Twenty Third Meeting of
Strangford Lough & Lecale Partnership
Advisory Committee
30th October 2014 Killough Village hall

Present:

Dr Jade Berman – Ulster Wildlife
Cllr Robert Burgess- Down District Council
Cllr Cadogan Enright – Down District Council
Graham Furey - Ulster Farmers Union
Patrick J Gault – Association of Strangford Lough Yacht Clubs
Isabel Hood – Northern Ireland Environment Link - Chair
Mike McClure – Sports Council for Northern Ireland
Frances McCormick – County Down Community Network-Regeneration
John Peacock – County Down Rural Community Network - Regeneration
Eddie Rea – East Down Rural Community Network – Regeneration

IN ATTENDANCE: Bob Bleakley - NIEA, Jennifer Firth – Strangford Lough Ranger, Michael Lipsett – Director of Recreation, Down District Council, and Caroline Nolan – SLLP Manager

NOTES TAKEN BY: Susan McClay

1. **APOLOGIES**- Apologies were received from Doug Edmondson – County Down Rural Community Network – Regeneration, Kerry Mackie – Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Diane Ruddock – National Trust, Dr Julia Sigwart – Queen’s University.

The Chairman asked that condolences be sent on behalf of the Advisory Committee to Doug Edmondson on the death of his mother. Duly sent.

2. **MINUTES OF TWENTYSECOND MEETING** – The Minutes of the twenty second meeting were proposed by Patrick J Gault and seconded by Isabel Hood and signed as a true record of the meeting.

3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING**

**EFFLUENT CONTAMINATION AT RINGDUFFERIN**

A line has been drawn under this

**REPORT ON THE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SHORE BASED PERIWINKLE COLLECTION ON STRANGFORD LOUGH**

No response, as yet, received from the Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside (CNCC) Dr Jade Berman to contact them to get an update on progress.

**SEAGEN APPLICATION FOR LICENCE**

There followed a discussion and some of the points raised were –

- Letter was sent to the Crown Estates Commissioners querying why they had not followed DETI policy, but also making clear that the SLLP-AC is not opposed to such a development in principle. The letter was forwarded to Energy & Infrastructure Department for their comments nothing received back so far, they have been prompted again for a reply. Response awaited with interest.
- The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) strategy stated that the current device (SeaGen) was for experimental use only, in current form not
economically viable, only working one day a week, on completion of experimental work SeaGen will be decommissioned.

- New licence has been applied for the next five years.
- The new Agreements for Lease (AFL) is for approximately 20 submerged devices.
- Extensive work to be carried out by DETI over the next 5 years to ensure that the regulations set down by the EU are met.
- One of the roles of the SLLP-AC is to protect Strangford Lough and the Lecale Coast.

**SIGNAGE**

Signage directing people to areas of interest, please can committee members forward their ideas for appropriate areas that need to be highlighted to SLLP office.

**STRANGFORD GREEN**

All issues have been resolved and now going ahead with the proposals as agreed with Down District Council and Village Committee, all works being carried out by the DDC Estates Department. Advisory Committee commend DDC for their endeavours with this matter.

**WARDEN / RANGER**

Staff from Department of Environment, Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), National Trust, local councils and wild fowlers will be invited - date and venue to be agreed.

4. **CHAIRMANS BUSINESS**

**EXPLORIS AQUARIUM PORTAFERRY**

The new Newry Mourne and Down Council acceptance of the Northern Ireland Executive funding package is designed to make the aquarium sustainable, refurbishment will now go ahead from the end of November.

**VENUES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

SLLP Advisory Committee will use the following three meeting venues in rotation, subject to availability, from this point onwards

- Ards Sailing Club, Newtownards
- Down Arts Centre, Downpatrick
- Killough Village Hall, Killough

5. **KILLOUGH VILLAGE PLAN** – Presentation by Doris Noe – Chairman of Lecale Conservation

Village plan set about recommending and implementing changes to the built and natural heritage and the environment, the plan was to develop a new project within the village looking at three themes:-

1. Sense of Place
2. A Place to Live and Work
3. Quality of Life

Funding was obtained from Palatine Trust, Down Rural Area Partnership (DRAP), and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

**A Sense of Place**

Developed the Rope Walk, with plans to develop it further. Through the HLO Townscape Initiative they have been able to renovate a rundown private dwelling, alleviating an eyesore and providing a home, the only stipulation under the initiative is that there is to be no sale of the property for 10 years, again it is hoped to carry this initiative further. Down District Council are providing partnership support for the development of the Grain Store and Potato Store.
A Place to Live and Work
Development of 30 community projects, creation and maintenance of such areas as the car park, and play areas, "way finding" through good signage and better public access. All helping to encourage use of the village and encourage visitors to stop and enjoy what the village has to offer, helping towards building a sustainable economy.

Quality of Life
Initiative has brought village together creating a sense of pride and reconnecting people with their village and what it has to offer. Film has been made Know Your Place by 16 young people from Killough work with a professional film crew to capture the life of the village on a summers day view it on www.Killoughvillageplan.org Work was done on the village infrastructure setting up over 50's club, Halloween Parade, Fun Run, new Christmas Lights are being organised, all helping to enhance the quality of life in the village.

The Village Plan was originally centred in Killough but is now being extended to the wider surrounding countryside, including St John's Point, Rossglass Settlement, and the farming hinterland towards Downpatrick.

It is hoped that all coastal paths will link in the area and that a wider Lecale Tourist Circle can be created.

A new publication will be ready by December 2014 Community Path Net Works – outlines the process by which to go about setting up community paths and linking them Sport NI

SLLP identified two ways they could be of help to the Killough initiative, though signage and working on access to the St John's Point Lighthouse attraction.

6. IMPACT OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON BIRD LIFE AT NORTH END OF STRANGFORD – Interim Report Mike McClure

Interim report of the survey being carried out by Allen & Mellon Environmental Ltd started August 2013 and again in August 2014 survey finished October 2014 final report will be issued to the committee. Initial report was to look at kite surfing at the top end of Strangford Lough and the impact it had on over wintering birds, so as not to demonise the sport of kite surfing an overall approach was taken. There was already a voluntary agreement in place with various clubs of lough users, for responsible use of the area, so care was needed not to alienate people, want to encourage them to be out and active and use the wonderful facility that is Strangford Lough, while minimising the impact on the area. There are national action plans in place for outdoor sports, leaflets circulated Responsible Use of the Outdoors.

There were four aims for the survey to look at
1. The disturbance by kite surfers
2. The disturbance by others
3. The disturbance of eelgrass beds
4. Management of the actions surveyed

Twenty two sessions of observation were held over a period of 2475 minutes, recording the level of impact 1. being low, no reaction from the birds, and 5. being high causing the birds to take flight. Observations were also carried out in Grey Abbey and Wardens bay, 25 events were recorded in total. The interim report would suggest no significant impact from the kite surfers, but if levels increase then it might prove to be a problem. It was observed that dog walking, which happens as a much more frequent occurrence, had much more impact; encouragement must be made to keep dogs on leads, an ongoing bylaws issue. Traffic disturbance was also a problem. People must be given guidelines for good practice and maybe a map could be produced highlighting access to the lough in areas where it is felt the environment is robust enough to sustain activity. Recreation Forum is addressing some of
these issues; the base is now laid down, but needs fine tuning, to plan the future of the development of promoting the benefits of the Strangford Lough area. Ards Borough Council and Down District Council are both behind sustainable development. It was felt that parking facilities for lough side activities should be thought about, to get over issues of roadside parking and it was hoped that the new councils would be on board with this.

7. THE NARROWS CHALLENGES & STRANGFORD LOUGH FESTIVAL

A time lapse film of the project, and a UTV news release of “The Narrows Challenges” were shown to the Committee. A leaflet was circulated summarising the project.

Storm warnings given for the weekend of “The Narrows challenges” meant the event had to revert to the emergency plan and all the races took part in Castle Ward Bay.

However it was a great event with approximately 800 people.

Press coverage had been exceptional. UTV ran news items (repeated during the day) on three occasions promoting the project and the area across the whole of the island of Ireland, and further afield when online media are taken into account. Chief Superintendent, District Commander, C Division, Peter Farrar was interviewed giving his support for the project.

The Down Coastal Rowing Club currently has 300 hundred members. Going forward, it is anticipated that individual groups will form clubs, affiliated to Down Coastal Rowing Association, managed by SLLP. The SLLP’s interest is to encourage coastal rowing as a community and tourism activity and to help connect local people to maritime heritage and coastal environment and wildlife.

The priority now is rowing training. The SLLP is looking at this in the wider context of water based recreation training, working with Sport NI. Any training will include environmental sensitivity training and will be inclusive - open to all ages over 11 and all abilities. This will be a theme for the Forum for Outdoor Recreation meeting to be held Wednesday 12th November, Ganaway Activity Centre, Ballywalter 5.30pm.

It is hoped in future to run “The Narrows Challenges” within the Strangford Lough Festival. Races may be held over a week to include races for experienced rowers, and fun racing for those with less skill, the races will be extended to include other rowing clubs from as far afield as possible, especially Scottish rowing clubs, try and revive Routen Wheel race with RNLI.

EnAlgae have responded positively to a first approach to support the 2015 Festival and are keen to be involved.

This project can be followed on Facebook at “Down Coastal Rowing Club”. Where both films may be viewed, they are also on YouTube.

Thanks were given to Down District Council for all their support and Matthew Salters for all of the support given with insurance cover.

Sport NI is hosting an international conference in Newcastle 30th September 2015 to 3rd October 2015 to feature the Down Coastal Rowing project as the best example they have seen of community involvement in outdoor recreation.

8. ITEMS FROM STRANGFORD LOUGH & LECALE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan is now being revised to include a traffic light system of approach so that it is easy to identify what has been achieved, what still needs addressing, and
what is being done. It is already clear that good progress has been made into this five year plan. As soon as this is complete it will be circulated to the committee.

At the moment it is felt that to progress things even further the Management Group should meet as specific working groups, to progress target issues. The next meeting is to target litter, dumping, and marine litter. Firstly the group will have to identify where the problems are, after events, on the shore, coming from boats etc. It is hoped that a “One Stop Shop” for rapid response to the problem of litter and dumping could be set up. Support must be given to local groups who are willing to help, ongoing education and working together in a unified way with the councils. There is an issue with “No Mans’ Land” – pockets of land for which there is no clear ownership or management regime.

Committee members were invited to contribute their ideas and information relevant to this topic and to provide details of local groups working on coastal litter clean-ups.

9. OFFICE UPDATE

- Cuan Barge
  The new National Trust Barge was launched last month. It provides a means of getting livestock and equipment over to islands, so lands can be managed more effectively.

- Update on townlands gates and gate posts
  Gateways have now been rebuilt or restored in Raholp, Kilclief, Newtownards Greyabbey, Island Reagh, Portaferry, Ballyculler, Bishops Milli. The Windmill Hill Portaferry will be built in November

- Since the Committee meeting the proposed Tree Planting and Bio-Diversity day in Portaferry has been postponed. The mild weather has meant that it is unlikely to be feasible to plant trees until after Christmas.

- EnAlgae Project
  They wanted a change of sites, put in MCT application, but permissions not received, so will stay with original sites until next year

- St John’s Lighthouse update
  The proposed site visit was postponed while building work commences to convert some of the adjacent buildings to self-catering accommodation. St John’s Point has not been included in plans to develop lighthouses as major visitor attractions due to unresolved access issues. However it is hoped that it may be conserved and used for guided tours and events in view of its tremendous industrial archaeology, the environmental interests at the site, the adjacent early church and the potential to develop a walk from there to Killough. A date will be set for a future site visit.

- Seafood Project
  The go ahead has now been received from the SEA Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) to develop a Seafood business plan as seafood industry / tourism initiative. Consultants will be awarded the contract to explore the opportunities to develop the local market for locally caught seafood, local quality agricultural produce, both as marketing opportunities and a tourism asset within the fishing dependent communities of Co Down. A Steering Committee is being set up to include relevant agencies and business leaders within the industry. Dick James will represent NIFPO on that Group.

- Maritime Heritage
  Maritime heritage and tourism initiative being funded by SEAFLAG & DRAP in three communities Portavogie, Kilkeel and Ardglass, Ards Borough Council, Down District Council and Newry and Mourne District Council, are providing trails, heritage signage and public realm improvements in harbour areas linking back into the towns and
villages. NI Harbour Authorities are to provide Wi-Fi installation in the areas. SLLP are to provide training for Heritage Guides for the areas (upwards of twenty people), and supporting literature.

- **Concrete Boat**
  A concrete boat that is currently moored off Ringhaddy is in danger of sinking, the owner's whereabouts is not known, the gentleman that the boat was left with no longer wants to manage it, there doesn't seem to be anybody willing to take responsibility for this, or deal with it, before it sinks and becomes a real problem.

- **Closure of right of way Ringhaddy**
  Access Officer Down District Council Heather Wilson addressing the issue. It was thought that the committee should be proactive in the matter and write to the Environment Policy Division of DOE addressing the general issues of rights of way being blocked

10. **JENNIFER FIRTH – STRNGFORD LOUGH RANGER UPDATE**

Has been dealing with issues in areas outside SLLP remit

Jennifer attended a community meeting about Coastal erosion in Ballywalter and wanted to bring the issue to the attention of the committee, as they may become involved in coastal erosion issues in the future.

Jennifer wanted the committee to know that DOE are only regulators and will advise the community from a marine licensing perspective. At present there is no single body which is responsible for coastal erosion, but all departments work together to try to reduce flooding and minimise damage to properties and roads where it is feasible and sustainable. Jennifer advised that individuals should not create their own hard defences without consulting with DOE Marine Licensing Team first, as a license is required for depositing any material below high water mark. It is also important to note that if one individual creates a hard defence, it simply pushes the sea’s energy to the next property or road, which may cause even more damage.

For information and with reference to the SL & Leacale Management Scheme, the scoping document on shoreline management has been completed internally by DOE Marine Division, but the decision was made not to take things further as yet. Jennifer Firth to check whether this document is for public review. Several years ago the National Trust also produced the Shifting Shores report showing how they will deal with coastal erosion issues at their properties.

Jennifer highlighted and commended the Killough Village plan for including and accepting that the area of green beside the bay will flood during high tides and stormy weather and that this kind of area should be considered in all coastal village plans. Having a sacrificial (flood plain) area, instead of building hard defences will help the coastline absorb the sea’s energy and avoid pushing the energy along the coast to other areas/ properties/ roads.

**Dates and Venues for future meetings:-**

- 11th December 2014 Ards Sailing Club TBC
- 12th February 2015 Down Arts Centre TBC
- 9th April 2015 Killough Community Centre TBC

Isabel Hood