Field study classrooms
- Fishing
- Grass area for ball games
- Guided walks
- Horse riding
- Indoor talks
- Informal team sports
- Maze

- Narrow gauge railway-rides
- Orienteering
- Outdoor challenges and team-building exercises
- Performances in outdoor spaces
- Picnicking
- Pony and trap rides
- Pond dipping
- Running trails
- Sculpture trail
- Swimming
- Trails for people with disabilities
- Viewpoint towers
- Visual Arts (Woodland art projects)
- Walking
- Way marked trails
- Wildlife watching
- Woodland Drive

At some sites it may not be possible to accommodate activities such as mountain-biking and horse riding without spoiling the experience of walkers. Separate, dedicated paths may be provided where the site is large enough. There may also be situations where the terrain would make such pursuits dangerous. Some activities would not be provided by EHS directly, but might be offered through a concession or lease of part of a Country Park. There may be scope for other partnerships, for example in the provision of tourist accommodation and additional activities including the staging of events.

A second group of activities could be potentially dangerous or damaging unless well supervised and would be regulated by the issue of permits where EHS was satisfied that leaders and participants were responsible, a satisfactory risk assessment was in place and safety considerations had been fully addressed.

- Concessions & Leases**
- Caravanning and camping
 - Craft workshops
 - Cycle hire
 - Family four-pedal buggy hire
 - Horse Riding
 - Marina
 - Put and take fishery
 - Sales Outlet
 - Café/Tea Shop/Restaurant

- Activities Regulated by Permit**
- Abseiling and rock climbing
 - Aerial runway
 - Archery
 - Children's off road bike trail
 - Educational Visits (self-led)
 - Events
 - Raft Building
 - Soap-box racing
 - Specimen collection

Other potential activities have been considered but deemed inappropriate to a country park setting, including all motorised sports, because they would threaten habitats and wildlife, create unacceptable noise or in other ways impinge on the experience and safety of visitors or are beyond the scope of EHS to supervise safely.

Activities and facilities deemed inappropriate

Downhill 'devil karting'
 Fish hatcheries
 Grass skiing
 Hunting
 Formal play areas
 Formal sports facilities
 Jet skiing and Water-skiing

Motor Sports (motorised trails, moto-cross, quad trails etc.)
 Paintballing
 Roller-blading and skate boarding facilities
 Ropes courses (high or low ropes)
 Shooting

EHS will develop best practice and agree procedures for the control of inappropriate activities. Each Country Park will identify alternative local provision for legitimate activities deemed inappropriate within the Country Park to which visitors seeking to participate in these activities can be referred.

Many approved specialist activities already take place in EHS Country Parks, and there are others which could take place. The following table gives an indication of the possibilities at each Country Park:

Site → Activity ↓	Castle Archdale	Crawfordsburn	Ness & Ervey	Peatlands Park	Redburn	Roe Valley	Scrabo
Abseiling / rock climbing		✓ (Scout Centre)	✓			✓	✓
Canoeing	✓	✓				✓	
Camping	✓	✓ (Scout Centre)					
Caravanning	✓						
Cycling	✓			✓			
Fishing	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Horse riding	✓	✓					
Railway				✓			
Orienteering	✓			✓		✓	
Outdoor challenge and team building	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Space for outdoor performance	✓	✓		✓			
Pony & trap rides	✓			✓			
Rafting	✓	✓				✓	
Rare breeds	✓			✓		✓	
Running trails	✓	✓					
Swimming	✓	✓					
Walking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wildlife watching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

5.2.5 Opportunities to run events, including those with an environmental theme

Larger Country Parks afford plenty of open space for outdoor events such as wildlife fairs, cross-country or trail-runs, orienteering events and group outings. They are ideal venues for events associated with the promotion of an active, healthy lifestyle and for sponsored walks, etc.. Where these involve large numbers or exclusive use of certain spaces, prior arrangements should be made with the Warden, who will issue an activity permit for approved events.

EHS-managed properties may not be used for the public promotion of political or religious views. Church outings, etc, are acceptable and many wedding parties use the Parks for photography, with occasional wedding ceremonies also.



5.2.6 Leisure and meeting facilities such as audio-visual and conference rooms, cafés, retail outlets for environment-related merchandise

Meeting rooms and audio-visual facilities at Visitor Centres may be booked for holding meetings, seminars, conferences, etc.. Priority will be given to EHS and other government bookings. External environmental and local community groups will be charged on a cost-recovery basis. Commercial groups will be charged at a full commercial rate.

Where there is sufficient demand, a suitable concessionaire can be identified and facilities can be provided, EHS will provide a café or small restaurant at Visitor Centres and may operate a small retail outlet for suitable merchandise with relevance to the environment and location. This could appropriately include in its stock locally-produced goods with some relevance to the Park and its hinterland.

5.2.7 Management of specific areas, facilities or services by third parties

EHS may arrange for the use or management of some areas and aspects of its Country Parks by third parties. Some areas so managed remain open to the general public. Others may be specific to particular interest groups. In either case the management undertaken must be for purposes that are in keeping with the ethos set out in section 4 and appropriate to the Country Park concerned. The exclusive use of an area by a special interest group will be arranged only where this leaves plenty of space and facilities for the general public.

Examples of such arrangements already in place include:

- ❖ the Scout Association campsite at Crawfordsburn;
- ❖ the commercial Caravan Site and Marina at Castle Archdale;
- ❖ cafés at Crawfordsburn, Roe Valley, Peatlands and Castle Archdale; and
- ❖ the Limavady Borough Council Weaving Shed Museum at Roe Valley.

5.3 To provide exemplary habitat and heritage management to enhance biodiversity and conserve the landscape and built environment

Article 4 (1) of the NCALO places a duty on public bodies to have due regard to the conservation of the natural heritage during the conduct of their business.

In keeping with this duty, EHS will use its Country Park properties to demonstrate best management practice of the Country Park environment and to engender appreciation and respect for the natural environment and historic heritage.



EHS Country Park management will provide examples of sustainable, best practice management for the conservation of Biodiversity, Landscape, Earth Science and the Built Heritage

Semi-natural habitats present will be managed for the conservation of their biodiversity - the variety of life - (both habitats and native species) in combination with public access. Particular regard will be given to priority habitats and species identified in the *Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy* and to compliance with the conservation objectives for any areas of the park designated as Area of Special Scientific Interest, Nature Reserve, Special Area of Conservation or Special Protection Area. All such obligations will be set out in the CMS Management Plans.

Most areas will be managed to maintain and, where possible, to enhance their value as wildlife habitat.

For example in undertaking woodland management, EHS will seek to plant and favour local provenance native tree species typical of the area, and to maintain or develop a good woodland structure with canopy, shrub, herb and field layers, a wide age-range of trees and both standing and lying dead wood.

Grassland will be managed to favour species richness of native, local provenance herbs and associated invertebrates.

In developing and managing its Country Parks EHS will take careful account of the impact of any facilities and planting on the scenic qualities of the parks and of the wider landscape including the parks when viewed from a distance. Where there are geological and physiographic features of importance, EHS will seek to ensure that these are conserved and displayed.

EHS will seek to conserve any features such as gardens, orchards, significant trees, and structures or buildings of historical, archaeological or heritage significance in its Country Parks, using best practice processes.

Where grazing by livestock is required for management, traditional breeds such as Irish Moiled and Dexter cattle will be favoured where these are available. Any livestock or captive animals kept at EHS country parks will be cared for according to best husbandry and veterinary practice.



5.4 To provide enhanced appreciation of the countryside and opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment needed to protect and improve the environment

EHS will draw the attention of visitors to its Country Parks to its application of best practice conservation management and to the reasons for it through interpretative panels, exhibitions, audio visual media, publications and particularly through contact with EHS staff and the Environmental Educators employed at EHS properties.

Case studies

Explanation will be provided of management work in progress. For example:

- ❖ Where non-native species such as rhododendron or cherry laurel are being cut from Woodland or peatland, a sign can be posted on site or a panel displayed in the Visitor Centre explaining the threat to native ground flora posed by these shrubs.*
- ❖ Where a mowing regime is being changed to allow the development and flowering of herb-rich grassland, a sign explaining this will demonstrate that this is active management rather than neglect.*
- ❖ If an old building of historic interest is being repaired, an explanation of its former use and the restoration work being undertaken can be posted.*

Visitors will be encouraged to explore the environment of the Parks and to find for themselves the features of interest. The threats to these will be explained, along with practical ideas as to how these can be mitigated through responsible, sustainable living.

5.5 To provide inspirational interpretation of the natural and built environment

EHS is committed to capturing the imagination of visitors to its Parks, particularly of children, on the wonders of the natural environment and the local history of its parks. Those whose interest is awakened will most probably be much more sympathetic to messages on the conservation of the environment on wider, even global issues.

There will be a two-pronged approach, one aimed at the general visitor, the other directed towards school children.

5.5.1 Interpretation of the Natural and Human History of the Park and its setting

Article 3 (2) (b) of the NCALO empowers the Department to ‘provide advice and disseminate knowledge about nature conservation and the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside’. (3) (a) enables the provision of ‘information services relating to the countryside, to places of beauty and interest therein’.

EHS will, in furtherance of the opportunities enabled by this legislation, and of its policy on heritage promotion, provide at its Country Parks imaginative information and interpretation about the wildlife, habitats, history and landscape of the area.

The nature and sophistication of the environmental interpretation provided by EHS will be site-dependant and much will relate to the natural history and historic heritage of the particular site. Provision will range from information panels and leaflets for minor parks to fully staffed buildings with thought-provoking exhibitions and audio-visual theatres at major sites.

Taken collectively, the suite of EHS Country Parks affords a wonderfully diverse range of habitats and species on which to provide information and engage the visitor's imagination. Many sites also offer multiple opportunities to link the features of the site and surrounding area to EHS messages about the wider environment.

At some properties there may be opportunity to demonstrate environmentally friendly farming practices and farm animals. In such situations, EHS will seek to demonstrate ways of integrating the conservation of natural biodiversity with commercial agriculture. There may also be scope for limited display of native wildlife, where this can be done safely and humanely.

This table identifies for each country park habitats, species and features which could be the subject of interpretation. Those with greatest potential are underlined.

CRAWFORDSBURN

Coast and seashore
Woodland
Pond
Meadows and plant biodiversity
Basking shark
Shore birds
Eider duck
Seals
Railway and viaduct
Grey Point Fort
Shaman Crawford family heritage

REDBURN

Woodland
Acid grassland
Yellowhammer
Farmland birds
Belfast Lough view
Antrim Hills view
Dunville family heritage

SCRABO

Geology
Woodland
Rivers and water quality
Peregrine Falcons
Farmland and agriculture
Strangford Lough
Scrabo Tower
Archaeology
Londonderry family heritage

PEATLANDS

Peatland habitat
Peat extraction industry
Peat conservation
Woodland
Marsh Fritillary
Large Heath
Wood Ants
Long-eared Owl
Verner family heritage

ROE VALLEY

River Roe and hydrology

Woodland

Meadow and plant biodiversity

Ponds

Farmland

Otter

Bats

Salmon

Industrial archaeology and linen

Hydroelectric power generation

O’Cahan legends and archaeology

NESS AND ERVEY WOODS COUNTRY PARK

Woodland

Burntollet River and water quality

Geology

Purple hairstreak butterfly

Red Squirrel

CASTLE ARCHDALE

Lough Erne shore

Woodland

Ponds

Meadows

Conifers

Zebra mussels

Grey and red Squirrels

Bats

Otter

Pollan

Barn Owl / Long-eared Owl

Archdale family heritage

World War II history

Case Studies

A field at Roe Valley Country Park has been developed with a species-rich hedge, winter cereal stubbles, a hay meadow and dry stone wall as a demonstration project.

Captive red deer are a popular attraction at Castle Archdale which provide visitors with an experience of sight, sound and smell few would otherwise be able to enjoy.

Periodically EHS undertakes strategic reviews of its provision of exhibitions at its Countryside Centres and other Visitor Centres.

The EHS Exhibitions Review that reported in 2002 recommended:

- ❖ the clear identification and definition of the messages EHS wishes to convey;
- ❖ the immediate review present exhibitions at country parks, with regular reviews on a 3-5 year cycle thereafter;
- ❖ consultation with individual country park staff on their needs and views;
- ❖ that exhibitions should be informative, enjoyable and inter-active;
- ❖ that non-site specific exhibition material and mountings should be designed to be readily transferable between country park centres.

Exhibits should be well lit, where practicable with Braille or audio information to aid the visually impaired.

5.5.2 Environmental education

EHS will employ, through an agency or directly if direct running costs funding is available, professionally qualified educators to provide curriculum / syllabus - related environmental education for Schools (Nursery, Key Stages 1-4, and A-level), Colleges and Universities around the key EHS themes of **biodiversity and historic heritage conservation** and **sustainable development**.

The service provided by EHS Environmental Educators will include :

- ❖ links to the school curriculum and higher education syllabuses;
- ❖ direct, "hands on" experiences of the natural world through exploration of ponds, bog, woodland, meadow, streams, the seashore, etc.;
- ❖ practical preparation and follow up work in the countryside centre classroom or workshop;
- ❖ opportunities to explore biodiversity at a local level with direct reference to life on earth as a whole and man's part in its future;
- ❖ exploring practical ways in which we can all work to become part of the solution to environmental ills rather than part of the problem;
- ❖ innovative approaches to learning through, for example, games, group work, practical activities, work-sheets, follow-up work, etc.;
- ❖ innovative programmes designed to meet the needs of special schools and that will target social needs, including those of the visually impaired with emphasis on tactile exploration with verbal commentary and information in an accessible form;
- ❖ outreach to teacher training colleges, colleges, universities and schools in the local regional area;
- ❖ contributing to the wider educational objectives for the park through work on interpretation, event planning /delivery, and outreach to strategic local groups;
- ❖ liaison with others offering similar provision through the Environmental Education Forum and networking.

Schools and colleges availing of this service will be required to book in advance and provide the statutory level of adult supervision, not including EHS staff.

5.6 To provide a positive "interface" between EHS and the public

In addition to the powers under Article 3 (2) (b) and (3) (a) of the NCALO described above, (3) (b) permits the Department to take expedient steps to publicise 'the prevention of damage in the countryside and for encouraging a proper standard of behaviour' among visitors.

Its Country Parks afford EHS with an excellent opportunity to engage the public on environmental issues and to promote the conservation of the Northern Ireland natural and built heritage, environmental protection and sustainable use of the earth's resources. EHS will also promote good visitor behaviour and adherence to the Country Code and by asking visitors to take their litter home.



Among the EHS and government strategies that could be promoted or implemented and issues that could be raised are the following:

- ❖ Biodiversity Strategies and EHS Biodiversity Implementation Plan;
- ❖ Nature conservation designations and their significance;
- ❖ The government Sustainability Agenda;
- ❖ Best practice management of semi-natural habitats;
- ❖ Promotion of good behaviour in the countryside through the Country Code;
- ❖ The Conservation and promotion of the Built Heritage;
- ❖ Landscape character assessment and landscape conservation;
- ❖ EHS Education Strategy;
- ❖ EHS Exhibitions Review;
- ❖ Consultancy report recommendations on EHS marketing;
- ❖ Peatland Conservation Strategy;
- ❖ River Conservation Strategy;
- ❖ Coastal Zone Management Strategy;
- ❖ Promotion of good air and water quality;
- ❖ Government Waste Management Strategy – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle;
- ❖ Promotion of local history.

The most effective means of putting over a message is often by direct contact with another person. Static exhibitions, even if interactive, videos and information panels are less engaging than a dynamic exponent with whom the visitor can converse.

EHS will maximize the effectiveness of its staff and others in engaging with visitors over the presentation of its messages by:

- ❖ ensuring that those presenting the messages use people-orientated delivery;
- ❖ ensuring that Rangers and other Park staff are trained to be inspirational interpreters;
- ❖ providing specific training for staff in Visual Awareness and the needs of minority groups;
- ❖ seeking to provide continuity of employment for seasonal staff; and
- ❖ utilising the experience of volunteers and 'guest interpreters', etc..

EHS will also explore with other providers of countryside recreation the possibility of promoting its messages on the environment through display panels, audio visual productions and leaflets, etc., at their properties.

EHS will adopt a professional approach to marketing its Country Parks not only to encourage visits but also to ensure that both visitors and EHS derive the maximum 'added value' from those visits in terms of high quality experiences and lessons learned about the environment.

EHS will promote its Country Parks and the messages it wishes visitors to absorb by:

- ❖ developing a marketing strategy which identifies effective promotion methods;
- ❖ conducting market research among visitors and the wider community;
- ❖ linking with other EHS units, local authorities, Regional Tourism Organisations and the NITB in cross-promotion;
- ❖ using 'branded' road signs and welcome signs;
- ❖ ensuring that Country Park entries on the EHS website are current, informative and attractive and can be accessed by hyperlinks from appropriate Local Authority and Tourist Board sites;
- ❖ identifying benchmarks against which to assess performance.

Finally EHS staff will also be encouraged to listen to and act on feedback from those wishing to comment on its management. EHS will conduct regular surveys, both of visitors to its properties and of those who do not visit, to gauge visitor satisfaction and learn ways in which its Country Park management could be improved.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Bodies which commented on the first draft of this document

Government Departments and Agencies

DARD Forest Service, Rivers Agency, Environmental Policy and Rural Development Divisions

DETI and NITB

DOE Planning Service

DRD Strategic Planning

DCAL

DE

Scottish Natural Heritage

Professional Countryside Recreation Bodies

Country Parks Network and Greenspace

Statutory Advisory Councils

The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

The Historic Buildings Council

The Historic Monuments Council

The Joint Committee on the Industrial Heritage

Local Authorities

Antrim Borough Council Development and Leisure Services

Ards Borough Council – Tourism

Ballymoney Borough Council – Leisure and Amenities

Belfast City Council – Client Services Department

Cookstown District Council – Tourism

Craigavon Borough Council – Conservation Service

Fermanagh District Council – Environmental Services

Lisburn City Council – Leisure Services

North Down Borough Council

Equality Agenda Bodies

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

RNIB Northern Ireland

Voluntary Conservation Bodies

The Woodland Trust

Crawfordsburn Country Park

- Grey Point Fort (1904) and search light placements
- Walled Garden
- Gas House beside the walled garden
- Boat House at Sea Park

Scrabo Country Park

- Scrabo Tower (The Londonderry Monument)
- Walled Garden
- Iron-age ring fort

Redburn Country Park

- Walled Garden
- Cast iron railings
- Bear-pit

Peatlands Park

- Bog artefacts
- Rath
- Crannog

Castle Archdale Country Park

- Filter House
- WW II Water Tank
- WW II Ammunition/Bomb stores
- WW II Slit trenches
- Boathouse
- Church Tower (on Forest Service property).
- Main Courtyard
- Rock Garden
- Walled Garden

Roe Valley Country Park

- Weaving Shed
- Beetling Mill
- Scutch Mill
- Watch Towers
- Brochan House
- Corn Mill
- Corn Store
- 'Bothy' (former Mill Office)
- Tanning Pond
- Abandoned Quarry, now Ponds at Miltoun
- Carrick Rocks Inverted Bowstring Bridge
- O'Cahan's Castle
- Power House
- Lade, Mill Pond (modified) and Headrace Channel to Power House
- Sir Thomas Phillips' Lade
- Brick circle base to summer house