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# Foresters' Forest National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership Programme in the Forest of Dean



## Project Title:

**Foresters' Forest National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership Programme in the Forest of Dean**  
Final Evaluation 2022

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# Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Figures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Background and local context of the FF Programme</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Background and local context of the FF Programme	10
1.2 Programme expenditure	13
1.3 Evaluation approach	16
<b>2. Description of project outputs</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Stronghold for nature	17
2.2 Exploring our Forest	18
2.3 Revealing our Past	18
2.4 Celebrating our Forest	20
2.5 Securing our future	22
<b>3. Outcomes</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1 Analysis of NLHF Landscape Partnership outcomes by Foresters' Forest themes	35
3.2 Stakeholder perceptions of Foresters' Forest Programme outcomes	57
3.3 The volunteer experience	61
3.4 Community engagement and social outcomes	70
3.5 Making a difference: a summary of the Foresters' Forest outcomes	83
<b>4. Legacy</b>	<b>92</b>
4.1 Project legacy arrangements	92
4.2 Long-term legacy of the Foresters' Forest Programme	94
4.3 Future threats and potential opportunities to further develop project outputs/benefits	100
<b>5. Causal Mechanisms</b>	<b>102</b>
5.1 Lessons Learned: what worked well and why	102
5.2 Additional factors influencing outputs & outcomes.	116
5.3 Summary of Lessons Learned	120
<b>6. Recommendations</b>	<b>124</b>
6.1 Taking it forward: recommendations for the future	124
6.2 Building on the Foresters' Forest foundation	127

# Figures

Figure 1. Timeline of development and delivery of the Foresters' Forest Programme	11
Figure 2. Structure of the Foresters' Forest Programme Partnership	13
Figure 3. Stronghold for Nature: Summary of project outcomes	37
Figure 4. Exploring our Forest: Summary of project outcomes	42
Figure 5. Revealing our Past: Summary of project outcomes	47
Figure 6. Celebrating our Forest: Summary of project outcomes	51
Figure 7. Securing our Future: Summary of project outcomes	56
Figure 8. On-line survey respondents with experience of volunteering for the FF Programme (2018 and 2021 comparison)	63
Figure 9. Occupation status of survey respondents with experience of volunteering for the FF Programme (2021 survey).	63
Figure 10. Reasons for wanting to undertake volunteer work (2021 On-line survey; n=137)	64
Figure 11. Personal benefits from FF volunteering activity (Comparison of Mean scores across 2018 (n=71) and 2021 (n=137) On-line surveys)	65
Figure 12. Perceptions of the volunteering experience in the Forest of Dean (2021 On-line survey, n=137)	66
Figure 13. Awareness of the Foresters' Forest Programme (Comparison of 2018 and 2021 survey data)	76
Figure 14. Participation in Foresters' Forest activities (Comparison of 2018 and 2021 survey data)	77
Figure 15. Views on learning and involvement (2021 On-line survey)	78
Figure 16. Self-reported knowledge of heritage topics: comparison of volunteers with non-volunteers (2021 on-line survey Mean scores)	79
Figure 17. Attribution of learning about heritage to the Foresters' Forest programme (2021 On-line survey)	80
Figure 18. Making a difference: Consensus and recognition	85
Figure 19. Making a difference: Improved heritage condition	85
Figure 20. Making a difference: Enhanced information resources	87
Figure 21. Making a difference: Inclusiveness	87
Figure 22. Making a difference: Community engagement	89
Figure 23. Making a difference: Building capacity and resilience	89
Figure 24. The impact of COVID-19 on volunteering (2021 on-line survey; n=137)	119
Figure 25. Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic on learning about heritage (2021 On-line survey; n=1,004)	120
Figure 26. A framework for future development	126

# Executive Summary

## 1. Programme context and structure

The Foresters' Forest Programme is a National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership operating over the 2017-22 period. The Partnership consisted of 32 organisations led by Forestry England who employed the programme team and provided financial backing, guidance, support and an office. Organisations were a mix of small local community organisations (e.g. The Dean Heritage Centre, the Local History Society), regional bodies such as the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and the University of Gloucestershire, and local offices of national organisations (such as Natural England and the RSPB). The programme was delivered across the area of the Hundred of St. Briavels within the Forest of Dean District in Gloucestershire.

The Foresters' Forest Programme delivered 38 projects which were grouped under the following 5 themes:

- ❖ A Stronghold for Nature
- ❖ Exploring our Forest
- ❖ Revealing our Past
- ❖ Celebrating our Forest
- ❖ Securing our Future

Each project within the programme had to demonstrate it was contributing towards one or more of the nine NLHF outcomes:

- ❖ Outcomes for heritage: **heritage will be...**(Better managed / In better condition / Better Identified/recorded)
- ❖ Outcomes for people: **people will have...**(Developed skills / Learned about heritage / Volunteered time)
- ❖ Outcomes for communities: **communities...**(Will have reduced negative environmental impacts / Will have more people and a wider range of people engaged with heritage / the local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit).

The programme budget amounted to £2.753 million over the 5-year delivery phase. Just over 20% of the budget supported programme management, which included salaries for full and part time personnel and for volunteer coordinators. The management budget also funded training for Project Leaders and the Programme team and office costs for the FVAF coordinators

Project expenditure was spread unevenly across the five thematic areas, varying according to the nature and scale of projects, and the type of activities undertaken.

## **2. Evaluation approach**

The Programme has been evaluated by the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) based at the University of Gloucestershire. A qualitative and quantitative evaluation approach has been taken to assess the extent to which the nine NLHF outcomes have been achieved and to explore the broader impacts on the Forest community. The evaluation consists of three main elements:

- ❖ Analysis of documentary evidence
- ❖ Interviews and discussion groups with project leaders and other stakeholders
- ❖ On-line surveys of the wider community (in 2018, 2019, and 2021)

The final evaluation was undertaken over the period October 2021 – February 2022

## **3. Project outputs**

A huge range of outputs were achieved from the 38 projects. These ranged from large amounts of information recorded about the current state of heritage through survey work (e.g. Bats, birds, reptiles, waterways, archaeological resources, literature) to improvement of natural heritage condition (such as habitat for birds, for butterflies, reptiles, and flora), and improved condition of oral histories and built structures. In terms of developing people, outputs included training large numbers of volunteers in different types of survey and monitoring work, digitising, cataloguing and archiving oral histories, training of stock checkers to support conservation grazing, raising skill levels of those involved in the Buried Heritage project, and developing skills in disadvantaged groups through access to the New Leaf, edible forest and heritage craft skills workshops.

Outputs also affected wider communities through raising awareness of their local heritage by means of running open days (Buried Heritage, Community Wildlife Study Group) or specific events such as guided walks, talks, and presentations (Ancient and Notable Trees, Batscape, Freemining, Reading the Forest). A number of projects also engaged in developing resource packs for schools, delivering school trips (e.g. Buried Heritage, Reptiles) and in-school delivery (Reading the Forest, Musical Landscape). In addition, two books by a local author (supported with information from FF projects) targeted schools, providing readily accessible material for teachers on the local natural and historical heritage ('Wildlife of the Forest', and 'Story of the Forest').

## **4. Programme outcomes**

The majority of projects achieved a high level of outcomes, meeting or exceeding the NLHF criteria established (i.e. relating to heritage, people and communities). The small number of projects that were identified as having lower levels of target outcomes were mainly those that were affected by internal management conflicts (e.g., New Leaf), lacked a clear set of objectives at the start (Built Heritage), or had lost project leaders and/or key expertise essential for project delivery (such as Geology, Batscape, and Woodland Flora). In the case of loss of expertise/leaders, some of the Stronghold for Nature projects were affected by reliance on Natural England expertise which was lost (and not replaced) following funding cuts in the

early part of programme delivery. In situations with internal conflict, internal resolution processes were adopted, and in some cases new project leaders appointed, resulting in delayed delivery but not necessarily any reduction in achievements.

The Covid-19 Pandemic also had a significant impact on achievement of outcomes related to developing skills among people and raising community awareness through engagement activities. A lot of voluntary activity stopped or was intermittent over a two-year period, and large numbers of events targeted at the wider community were cancelled, reducing project outcomes. Projects were still able to meet their volunteer output targets as these had largely been attained by the programme mid-point, before the Pandemic started.

## 5. Making a difference

Evidence for the wider community impacts identified through thematic analysis of Legacy plans, project progress reports, discussion groups conducted with Project Leaders, and interviews with Programme personnel, Project Leaders and other stakeholders during the period October 2021 – February 2022. Wider outcomes are described under six broad themes:

- ❖ Consensus and Recognition
- ❖ Heritage condition
- ❖ Information resources
- ❖ Inclusiveness
- ❖ Community engagement
- ❖ Building capacity and resilience

The analysis explored the ways in which the Foresters' Forest Programme '*made a difference*' not just to the heritage of the area, but to the people living in the Forest and their capacity to influence and shape their communities after the Programme ends in 2022.

Examples of key outcomes include: a consensus on biodiversity management arising from partner organisations working together towards a common goal of improving biodiversity in the Forest of Dean; development of agreement among Freeminers on how to secure the future sustainability of freemining; and, recognition of the significance and ecological quality of the forest waterways arising from research carried out under the Wetscapes, ponds and mires project. In addition, work carried out under the Buried Heritage project has revealed a much richer archaeological resource that was previously thought existed, and the Reading the Forest project discovered a richer and more extensive literary heritage of the Forest.

'Inclusiveness' was a significant outcome of the FF Programme, in terms of having a range of projects targeting very different sectors of the population. Projects targeted the young (Forest Explorers, Youth Rangers; Schools; Musical Landscape), those in care (mindSCAPE), and the physically impaired (Walking with Wheels). Disadvantaged sectors of society were also supported through provision of courses and skills workshops delivered through the New Leaf and Heritage Craft Skills

projects. Volunteering enabled people from all sectors of the community to engage with activities and subject areas that interested them.

Individuals and community groups have benefitted from the opportunity to develop project management and leadership skills, through experience. New organisations have been created (e.g. Freemining CIC; Friends of Worcester Walk) and Project leaders have gained experience of managing volunteers and working in partnership with other organisations. The Programme also includes organisations and individuals who have developed innovative solutions to the challenges facing their community or activity of interest.

Taken together, the project activities, the inclusive nature of the programme, the use of volunteers, the emphasis on partnership working, the knowledge and awareness generated by new information, and recognition of the significance of some of the local heritage, have created hidden benefits for the Forest of Dean communities. The level of engagement and experiences of volunteers and project leaders has laid a foundation for more effective involvement of the local community in the future conservation and management of their heritage. The increased knowledge and awareness of heritage, the social capital and skills that have been developed, and the management and leadership experience, have the potential to make the area more resilient and adaptable to future change.

## **6. Volunteer experiences**

A very high level of volunteering occurred across the Foresters' Forest projects with the target for volunteer hours being reached by the mid-point of the programme period. More than 1,000 unique volunteers have contributed a total of 37,209 recorded volunteer hours, with an estimated financial value equivalent to £831,000.

The 2021 On-line Survey revealed that 13.6% of respondents had engaged in some form of volunteering with the FF programme, the majority of whom (85%) are residents, while in terms of employment 60% were employed and 29% retired. Volunteer numbers varied greatly across the 38 projects with highest numbers engaged in Love Your Forest, Buried Heritage, Reptiles, Butterflies, Heritage Open Days, and Waterways, ponds and mires. The most common types of activity were litter picking, undertaking surveys or data collection, conservation work, and organising events.

Volunteers identified multiple reasons for engaging in volunteer work in the Forest of Dean. Key reasons include a desire *'to help protect the natural environment of the Forest'*, and *'to contribute to the community where I live'*. In addition, more than two thirds of the survey sample indicated that *'helping to conserve the culture and traditions of the Forest'* was important for them.



## 7. Programme Legacy

One indication of Programme success is that 26 out of the initial 38 projects are planning to continue operation into the future. A large proportion of the Stronghold for Nature projects will continue with support from Forestry England and other partners that have been involved with delivery (e.g. RSPB, GWT, BTO). These are the projects that have had a management focus based on improving the condition of the natural heritage (Biodiversity) of the Forest. Forest of Dean volunteers will also be involved in future project delivery.

Projects under some of the other thematic areas will continue, initially at a lower level of activity as they will be reliant on obtaining funding from other sources. The majority of projects under the Celebrating our Forest and Securing our Future thematic areas, for example, will continue. The Freemining Association will continue its work on a more sustainable financial footing through operation of the briquetting machine. Rewild will continue to deliver Heritage Craft Skills, Edible Forest, and New Leaf, under an Forestry England licence agreement and funding from other sources. The dependence on Forestry England support for the continuation of activities is high for a significant number of projects that operate on Forestry England land and require licences to continue their work (7 projects), or expert/supervisory advice and support from personnel (8 projects).

Volunteers expressed a high level of concern for the future of projects they had worked on and a desire to maintain involvement but noted the need for leadership. Overall, the hope was expressed that the FF programme would be able to continue in some form and that they would be able to engage in project activities and maintain the friendships and social relations that had been developed.

## 8. Lessons learned

Factors influencing the overall impact and effectiveness of the Foresters' Forest Programme were identified and explored under the following headings:

- ❖ Programme governance
- ❖ The role of Forestry England
- ❖ Financial management & support
- ❖ Communications
- ❖ Project management & administration
- ❖ The nature of projects
- ❖ Community engagement
- ❖ Involvement of schools
- ❖ Volunteering
- ❖ Covid-19 Pandemic

Each of these factors were identified as influencing Programme outcomes in either positive or negative ways. Programme governance was identified as having a major influence on successful implementation driving the structure, culture and direction of activities, and the level of community involvement. Volunteering and community engagement were identified as essential elements in achieving project objectives and in building capacity and resilience to adapt to future change. Involvement of schools

was also viewed as a way of engaging with the wider community as well as influencing attitudes and developing awareness among future generations.

Efficient project management and programme administration were identified as major reasons for successful implementation over the seven years of development and delivery. Effective communications (internal and external) were viewed as an essential element of programme delivery, keeping a wide range of stakeholders and the wider community informed of developments, events and opportunities.

On the negative side, the Covid-19 Pandemic had a massive impact on project delivery in years 4 and 5. A major effect was loss of momentum from lockdowns, restrictions on activities on Forestry England land, and loss of volunteers through shielding and rules restricting social activities. A number of projects revealed an ability to adapt using social media to develop new forms of engagement (e.g. podcasts, virtual meetings), which in some cases increased awareness and engagement across the wider community.

## **9. The Future**

The most significant challenge facing those involved in delivery of the Foresters' Forest Programme is deciding what should replace it. There have been discussions throughout the programme period and a recent consultation document indicated a desire to build on the social capital created under the FF Programme through constituting a new organisation that would be 'respected, reasonable, inclusive and trusted'. Concern has been expressed that a new Forum might just become a 'talking shop' without capacity for action or ability to evolve to meet future demands. Commentary in the documentation clearly reveals the difficulty of the decision for many of those involved. There is a desire to be more pro-active, to have an organisation that is inclusive and representative of the wide range of interests of Forest communities, one that can pull down funding, and with the capacity to make things happen.

Following extensive discussions of alternative proposals, the Community Stakeholder Group decided to create a 'Foresters' Forest Forum' hosted by Forestry England (with a community steering group) to ensure that 'the Foresters' Forest momentum is not lost. Discussions on developing a more independent organisation will continue into the future with more time to explore local needs and alternative structures.

# 1. Background and local context of the FF Programme

## 1.1 Background and local context of the FF Programme

### Foresters' Forest Programme Summary

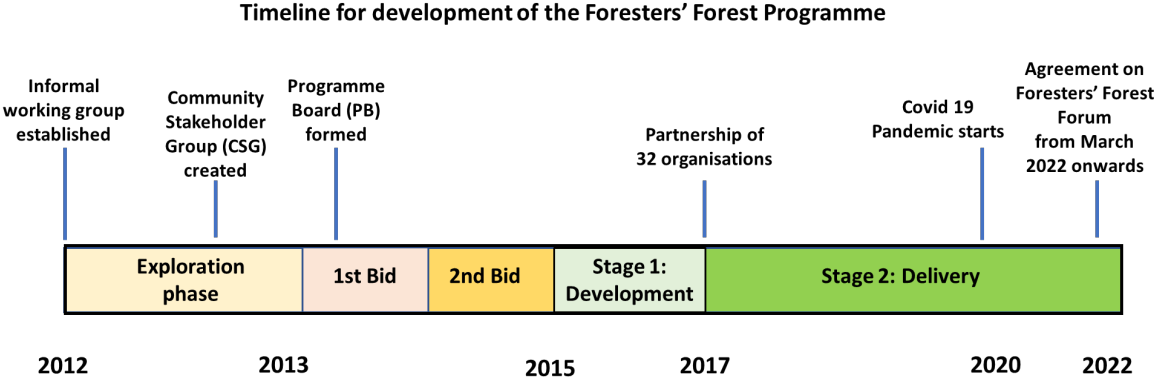
The Foresters' Forest Programme is delivered across the area of the Hundred of St. Briavels, an area of land totalling 48,327 acres (19,557 hectares) about which there has been some dispute over the years in terms of its boundaries ever since the first mention of St. Briavels in 1161.

It is worth noting that the Hundred of St. Briavels lies within the Forest of Dean District, which is a larger area with a population of 82,700 in 2012 and a projected population increase of 4.2% over the period 2012-2021. The largest change is expected in the over-65 years age category, which is anticipated to increase by 24% over the period. Net migration is anticipated to only account for a small proportion of these changes (500 persons over the 2012-21 period), though the source of in-migration is not known.

Data also indicated an increase in single households and married couples with no dependent children. This is supported by the increasing number of people commuting out of the area to work on a daily basis and the loss of large local employers such as Rank Xerox in Mitcheldean (which finally closed in 2010 and at one time employed 5,000 people). An estimated 15% of people of working age in the Forest of Dean travel to Gloucester for work, and an unknown number commute to the South Gloucestershire and Bristol area.

The Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership involves 32 organisations. The Partnership evolved over a period of time following establishment of an informal working group in 2012 to 'explore the potential for making a landscape partnership bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund' (The Foresters' Forest HLF Landscape Partnership Programme for Our Land between Two Rivers', 2016). which received 86 project ideas for the Forest area. A Community Stakeholder Group (CSG) was created in 2013 and from that developed a proposal for a bid to the HLF. The initial bid was not successful but the Programme Board (PB) that came together to submit the bid continued to develop ideas and made a second bid, winning funding for a development stage in 2015 and a delivery stage that ran across the 2017-22 period (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Timeline of development and delivery of the Foresters' Forest Programme



### Structure of the Partnership

The Programme Board was established as the decision-making body of the Partnership with the following roles:

- Overview of Programme delivery (operations and finance)
- Reporting and communications
- Contract with the Heritage Lottery Fund for programme delivery
- Contracts individually with each project partner to deliver identified outputs

The Board is made up of 5 representatives from the CSG and 5 representatives from delivery bodies, with the 11<sup>th</sup> member being Forestry England, the Lead Partner, which also hosts the core Programme Team (Table 1). The programme Manager attends PB meetings but does not have a vote. The Board takes advice from the CSG who represent broad community aims and objectives (Figure 2).

The CSG was created to ensure input from the local communities in the Forest of Dean. The 13 CSG members are individuals, they may belong to local organisations but do not represent those interests at meetings. Their role is to discuss broader community desires and to represent community views to the Programme Board.

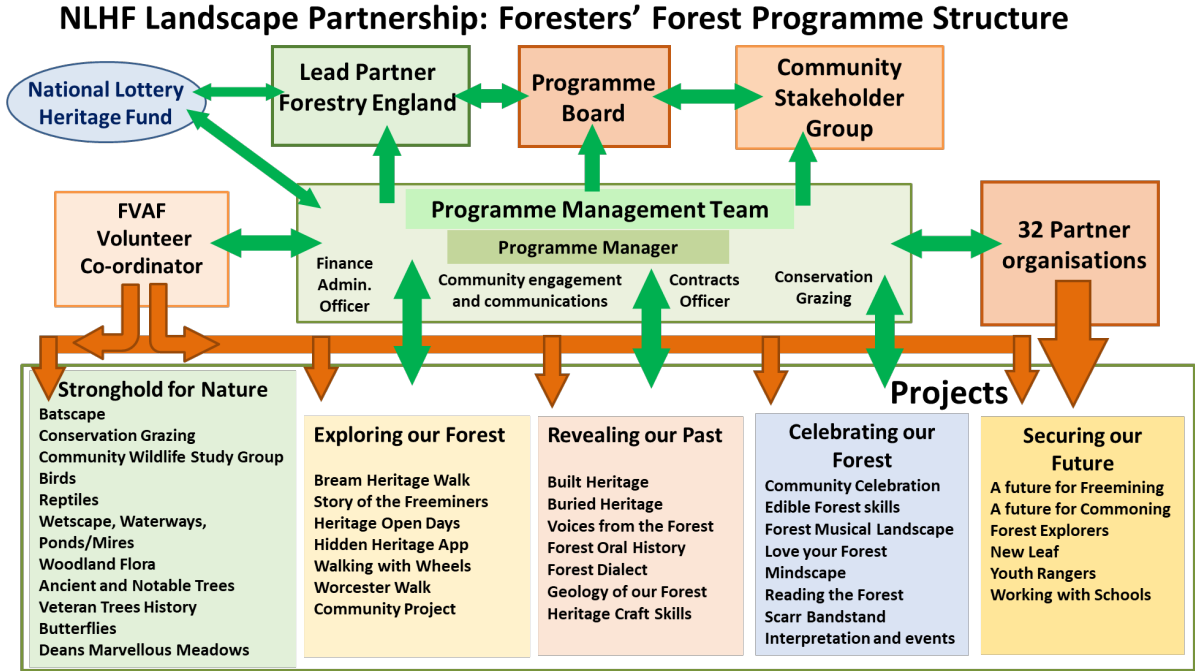
**Table 1. Organisations and individuals in the Landscape Partnership**

<b>Partner name/organisation</b>
Forestry England (Lead Partner)
Andrew Hoan
Arbour Training: New Leaf
Butterfly Conservation
Coleford Area MCTi Partnership
Commoners Association*
Dean Heritage Centre
Dean Meadows Group
Environment Agency
Forest of Dean Brass Band
Forest of Dean District Council
Forest of Dean Local History Society
Forest Voluntary Action Forum
Forest of Dean Buildings Preservation Trust
Friends of Scarr Bandstand
Gloucestershire Bat Group
Gloucestershire County Environmental Records Centre
Gloucestershire Geology Trust
Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society
Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
Hidden Heritage Apps Ltd
Lydbrook school
Natural England
Plantlife
Rewild
Royal Forest of Dean Freemaners Association
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
University of Gloucestershire
Wyldwood Arts
Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
West Dean Parish Council
Worcester Walk Community Project

\*Note: The Commoners Association was identified in the HLF funding bid as a Main Partner but did not engage in programme delivery.

(Source: NLHF Funding Bid, 2016)

Figure 2. Structure of the Foresters' Forest Programme Partnership



## 1.2 Programme expenditure

The total programme budget for the Foresters' Forest amounted to £2.753 million over the 5-year delivery phase (Table 2). Just over 20% of the budget supported programme management, which included salaries for full and part time personnel (Programme Manager, Finance & Administration, Contracts Officer, Communications and Community Engagement Officer) and volunteer coordinators based in FVAF. The management budget also funded training for Project Leaders and the FF team, Office costs for the FVAF coordinators, an Assistant Ecologist based in Forestry England, and a contribution towards Monitoring and Evaluation costs (CCRI).

Project expenditure was spread unevenly across the five thematic areas (which had varying numbers of projects) with more than a quarter of the funding (£2.753 million) going to the ecologically focused projects (Stronghold for Nature), 17% to Securing our Future and less than 6% to Exploring our Forest thematic area. Project expenditure varied due to the nature and scale of projects, and the type of activities undertaken.

The five largest projects (Table 3) between them accounted for just under forty percent (37.14%) of total project expenditure and were concentrated in three themes focusing on enhancing the natural heritage (Conservation grazing and Wetscapes), built and buried

heritage (industrial heritage and Archaeology) and securing the future of the living heritage (Freemining), with the majority of funding supporting purchase of a briquetting machine and building to house).

This concentration of funding might seem high, but the five projects identified in the table underpin the core aims of the Foresters' Forest providing a foundation on which to build into the future. The Conservation grazing and Wetscapes projects created the space and habitat improvement supporting biodiversity objectives of other projects (e.g. Reptiles, Butterflies, flora); the built heritage project undertook restoration of specific heritage sites; buried heritage provided information to underpin the exploration of archaeological sites; and, the briquetting machine underpins the future sustainability of Freemining in the Forest.

Table 2. Breakdown of Programme expenditure

Thematic area	Budget (with 2021 reallocations)	Proportion of total expenditure (%)
Stronghold for Nature	£769,131	27.88%
Exploring our Forest	£161,374	5.85%
Revealing our Past	£465,668	16.88%
Celebrating our Forest	£331,795	12.03%
Securing our Future	£473,379	17.16%
<b>Total project expenditure</b>	<b>£2,201,347</b>	79.81% of Total Programme funding
<b>Programme management</b>	<b>£556,909</b>	20.19% of Total Programme funding
<b>Total Programme funding</b>	<b>£2,758,256</b>	

Table 3. Projects with the highest expenditure level

Thematic area	Project title	Project expenditure	Proportion of total project expenditure
<b>Securing our Future</b>	Future for Freemining	£312,448	11.33%
<b>Stronghold for Nature</b>	Conservation Grazing	£214,373	7.77%
<b>Revealing our Past</b>	Buried Heritage (Archaeology)	£173,982	6.31%
<b>Stronghold for Nature</b>	Wetscape - Waterways, Ponds and Mires	£165,688	6.00%
<b>Revealing our Past</b>	Built Heritage	£157,816	5.72%
<b>Total expenditure</b>		<b>£1,024,307</b>	<b>37.14%</b>



## 1.3 Evaluation approach

The programme evaluation has operated over 6 years consisting of the following elements:

- 2016 Evaluation of the Development Phase
- 2017 Baseline Programme Evaluation
- 2019 Mid-term Evaluation
- 2022 Final Evaluation

A qualitative and quantitative evaluation approach has been taken to assess the extent to which the nine NLHF outcomes have been achieved. At each stage the evaluation has consisted of three main elements:

- Analysis of documentary evidence
- Interviews with project leaders and other stakeholders
- On-line surveys of the wider community (2018, 2019 and 2021)

The final evaluation was undertaken over the period October 2021 – February 2022.

## 2. Description of project outputs

Project objectives and outputs are summarised briefly below (Tables 4 – 8) under the five Foresters' Forest thematic areas. More detailed output summaries can be found in the Appendices to this report. This section will not describe the individual project outputs in detail as they are extensive, varied and wide-ranging, incorporating impacts and benefits on the heritage, on volunteers, people who have engaged with project activities or events, and wider communities in the Forest of Dean. This section will provide a brief overview of outputs by thematic area.

### 2.1 Stronghold for nature

The majority of projects concentrated on two areas of activity: improving the condition of the natural heritage, and/or identifying and recording the current state of the natural environment and biodiversity of the Forest. The two 'tree focused' projects (Ancient and Notable trees; Veteran trees History) directed their efforts towards identifying and recording location and condition of individual trees, providing information for future management. The Woodland flora project examined ground flora as an indicator for previous and future management.

The projects targeting specific species (Batscape, Birds, Reptile, Butterflies) were more concerned with habitat and management improvements that would support specific species, though all of them also had a strong element of identifying species and recording numbers. Batscape was concerned with improving land management within the core sustenance zones (feeding area) of bat roosts (e.g. through gapping up of hedgerows), while the Birds (tree planting, scrapes, stumps for nesting) and Butterfly (encouraging heathland plants) projects were both engaged in habitat management to encourage population growth, while the reptile project examined changes in species population under changing habitat conditions.

Conservation grazing, Dean Meadows, and Wetscapes projects were more focused on understanding and improving large scale habitat areas. Conservation grazing therefore engaged in management improvements to create lowland heathland habitat (80 ha area) for biodiversity in the Forest. This involved felling conifer plantations, utilising livestock grazing and fencing to manage habitat change. Dean Meadows was focused on identifying wildflower meadows and working with landowners to manage them sustainably, while the Wetscape project was exploring the hydrology of the forest, assessing water quality in streams and ponds, species surveys, and creating new ponds. The findings of this project increases understanding of surface hydrology and will feed into forest management planning.

All of the projects relied heavily on volunteer input to undertake surveys, collect and record information, and prepare it for submission to the Gloucestershire Centre for Environmental

Records (GECR) and/or partner organisations. The Community Wildlife Study Group trained volunteers in specific survey methods that could be utilised across multiple projects. Projects engaged with the wider communities of the Forest in different ways, Conservation Grazing, for example, attracted a lot of visitors who came to see the grazing animals, (ponies, cattle, sheep), providing opportunities for increasing awareness of FF activities, while the reptiles project did some work with local schools, and Batscape and the tree projects gave presentations and guided walks to groups.

## 2.2 Exploring our Forest

Projects delivered under the Exploration theme addressed issues of access and sources of information with almost no emphasis on management, condition, or recording of the heritage itself. Bream Heritage Walk and Walking with Wheels both focused directly on access (the first for the able bodied in the Bream area, the second for the physically impaired). Both enabled people to engage with natural and industrial heritage more closely and raised awareness through provision of information. The hidden heritage apps (three Apps were produced) provided direct links for people to explore heritage through linking of historic images with the current context. Heritage open days was more a means of ensuring Foresters Forest projects gained wider promotion and raising awareness among Forest residents and visitors of the heritage activities available.

The final project under this theme, Worcester Walk, was led by a community group to improve a local area by voluntary activity, reduce vandalism and make it a more secure and safe place to visit.

In general, these projects engaged with smaller numbers of volunteers over the programme period but were targeting the wider community to increase awareness and engagement with the heritage of the Forest.

## 2.3 Revealing our Past

Projects under the theme of 'Revealing our Past' focused on improving understanding, awareness, and engagement with physical and non-physical aspects of the industrial and cultural heritage. Many of these projects had impacts on all three outcome areas: heritage, people and communities.

Voices from the Forest, Forest Oral History and Forest Dialect projects were linked in terms of their focus on improvement and enhancement of oral histories based on memories of local residents. This group of projects were highly successful in improving the condition of current

heritage, raising the skill level of volunteers and raising awareness and understanding of the past. The Oral histories project updated and digitised existing taped interviews that were in danger of being lost through deterioration of the technology for utilising them. Some of these interviews were also utilised by the Forest Dialect project to research the local dialect. Both projects relied heavily on trained volunteers to transcribe interviews and catalogue the information to create a more usable resource (archived at the Dean Heritage Centre). The Voices from the Forest project focused on capturing, transcribing and cataloguing memories from current residents of the Forest. Together this suite of projects provides a heritage asset stretching back into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century providing information on living and working conditions from men, women, and children.

The 'Built' and 'Buried' heritage projects focused on the industrial structures and archaeological remains in the Forest. The Buried Heritage project was highly successful, undertaking LIDAR surveys and archaeological digs. The project attracted large numbers of volunteers who learned about the industrial heritage and developed skills related to archaeological surveying and excavation. The three teams of volunteers established for the Lidar validation and Built Heritage survey found and recorded many sites in the Forest and this work will continue this process in future years. Community engagement was extensive with the project producing a school archaeological pack in 2019 with 13 schools signing up to a training day on how to utilise the resources, and open days attracted large numbers of visitors and school visits to the sites.

The Built Heritage project focused on improving the condition of specific sites through small scale conservation works (e.g. Trafalgar Colliery, Darkhill Iron Works, Titanic Steelworks, Soudley Packhorse Bridge, Oakwood Tramway, Oakwood Mill drift mine, Blue Rock Trail and Blakeney Limekiln). The Built Heritage project suffered from a number of problems, including a lack of a clear direction during the early phase of the programme and delays due to Forestry England requirement and procurement processes. There were also conflicts with ecological project goals and requirements for surveying, monitoring, and agreeing modifications to activities before planned work could be undertaken (e.g. bats, butterflies), which slowed down activity and limited the achievement of some outcomes.

*"Built heritage got held back...There was a lot of frustration from people who just wanted to get on and do the work on the ground, a lot of frustration with the ecological stuff...At Dark Hills for example we all agreed on what work was needed but it was a battle just to take the ivy off the walls because the work conflicted with butterflies - it turned out the butterflies need it – it's a frustration but we came to a compromise."*

(Member of Programme Board interview, 2021)

The Geology project was another that was adversely impacted by loss of geology experts early during the programme period with a delay before new leaders were found and different objectives adopted. The project successfully created a Geoheritage App with 11 walks identifying and describing the local Geological features, provided guided walks and engaged with schools through production of a Geology resource pack.

Heritage Craft Skills was also affected by a slow start as a result of leadership changes and then later on by Covid-19 regulations which limited the number of participants in workshops that could be delivered and thus the extent of community engagement with the project. The

focus was on teaching people a range of traditional skills based on the use of natural resources, including: skinning, tanning and utilising leather, making and using natural dyes, spinning and carding wool, woodworking, willow weaving, coppicing, and traditional blacksmithing. The project is linked to the New Leaf Project which ran a series of training workshops (e.g. coppicing, bushcraft, bowl carving) to generate income from the general public and support New Leaf participants on their courses.

## 2.4 Celebrating our Forest

The projects within the 'Celebrating our Forest' theme covered a wide range of activities within the Forest, including:

- Music; renovation of a bandstand
- Literature
- Support for those living with dementia
- Foraging edible resources
- Litter picking, and community celebration events

The majority of projects delivered high levels of NLHF outcomes with a focus on engaging with people and communities. Five projects under this theme also delivered one or more improved heritage outcomes (in terms of management, condition, or recording of heritage). Two projects were unable to deliver all their outcomes, largely due to the impact of Covid restrictions which forced the cancellation of events (this had significant impacts on the musical projects and Edible Forest Skills).

The Scarr Bandstand project succeeded in renovation of the bandstand ensuring its use as a cultural and heritage site into the future. A range of physical improvement activities were carried out including installing boar-proof fencing, signposting, clearing of weeds and hedgerow planting (with input from Wye Valley Youth Rangers). In the first two years a programme of events was completed resulting in every Brass Band in the FoD, and several local choirs, performing at the bandstand but then Covid-19 resulted in cancellation of all events in Year 4 and some in Year 5 (although The Friends of Scarr Bandstand ran a successful series of events during Year 5). On the positive side, the area around the bandstand was widely utilised for family recreation by the local community during lockdown periods, and the bandstand itself utilised for socially distanced exercise classes.

The Forest Musical Landscape project collected and archived (in the Dean Heritage Centre) a range of artefacts, (e.g. programme sheets, uniforms, instruments, photographs and other ephemera such as trophies). The project also increased awareness of the musical heritage of the Forest among the local community through musical events and going into schools to encourage involvement. Twenty concerts were delivered at a variety of venues before Covid-19 restrictions forced cancellation of events in Years 4 and 5. The schools work was viewed as "quietly successful" by Project Leaders, raising awareness and offering young

people a pathway into music following a period of cuts in local authority support for music tuition, and around one quarter of schools in the Forest were reached.

Forest literary heritage was explored through a highly successful 'Reading the Forest' project, which identified and recorded 48 authors (exceeding the target) and created a web resource and literary trail map. Volunteer training produced multiple specialist book researchers and reviewers; website editors & administrators; and multi-media editor/producers, with an additional 61 people contributing to site content. Public events were delivered to engage the wider community (with 1,882 visitors) and school resources developed. The project was very active on social media and during lockdown a series of podcasts proved popular and were made available on CDs, targeting those 'less digitally proficient'.

*"The work has drawn people in and given a more nuanced and fuller history of the Forest. Numbers of podcast listeners were good for what was a relatively small element of the project and attracted members of the 'Forest diaspora' spread across the world."*

(Project Leader interview, 2022).

A total of 9 schools started using the resources with steadily increasing numbers of pupils making use of the materials, with some additional teaching support from Project Leaders.

Some of the natural heritage resources of the Forest were accessed through the Edible Forest Skills project. The broad project aims included: *'improving the management and condition of the local environment through increased knowledge of heritage and renewed interest in growing organic food and community growing spaces'*. In the first three years, workshop activities included: Mushroom Foraging; Fermenting Foods; Brewing Country Wines; and a Wild Meat Weekend. A total of 332 people participated in training courses. As with other FF projects Years 4 and 5 were impacted by Covid 19 and restrictions on utilisation of the Forest England estate which reduced the number and type of workshops that could be delivered and affected achievement of target outcomes.

The Love Your Forest project operated as a partnership consisting of the FF programme with Hubbub, Suntory, FoD District Council, Forestry England and FoD/Wye Valley Tourism. The project undertook a range of activities including: litter picking events, organising a 'Trash-converter' van to visit schools, development of a litter picking badge for Scouts & Girl Guides, and installing branded litterbins in four town centres and at Forestry England sites. Litter-picking events attracted a significant number of volunteers of all ages and by the end of Year 5 a total of 1,570 bags of litter had been collected.

mindSCAPE targeted a very specific population with the overall aim of 'enabling care home residents living with Dementia and their carers to undertake landscape themed artistic activities'. This project lasted for four years and delivered 80 mindSCAPE activities (meeting the target output), produced four resource booklets, three exhibitions of work, and involved 18 care home employees in mindSCAPE activities assisted by 20 Volunteers. Volunteering was not possible in the final two years due to Covid-19 but the project produced videos of activities for carers or families of those living with dementia.

Community Celebration increased community awareness and interest in local heritage. The project went through several changes of plan due to the difficulties of delivering specific project ideas and the impact of Covid-19 which required postponement of events and changes to deliver more activities digitally. Despite these challenges a wide range of activities were undertaken including 11 commissioned public performances / events based on history of the local area, 16 Vlogs/Blogs, 7 Podcasts and 14 local exhibitions.

## 2.5 Securing our future

The fifth Foresters' Forest thematic area looked at how the living heritage could be protected and enhanced into the future through increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding of the unique cultural heritage of the Forest. The main focus on the projects were on developing awareness, knowledge and skills among local people and engaging a wider sector of the community with their heritage.

Three projects (Forest Explorers, Youth Rangers, and the Schools project) engaged with young people across the Forest of Dean area. Youth Rangers engaged with young people (14-18 years of age) raising awareness of the Forests' natural, built and cultural heritage, and developing skills in practical conservation, media use, first aid and health and safety. Forest Explorers was aimed at younger children (aged 5-13) and their families. A monthly programme of heritage-based activities was developed with 39 sessions delivered over 5 years (less than the original target output due to Covid-19 impacts in years 4 and 5 which initially stopped all activities and later resulted in a lack of bookings and limitations from operating under the rule of six (meaning small groups and multiple repetition of sessions).

The Working with Schools Project aimed at raising awareness and understanding among teachers and children about the local natural, built and cultural heritage, with the aim of building local pride to ensure future protection and promotion. The project was fully embraced by Lydbrook Primary school which re-developed their curriculum to make use of the locally generated resources about the FoD heritage, which proved highly successful. Teachers reported improved interest and engagement from pupils and greater awareness among families who learned about their local heritage from the children. The original ideas and resources provided were not as widely adopted as hoped. A 2021 survey of schools in the FoD district found that 80% of respondents had heard of the FF programme and the free teaching resources provided, but in most cases the resources were utilised by only one or two classes in a school, except for the 'history scheme of work' which was utilised across the whole school in six cases. The evidence suggests that around half of the sample had utilised the resources.

There are multiple reasons why school resources received limited use including: difficulties communicating with teachers, pressures on teachers' time, the time and effort required to integrate new materials into a curriculum, and more recently, the increased workload created by Covid-19 and associated burden of developing on-line teaching methods. In schools where resources were utilised, interviews with teachers and head teachers revealed a range of benefits in terms of increased pupil engagement and interest, increased enthusiasm from

teachers, and increased awareness and knowledge of the local area, extending into the wider community through the families of pupils. Half of the respondents indicated that the FF resources had *'increased use of outdoor learning in the area around the school'* (although this had been severely impacted by the Pandemic in the previous 2 years). Interviews also revealed some of the difficulties of utilising the materials including the quantity of materials provided and the need for additional support to understand and absorb the complexity of provision (over half of respondents stated they needed expert help to *'make the most of these resources'*).

An additional success linked to the school project has been the 'Story of the Forest' book targeted at children and produced by local author, Andy Seed. Schools have been given free copies and are utilising the book which provides a history of the Forest from pre-historic times to the present.

*"The Book is a nice tangible result. It's such an easy read, any teacher can pick it up and use it straight away. We were part of the school project starting in Lydbrook and some of our members were involved in writing some of the material; there were lots of different contributions. It has been much more successful than I thought it would be."*

(FoD History Society interview Nov. 2021)

The feedback on the book is that both adults and children enjoy reading the 'Story of the Forest' and have learned about the Forest from it, even long-time residents have expressed support. Andy Seed has also produced a sequel, the 'Wildlife of the Forest' for children, which has been delivered in March 2022.

One disappointment was the failure to engage with commoners (Future for Commoning) as there was no enthusiasm from the commoners to get involved with the overall FF Programme. Part-way through the programme period one independent grazier has been involved with the programme, benefiting from equipment provided to run a flock of Herdwick sheep on specific Forestry England sites that needed grazing.

The other project that faced some difficult challenges was New Leaf which had the overall aim of supporting disadvantaged groups to access social forestry and acquire skills in coppicing, green wood turning, and traditional craft skills. There were some initial project management challenges requiring additional expenditure related to repairs to vehicle purchases, costs related to refurbishment of Kensley sheds, and a change in leadership, all of which delayed the project start. One project leader resigned and the Rewild Project took over as the project lead. Once changes were in place the project became more successful, delivering New Leaf courses to 71 young people and unemployed and vulnerable adults (exceeding the target number) but in Year 4 both Rewild and New Leaf had to cancel workshops due to Covid-19.

The Future for Freemining project enabled Freeminers to work together to ensure that the traditions of freemining continue into the future. Two distinct areas of activity were undertaken: first, the purchase of a briquetting machine and creation of the Freemining Futures CIC to manage it; and second, the Freemining Association concentrated on attracting new recruits and increasing skills and knowledge of freemining through training and raising awareness in the wider community. A key positive outcome was that the multiple



strands of the project brought the freeminers together to agree a strategy for a sustainable future. Other key outputs include provision of a mine rescue vehicle, 16 young trainees working towards their 'year and a day', 21 miners trained in the use of Nonex explosives, and others trained in chainsaw use, and First Aid.

Purchase of the briquetting machine from India was a complex process requiring paying for a local organisation to visit the site to verify production, organising international freight and design and erection of a building to house the machinery. The project was a large undertaking for a group that had no experience in that kind of work:

*"What we have done is big stuff, it was a big challenge; to find a machine and bring it here from the other side of the world during a covid pandemic and get a building designed and built to house it."*

(Project Leader Interview, 2021)

The impact of the Covid pandemic was huge, setting the project back a year through delayed delivery of both the pre-fabricated building and the briquetting machine from India. An engineer from India who would oversee the assembly was unable to travel and the Freeminers ended up assembling the machinery themselves.

**Table 4. Summary of Project outputs and expenditure: Stronghold for nature**

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Stronghold for Nature: Outputs (to January 2022)</b>	<b>Total Spend (£)</b>
Batscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better land management for Horseshoe bats</li> <li>Improved resilience of the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Horseshoe bat colony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hedging planted and gapping-up, resulting in continuous hedge lines</li> <li>Flight line surveys carried out at primary roosts; roost emergence counts carried out at multiple sites</li> <li>Volunteers developed skills</li> </ul>	<b>57,147</b>
Conservation Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create and link open habitat (lowland heathland) using grazing animals in the Forest of Dean to enhance biodiversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80 hectares of open habitat now being managed/restored or enhanced for wildlife</li> <li>Over 40 volunteer stock checkers recruited, trained and active</li> <li>Procurement of appropriate conservation grazing livestock and equipment</li> <li>An increase in knowledge of the benefits of conservation grazing to hundreds of site visitors through a variety of walks and talks, events and visitor interaction.</li> </ul>	<b>214,373</b>
Community Wildlife Study Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put in place a self-sustaining Survey and Monitoring (Study) group that will last beyond the life of the project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey methods in place for Batscape, Sphagnum, riverfly, MoRPH, Newts, Eel pass monitoring, ancient and veteran trees, reptiles, and heathland establishment.</li> <li>Training sessions delivered for wide range of biodiversity surveys</li> <li>Established study group members with the skills to pass on to new recruits.</li> </ul>	<b>57,327</b>
Birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reverse declines in some of Gloucestershire's rarest breeding birds.</li> <li>Restore and improve habitats in the Forest of Dean for target species.</li> <li>Survey and monitor populations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Valuable ecological data collected and shared across the county.</li> <li>Bird populations monitored and learned more about the target species.</li> <li>New habitat has been created and existing habitats improved, benefitting other species as well as the targeted bird species. Includes tree planting, creating scrapes,</li> <li>32 volunteers involved in species surveying and habitat management work</li> </ul>	<b>57,327</b>
Reptiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform the development of an improved network of habitat favourable to reptiles</li> <li>A volunteer base will be established to help monitor reptile distribution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased adder records and new site records.</li> <li>Greater understanding of adder behaviour.</li> <li>Volunteers involved in checking reptile 'refugia' at 35 sites around the Forest and recording what lies beneath to monitor how reptile populations change over time (mainly adder, common lizard, grass snake and slow-worm)</li> <li>Volunteer engagement and improved public awareness.</li> </ul>	<b>13,615</b>

Wetscape, Waterways, Ponds and Mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete Inventory of FOD ponds including habitat status, locations, physical attributes and photographs recorded on national database.</li> <li>• Surveys of indicator species (i.e. of pond health, etc.) and non-native species.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Database fully updated with all Forest of Dean ponds and their habitat survey data. Data extracted and stored locally</li> <li>• Blakeney Weir eel pass installed</li> <li>• Over 500 hours of trained volunteers time have contributed to brooks survey that will contribute to catchment management plans.</li> <li>• 1,300 hours of volunteered time carrying out training, survey, monitoring and practical maintenance</li> <li>• Multiple new ponds created Across the Forest and in some schools.</li> </ul>	<b>165,688</b>
Woodland Flora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying impacts of forest operations on woodland flora; exploring woodland flora to provide input to forestry management planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained volunteers to recognise and survey areas for rare plant species</li> <li>• Undertook initial surveys.</li> </ul>	<b>33,600</b>
Ancient and Notable Trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing ancient and notable trees will be identified, and appropriate management included in woodland management plans</li> <li>• People will have developed new skills in surveying and recording ancient and notable trees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The whole forest and Hundred of St Briavels has been included in the tree survey and has received records across 70% of the area</li> <li>• Adjacent landowners to the forest have shown a positive approach to the management of their ancient trees and are taking steps to implement best practice</li> <li>• Approximately 60 people have, over the life of the project attended a workshop or a survey day and learned about ancient trees and have taken an active interest in trees</li> <li>• 9 Tree guardians nominated during the project</li> </ul>	<b>8,788</b>
Veteran Trees History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording veteran trees and their associated archaeology in two areas of the Forest of Dean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recorded around 500 veteran and notable trees.</li> <li>• 50 people volunteered for the project and were trained in recording techniques. Completing 510 volunteer hours</li> <li>• Better understanding of areas of forest waste and veteran trees in such areas.</li> </ul>	<b>8,192</b>
Butterflies	<p>The aims of the project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To gather information on habitat quality and remaining butterfly numbers and distribution</li> <li>• To undertake habitat management work to protect the Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The habitat at Moseley Green area has improved and new breeding sites were created through this project. The population at Ruspidge Halt, Linear Park has increased since the project began, with more available habitat and the original habitat is more suitable for the butterfly.</li> <li>• Key butterfly species in the Forest of Dean have benefitted from the habitat improvements across the sites, with all three species found in very good numbers in large areas across the Linear Park and adjacent Foxes Bridge</li> </ul>	<b>70,675</b>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To engage local people, raise awareness and participation</li> </ul>	<p>Colliery area. This entire area is now the richest and largest butterfly area in the Forest, thanks to work undertaken through this project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many volunteers (average of 20 individuals per week per winter work party and 15 per week for the summer surveys) have taken part in the project</li> </ul>	
Deans Marvellous Meadows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To promote wildflower meadows, identify and record meadows, and to support improvements via the Capital Works Fund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19 meadows have been surveyed and recorded to date</li> <li>21 meadows owners have been provided with advice and management recommendations</li> <li>283 people have gained knowledge from attending events,</li> <li>Capital work improvements have been undertaken on 12 meadows</li> </ul>	<b>18,437</b>
Heathland Habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of funding support for Conservation Grazing project; controlled by the FF Core Team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for works on the ground needed to create lowland heathland habitat under the Conservation Grazing project (e.g. paying contractors to mulch)</li> </ul>	<b>63,962</b>
<b>Total funding</b>			<b>769,131</b>

**Table 5, Summary of Project outputs and expenditure: Exploring our Forest**

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Exploring our Forest: Outputs (to January 2022)</b>	<b>Total Spend (£)</b>
Bream Heritage Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a walk identifying the industrial heritage of the area around Bream</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A 6.5-mile signposted walk around the villages of Bream and Whitecroft and the hamlets of Saunders Green and Brockhollands, highlighting 55 points of interest, including some scowles.</li> </ul>	9,969
Bixslade (Changed to Story of the Freeminers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tells the story of Freemining at Hopewell Colliery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Series of interpretive panels created and installed in a reconditioned storage container at Hopewell Colliery.</li> </ul>	5,000
Heritage Open Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and awareness raising regarding local heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved knowledge and understanding of the past through encouragement of more involvement in open day events</li> <li>The Heritage Open Days event is part of the National Heritage Open Days events occurring every year. A number of Foresters' Forest projects are represented within the schedule of the activities/ events occurring in the Forest</li> </ul>	13,555

Hidden Heritage App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of downloadable free Apps that link images and information from the past with current locations.</li> </ul>	<p>Production of 3 Apps available free:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hidden Heritage of the Dean – linking numerous mine sites using the Forestry England Family Cycle Trail (previously a railway line)</li> <li>• Coleford’s Hidden Heritage –includes Darkhill, Titanic and Scarr Bandstand</li> <li>• Cinderford’s Hidden Heritage – links heritage sites within the town to those in the surrounding area</li> </ul>	40,545
Walking with Wheels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide two all-terrain mobility scooters to provide access to the environment and heritage of the Forest’s woodland.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two trampers available for hire 7 days per week.</li> <li>• 6 approved routes allowing users to explore the Forest of Dean.</li> <li>• Over 800 people have accessed the forest as a result; over 100 volunteers have been involved with the project</li> </ul>	56,272
Worcester Walk Community Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging local people to learn more about their natural and cultural heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local people feel much safer walking through fields which are boar proof and appreciate the hedgerow extension, the wildlife pond, the wildflower meadows, the benches, the dog waste bin and the peace and tranquillity</li> </ul>	28,533
Improving Engagement with Disadvantaged Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small project to enhance local engagement with disadvantaged groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a pilot sensory trail within the Cyril Hart Arboretum (near Speech House), undertaken by FVAF with Forestry England support.</li> </ul>	7,500
<b>Total funding</b>			<b>161,374</b>

**Table 6. Summary of Project outputs and expenditure: Revealing our Past**

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Revealing our Past: Outputs (to January 2022)</b>	<b>Total Spend (£)</b>
Built Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the condition of built heritage structures through small-scale conservation work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trafalgar Colliery - revealed and then conserved the base of the ventilation chimney which was positioned on the hillside above the colliery</li> <li>• Darkhill Ironworks and Titanic Steelworks are Scheduled Monuments near Ellwood. Works under Foresters' Forest included removing vegetation and completing small-scale conservation works on the remaining structures at both sites.</li> <li>• Blakeney Limekiln – removal of vegetation and repair to stonework</li> <li>• Mill Hill Drift mine and Mill Hill Tramway – repair to mine entrance and wall alongside tramway</li> <li>• Blue Rock Trail – conservation works to boundary walls on the brook in selected areas</li> <li>• Soudley Packhorse Bridge – conservation works to bridge</li> <li>• Worcester Walk Community Project Shed – refurbishment of shed to house tools for community project.</li> </ul>	157,816
Buried Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve the identification and understanding of the archaeological remains that survive across the Forest.</li> <li>• To enhance understanding of the buried and built heritage by a programme of community training and investigations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principal output is GIS mapping of archaeological assets across the Forest. The information will underpin condition monitoring and appropriate management measures to ensure protection of important and/or vulnerable archaeological remains.</li> <li>• Development of a well-trained and motivated group of volunteers with the potential to benefit local heritage studies for many years to come through undertaking their own LIDAR surveys, as well as supporting that of others.</li> <li>• A school resource pack a distributed to all schools within the Forest with teacher training days held to promote use of the pack.</li> </ul>	173,982
Voices from the Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a living collection of oral histories based on the rich land based occupational history of the Forest of Dean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of historically important interviews recorded</li> <li>• Accessible web resources created, including clips; timeline; map; films</li> <li>• Podcast series and a publication</li> </ul>	39,638
Forest Oral History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To digitise collection of audio cassette tapes and to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nearly 200 digitised oral history recordings</li> <li>• A searchable collections database containing information for all the recordings</li> </ul>	21,053

	make more accessible to the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A unique and invaluable social history archive of oral histories for the Forest of Dean spanning the 20th century. A new resource for DHC, historians and researchers</li> </ul>	
Forest Dialect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve condition of oral histories digitally, check sound quality and catalogue content</li> <li>• Volunteers learn about cataloguing; transcription skills; social media, writing, communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 oral histories digitally improved for sound quality; 20 oral histories transcribed and catalogued</li> <li>• Volunteers trained in cataloguing for dialect research, transcription skills; social media promotion, writing, communication skills</li> <li>• 976 volunteer hours completed, educational resources produced, social media communications established</li> <li>• Engaged with 23 organisations including local schools</li> </ul>	16,650
Geology of our Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To Promote the learning and understanding of Geology in the Forest of Dean</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More public awareness and understanding</li> <li>• Geology App created with 11 walks- provides a detailed explanation of the Forest's Geology and how this has influenced our industrial heritage, with particular reference to Freemining.</li> <li>• Guided Walks on varied routes around the Forest.</li> <li>• School Geology Packs created.</li> </ul>	20,721
Heritage Craft Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make heritage craft skills more accessible and affordable to the people of the Forest of Dean through the provision of 8 subsidised workshops a year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 400 will have access to heritage craft skills by attending a workshop</li> <li>• 40 volunteers supporting delivery of the workshops</li> <li>• 60 free workshop spaces given to New Leaf Social Forestry Project participants, giving people from disadvantaged groups access to these skills.</li> <li>• Made key links with other community projects and schools with the view to sharing these skills more widely in the Forest of Dean</li> </ul>	35,808
<b>Total funding</b>			<b>465,668</b>

**Table 7, Summary of Project outputs and expenditure: Celebrating our Forest**

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Celebrating our Forest: Outputs (to January 2022)</b>	<b>Total Spend (£)</b>
Community Celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capturing oral histories and staging community events to celebrate local history and heritage of the area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community events and local interest podcasts</li> <li>• Performances of Passing the Baton Play; and an Online photo exhibition</li> <li>• Extended docu-drama of the Mushet story</li> <li>• Project celebration event (in 2021)</li> <li>• A range of activities delivered by Wyldwood Arts have focused on celebrating and preserving local knowledge and history through the creation of podcasts, public performances and events based on the history of the local area.</li> </ul>	64,852
Edible Forest skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make edible forest skills more accessible and affordable to the people of the Forest of Dean through subsidised workshops.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 320 people will have accessed an edible forest skills workshop</li> <li>• 32 volunteers supported the delivery of the workshops</li> <li>• Approximately 48 free workshop spaces given to New Leaf Social Forestry Project participants, giving people from disadvantaged groups access to these skills.</li> </ul>	21,751
Forest Musical Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect, record and archive artefacts and documents relating to the history of bands in the Forest.</li> <li>• Raise awareness and opportunities for people to learn about the musical heritage of the Forest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collected and archived a range of musical heritage materials in the Dean Heritage Centre</li> <li>• Delivered 20 concerts at a variety of venues – raised awareness of musical heritage</li> <li>• Involvement in schools, providing tuition and an alternative route into music for young people</li> <li>• People volunteered time to help with concerts and the archiving project</li> </ul>	23,482
Love your Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness of anti-littering and the need for more recycling in the Forest by the creation of the ‘Love Your Forest’ brand and an ongoing campaign of activities and events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foresters’ Forest and Love Your Forest have organised regular community volunteer litter picks at various sites in the Forest, gathering 1,570 bags of litter since 2017</li> <li>• Trash converter van made school visits</li> <li>• Artworks created to promote anti-littering and recycling messages</li> <li>• Reward Recycle machines installed in Coleford Co-op and Dean Heritage Centre</li> </ul>	2,240
Mindscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage Care Home residents living with Dementia with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care Home residents engaged with landscape and nature through a programme of art activities. These have provided stimulation and entertainment, and either re-established old skills or engaged residents in something new.</li> </ul>	24,299



	nature and landscape through art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care home Activity Co-Ordinators and care staff have been up-skilled.</li> <li>• 8 Care Homes received 10 sessions each; 4 Activity guides produced and distributed to encouraged continuation of activity led by activity providers; and a series of 10 online videos produced</li> </ul>	
Reading the Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, research, and enhance awareness of the rich literary heritage of the Forest of Dean.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established history, extent &amp; significance of FoD's literary heritage</li> <li>• Made &amp; shared new discoveries about FoD literature, authors &amp; poets; created new public arts works (murals); Published anthology</li> <li>• Web resources include: teacher resources; trail map; timeline; films</li> <li>• Podcast series, organised events, exhibitions, talks, screenings, performances.</li> <li>• Broadcasts, including regional radio series; national network radio programme; regional television feature</li> <li>• Worked with schools to develop free resources and lesson plans; Online Timelines telling the story of the Forest through the ages and Reading the Forest's 'Forest Literature Timeline'.</li> </ul>	83,680
Scarr Bandstand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore Scarr Bandstand for community use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bandstand heritage site restored: now usable by community</li> <li>• Memories of older residents revived; Tradition of brass band concerts revived</li> <li>• High-quality events enjoyed by hundreds of locals and tourists each summer</li> <li>• Community groups now use the Bandstand for their own events</li> </ul>	21,688
Interpretation and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce information about Foresters' Forest project activities and raise awareness of local heritage.</li> <li>• Organise events to celebrate heritage and encourage engagement by the wider community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blue/green plaques installed to celebrate achievements of Forest heroes.</li> <li>• Interpretation boards erected at key locations</li> <li>• Map and leaflet published</li> <li>• Films and Forest timeline produced</li> <li>• Celebration events to publicise project activities and 'thank you' events for volunteers</li> </ul>	89,804
<b>Total funding</b>			<b>331,795</b>

**Table 8. Summary of Project outputs and expenditure: Securing our Future**

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Securing our Future: Outputs (to January 2022)</b>	<b>Total Spend (£)</b>
A future for Freemining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To enhance the Freemining tradition in the Forest in future generations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sourced briquette making machinery from India which will mix small coal with a binding agent to create briquettes. Constructed a building to house the machinery.</li> <li>Freeminers created a CIC to manage the briquetting machine and the income will help support training Freeminers in future.</li> <li>Traditional training supplemented by specialist training e.g. advanced First Aid underground.</li> <li>A memorial to the Waterloo Colliery disaster in 1949 installed at Waterloo screens near Mireystock tunnel.</li> </ul>	312,448
A future for Commoning (changed into supporting an independent local grazier)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newly created and existing open spaces in the Forest will be maintained by grazing animals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for purchase of water bowser and stock handling equipment</li> <li>Educational opportunity for agricultural students from Hartpury and school children</li> <li>Raised awareness around heritage of commoning sheep in the forest</li> <li>Improved butterfly habitat; flora and fauna diversity within fenced enclosures</li> </ul>	15,464
Forest Explorers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To engage families in forest heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>34 sessions have been held and 1,655 children have attended, learning about the Forest's natural, built and cultural heritage.</li> <li>Active volunteers currently engaged with the project</li> </ul>	15,731
New Leaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To engage disadvantaged groups with heritage craft skills and woodland management in the hope that this would lead to paid employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging with disadvantaged groups such as people who are homeless, have additional needs, mental health problems, suffering from domestic violence or unsound home life, or addiction issues</li> <li>Kensley Sheds as a building has been improved to create a fully working community craft centre – in use 5-7 days week</li> <li>Activities include green wood working heritage crafts group events providing training in traditional woodland management and conservation skills in areas of woodland allocated by Forestry England.</li> </ul>	76,997
Youth Rangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with young people in the natural environment of Forest of Dean, to develop their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities for 14-18 yr group during monthly meetings</li> <li>30+ Young people have a better understanding about the heritage of Forest of Dean</li> </ul>	7,995

	understanding of local heritage.		
Working with Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To enthuse local teachers and children about their natural, built and cultural heritage, so that they become proud of their Forest heritage and will protect and promote it in future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lydbrook Primary school fully immersed themselves in the Foresters' Forest programme, re-writing their school curriculum to embrace their local heritage; now being used as a model for other schools.</li> <li>Other local schools have engaged in forest visits as part of their outdoor learning</li> <li>Foresters' Forest 'Schools Day' events have been held for local teachers and pupils to increase engagement with FF project work.</li> <li>Learning resources provided to all schools in the Forest of Dean include: Ranger in a Bag – learning activity bags to use outdoors in the Forest; Archaeology Pack; History Scheme of Works &amp; Natural Heritage Scheme of Works; school curriculum Key Stage 1 &amp; 2 guidance notes for teachers; Colouring Page; Hidden Heritage and Geo-heritage Apps; 'Story of the Forest' and 'Wildlife of the Forest' books; Geology Packs.</li> </ul>	44,743
<b>Total funding</b>			<b>473,379</b>

# 3. Outcomes

## 3.1 Analysis of NLHF Landscape Partnership outcomes by Foresters' Forest themes

### Achievement of National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Outcomes

This section describes the outputs from the 38 projects and the extent to which the NLHF outcomes were achieved. A total of 38 projects were delivered through the Foresters' Forest Programme over the 2017-22 period under five broad themes

- A Stronghold for Nature
- Exploring our Forest
- Revealing our Past
- Celebrating our Forest
- Securing our Future

Projects were very different, targeting a wide range of issues, and in some cases projects within a thematic area cooperated to achieve wider impacts across the Forest of Dean. The Community Wildlife Study Group, for example, trained volunteers who then worked on a range of biodiversity issues within the Stronghold for Nature thematic area.

Each project within the Foresters' Forest programme had to demonstrate it was contributing towards one or more of the nine broad outcomes required by the National Lottery Heritage Fund:

- Outcomes for heritage: **heritage will be...**
  - Better managed
  - In better condition
  - Better Identified/recorded
- Outcomes for people: **people will have...**
  - Developed skills
  - Learned about heritage
  - Volunteered time
- Outcomes for communities: **communities...**
  - Will have reduced negative environmental impacts
  - Will have more people and a wider range of people engaged with heritage
  - the local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit

It is important to note that most projects did not target all of the outcomes. Most projects concentrated on delivering between three and 6 of the nine outcomes listed above. The extent to which each project met its overall outcomes is indicated in the five charts summarising the main outputs and outcomes (Figures 3 to 7).

### 3.1.1 Our Stronghold for Nature

Projects under the Stronghold for Nature theme focused on the natural environment, in particular identifying and recording species and improving habitat to enhance biodiversity. There was a high level of partnership working across the theme linking expertise in organisations such as the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, (GWT), RSPB, Natural England, and Forestry England with local independent experts and volunteers from within and external to the Forest of Dean.

Figure 3 summarises the outcomes for a range of projects focused on activities associated with bats, reptiles, birds, butterflies, meadows, ancient trees and wetscapes (ponds and waterways). The focus of most projects was on improving the heritage (in terms of condition, management and recording) and developing knowledge and skills among local people. Only two projects identified impacts on the wider community (in terms of the NLHF criteria).

Projects varied in levels of success, which is not surprising given the variety of ecological aspects addressed and dependence on external bodies for provision of expertise. Projects with the highest overall outcomes (in relation to the NLHF criteria) related to Butterflies, Ancient and Notable Trees, Wetscape (Ponds and Waterways), and the Community Wildlife Study Group. The Dean Meadows project also indicated a high level of outcomes for three of their target criteria. These were projects largely focused on identifying and recording information and developing the knowledge base and skills of local volunteers. The nature-based projects were some of the most popular projects attracting enthusiastic volunteers, utilising local experts who in many cases were volunteers themselves, and engaging with the wider community.

The Community Wildlife Study Group (CWSG) was a highly effective project, although slightly different from others in that it cut across several areas of interest with a focus on developing skills (such as surveying and recording species) among volunteers who then went on to work on a range of other biodiversity projects within the nature-based theme.

**Figure 3. Stronghold for Nature: Summary of project outcomes**

Stronghold for Nature: Extent to which outcomes achieved (Low / Medium / High)										
As at Yr 5 Q2	Heritage will be:			People will have:			Communities:			
Project Title	Better managed	In better condition	Identified / recorded	Developed skills	Learned about heritage	Volunteered time	Environmental impacts will be reduced	More people/wider range of people engaged with heritage	Local area/community a better place to live/visit	Comment
<b>Batscape</b>	Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes		Low outcomes		Struggled to deliver some outcomes; some targets set very low; loss of leader and expert volunteer; lack of recorded information.
<b>Conservation Grazing</b>	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		High level of community engagement from visitors coming to look at the grazing animals. Habitat improved.
<b>Community Wildlife Study Group</b>			High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Provided trained volunteers for other projects. Training sessions affected by Covid in years 4 and 5. People engaged with open days.
<b>Birds</b>	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Habitat improvements achieved and range of surveys undertaken. Additional species supported.
<b>Reptiles</b>			High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes				Final 2 years of activity impacted by Covid-19. Lot of volunteer activity.
<b>Wetscape (ponds and waterways)</b>	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes		Large proportion of work carried out by volunteers from Dean Green Team and partners.
<b>Woodland Flora</b>	Low outcomes	Low outcomes	Low outcomes	Medium level of outcomes		Low outcomes				Loss of Project Leader and expert . Few volunteers, ambitious and difficult tasks. Impacted by Covid in yrs 4 and 5. Original objectives not achieved.
<b>Ancient and Notable Trees</b>	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		The whole Forest has been included in the tree survey. People have attended a workshop or survey day and learned about ancient trees.
<b>Veteran Trees History</b>			High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Recorded 500 veteran trees using trained volunteers. Raised awareness through lectures, talks and walks.
<b>Butterflies</b>	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes				Habitat improved; evidence of improved condition of target species
<b>Dean's Marvellous Meadows</b>	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes				Better managed wildflower meadows; better informed landowners; Dean Meadows Group more sustainable in the longer term.

Projects supported by CWSG expertise and volunteers included: Batscape, Wetscape (Ponds and Waterways), Reptiles, and Woodland Flora. A large number of volunteer hours were accumulated through training and active delivery on projects (e.g. surveying, brush clearing, maintaining survey transects, stock checking, recording and entering data). The CWSG project also engaged with the wider community. In Year 5 for example 300 people attended eight public wildlife engagement days in 4 locations meeting target outputs. The aim was not just to provide information but also to encourage people to take action in their own gardens or local community. Engagement would have been higher but for the Pandemic restrictions which limited activity in Year 4.

Training volunteers was a major focus of activity and over the programme period a core of volunteers was created who attended multiple survey sessions developing a wide array of skills and knowledge. Over the period 50 people attended training courses and 500 people participated in submitting records online. Covid-19 had a significant impact on activities and limited both training and community engagement in Years 4 and 5.

The two tree projects, Ancient and Notable Trees and Veteran Trees History were highly successful in achieving their target outcomes. The work was a mix of training volunteers in survey techniques, identifying and recording trees, their condition and surroundings, and engaging with the wider community through talks, walks, and presentations. Significant numbers of volunteers engaged with the projects and learned surveying skills.

The Butterfly project focused on improving management and condition of two areas of the Forest to enhance butterfly habitat. Over the programme period this involved: clearing 7Ha of scrub and bracken; felling 7.1ha of wood; installing fences; sowing 46kg of seed and planting 3,250 plug plants and arranging for sheep grazing to take place. In addition, volunteers were involved in undertaking 20 surveys with 900 person days spent on surveying. As with many of the projects in the Stronghold for Nature thematic area Covid-19 reduced volunteer and public engagement activity (for example, there were no training activities held in Year 4). All output targets were met and Year 5 surveys indicate that all target species of butterfly were seen. The Project Leader notes that the Ruspidge Halt Linear Park/Foxes Bridge Colliery Tip area is now one of best areas for butterflies and moths in the FoD.

Projects which delivered a lower scale of outcomes included Batscape and Woodland Flora. Each of these projects had some areas of success but did not achieve all of the outcomes envisaged at the start of the FF programme. Batscape, for example, had high outcomes in terms of improving management of an area of land for bats but suffered in particular from a loss of expert leadership in Year 3 (that was never fully replaced by NE) and the project delivered through CWSG, external bat consultants and volunteer support. The loss of key expertise and impacts of the Pandemic in Years 4 and 5 resulted in only partial attainment of some of the original outputs and outcomes. This is one project where CWSG expertise and volunteers were able to step in and support activities, although in the final two years the Covid-19 pandemic reduced available volunteers and severely restricted activities that could be undertaken.

The project on Woodland Flora achieved few of its target outputs. Most activity took place in the first two years with 6 training days held with 49 volunteers attending each training / refresher day and 19 volunteers completed surveys of 22 woodland compartments in 2019.

Activity declined from Year 3 onwards with only 2 refresher training days delivered in Year 3, nothing in Year 4 and only 1 with reduced numbers in Year 5. As with Batscape, the project was affected by withdrawal of staff by Natural England (NE) due to lack of funding and no replacement staff were provided for Project Leadership. The original NE project leader was not able to engage and after two years the replacement lead also moved on. As originally conceived, it was an ambitious project and difficult for delivery with volunteers who needed significant amounts of support and training.

*“The original idea was to re-visit sites affected by forestry operations and record impact on the flora but it was very ambitious for volunteers. The list of plants was huge and many of them very rare, not plants volunteers were likely to have come across. It’s a shame it did not work out as it could have really got people fired up but it’s a good lesson to learn, what happens when you lose a project lead.”*

(Project Leader interview, 2022)

After year 2 the project was re-drawn following discussions within Forestry England and the focus altered to explore relationships between forest operations and existing flora. Some training and survey work was completed in the final two years of the project but was hampered by Covid-19 restrictions (e.g. Rule of six) and the original objectives were not achieved (Project Leader interview, 2022).

The Birds project was delivered by RSPB with Forestry England support and with a focus on improving habitat management for a range of species. Outputs include 35.4 ha of improved habitat which required 19.8ha clearfell/restock forestry, planting of 8.2ha with 2,950 food bearing trees and shrubs, managing 40 trees to create nesting sites, creation of 8 scrapes, and provision of 300 Kg of supplementary seed/year provided at feeding sites. In addition, 23 Woodlark surveys and 27 Willow tit surveys were undertaken each year, 24 days ringing were undertaken each year, and 20 geolocators fitted to tree pipits. However, not all of these activities met the planned targets. A small number of volunteers were trained, and the project exceeded the volunteer hours target. Community engagement was limited though more effort was directed towards this area of activity when Covid-19 halted all survey and research work in the Forest in Year 4. In Year 5, for example, a 3-minute film was made on ringing Hawfinch and other work being undertaken to help the species. This was shared by FF on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and as a blog on the FF website.

Conservation grazing proved challenging given the need to provide fenced areas, water and shelter for grazing animals. This took time and the level of livestock grazing only increased slowly starting with Exmoor Ponies and Highland Cattle, joined in the final two years by a small herd of sheep. Habitat improvement takes time so it will be some years before the full impact of grazing can be assessed. The project has been successful however, in terms of testing out new technology for managing livestock, attracting volunteers as stock checkers (increase in skills) and residents from the wider community who come to look at the animals (increased engagement with local heritage). Conservation Grazing has had a significant impact through creation of lowland heathland habitat and open space in the Forest which benefits multiple species (such as, birds, reptiles, invertebrates, butterflies).



### 3.1.2 Exploring our Forest

The main unifying factor of projects under the 'exploration' theme is improving access. Projects focus on improving accessibility of the Forest through creation of trails (Bream Heritage Walk), provision of access for those with disabilities (Walking with Wheels), providing information on heritage (Hidden Heritage App; Heritage open Days), and supporting local community access (Worcester Walk Community Project).

Project outcomes (Figure 4) are targeted at volunteering and provision of opportunities to learn about heritage for individuals, creation of opportunities for people to engage with heritage and enhancing the quality of life in local communities. All of the projects generated high levels of outcomes in relation to their targeted NLHF criteria. This is a significant achievement given that several of the projects also indicated impacts on their activities as a result of Covid-19 during the final two years of the FF Programme. Heritage Open Days, Worcester Walk and Walking with Wheels were most affected through cancellations of events, reductions in volunteering, and for Walking with Wheels in particular a sharp fall in both bookings and volunteer activity (due to the fact that the sites where the Trampers are located were closed during lockdown).

All projects benefitted from high levels of volunteer input. Walking with Wheels required a dedicated team of volunteers to support users of the Trampers, and for booking and cleaning activities. The project proved highly successful in enabling people to engage with local heritage in the Forest, benefitting not only the users but also family members who were able to accompany the users. The Project Leader noted that the benefits of the Trampers lay in:

*"...opening up the beauty of the FoD to those less mobile. The feedback from those hiring – they say they couldn't access the forest without the Trampers. There are pre-determined routes which gives people the confidence to use them."*

(Walking with Wheels Project Leader Interview, 2021)

Benefits were somewhat limited by the scale of the project, which was only able to support two Trampers, and the impact of the Pandemic which severely curtailed use in Years 4 and 5 (*"we lost 7 months out of 12 in terms of using the Trampers"* which resulted in lack of meeting output targets for volunteering and Trumper utilisation). Part of the problem is the location of the Trampers, which are linked to accommodation, meaning the Trampers could not be accessed because the accommodation sites where they are located completely closed down. The Trampers undoubtedly enable a wider range of people to access the natural heritage. User evaluations are positive and there is evidence of whole families engaging, not just the user: *"...families come out together –it enables the older people to share their memories and stories with the younger generation"*.

Only one project (Worcester Walk) focused on developing skills and reducing environmental impacts and that was in relation to activities such as fencing, scything and managing vegetation to improve local habitat of an area. The project was slow to start (Year 2) and suffered initially from a lack of local support but following a change in leadership a high level of community involvement was achieved with a large number of volunteers and engagement with heritage as well as improving environmental quality of the area.

Bream Heritage Walk created a heritage trail using existing rights of way and produced a brochure (distributed through local retail outlets as well as on-line) with a map identifying the trail with detailed heritage information at specific locations. The Trail was established in Years 1 and 2 of the project and supported by a website with descriptions of heritage to be found at specific locations. An early incidence of vandalism resulted in 50% of the (wooden) signs being broken and waymark discs removed, requiring replacement with stainless steel pointers and new numbered discs. Voluntary activity exceeded the Project target and by Year 5 Q2, 113 people stated they had learned something about local heritage during the walk (exceeding the output target of 48). By the end of Year 4 a total of 1,000 booklets had been printed.

Year 4 feedback from those using the trail resulted in further improvements (such as modifications to signposts). Signage and a tramway feature were made locally. The Trail has proved successful with increasing numbers of users making positive feedback. A user survey generated 45 responses with the majority of respondents indicating they enjoyed the walk and learned something new about the heritage.

Heritage Open days focused largely on promotional work for heritage events as part of the national HODS programme in September (including some FF projects each year) to encourage visitors and residents to engage with FoD heritage by visiting events and sites. Initial activities were highly successful, for example, helping to attract 1,500 visitors to 40 events held over two weekends in 2018. Activity decreased in Year 3 due to lack of paid staff or volunteers to help with promotional work on social media, and Years 4 and 5 suffered from Covid-19 impacts which resulted in cancellation of events and restrictions on activities on Forestry England land.

Finally, the Hidden Heritage of the Dean App, completed early on during the FF Programme period has been widely utilised, enabling people to explore and learn about the local industrial and built heritage through an App that produces fading images of 'Then and Now' photos showing past activities at specific geographic locations. The Hidden Heritage App team has also launched two further Apps: 'Coleford's Hidden Heritage' and 'Cinderford's Hidden Heritage'.

**Figure 4. Exploring our Forest: Summary of project outcomes**

Exploring Our Forest: Extent to which outcomes achieved (Low / Medium / High)										
As at Yr 5 Q2	Heritage will be:			People will have:			Communities:			
Project Title	Better managed	In better condition	Identified / recorded	Developed skills	Learned about heritage	Volunteered time	Environmental impacts will be reduced	More people/wider range of people will have engaged with heritage	Local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit	Comment
Bream Heritage Walk					High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	More people confident to walk in and around their village. More people engaged, people volunteered. Locals are identifying this walk as a feature associated with their village.
Geocache Trail										Bixslade Geocache Trail changed into Freemining interpretation at Hopewell, also became one of the Trails on the Geology App.
Heritage Open Days					High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Not all figures were returned from venues therefore likely underestimate of engagement. 1 final two years numbers limited due to indoor cancellations (Covid).
Hidden Heritage App				High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	3 Heritage Apps created: Hidden Heritage of the Dean; Coleford Heritage; Cinderford Heritage.
Walking with Wheels					High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of engagement of users and their families. Sharp fall in volunteering and utilisation (bookings) due to covid. Significant impact from Covid in final two years
Worcester Walk Community Project				High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Started late (year 2) and has increased community involvement. Yrs 4 & 5 Covid has restricted input of new and existing volunteers

### 3.1.3 Revealing our Past

Projects within the 'Revealing our Past' thematic area focus on various aspects of the built and cultural heritage of the Forest, including archaeological remains, industrial heritage, the underlying geology of the area that has influenced economic development over the ages, the cultural heritage in the form of dialect, memories, and oral histories, and traditional craft skills utilising the resources of the Forest. In terms of NLHF outcome criteria the focus is largely on identifying and recording the heritage that exists, developing skills among volunteers and encouraging the wider community to engage with their heritage. The projects under this theme were highly successful and most exceeded their planned outcomes (Figure 5) as well as target outputs. The projects were not without problems, and some had a slow start or had to overcome a range of Leadership issues related to loss or change of key personnel early in the programme period (e.g. Geology, Built Heritage). Covid-19 also had significant impacts on all projects in Years 4 and 5, although project personnel were able to adapt and still achieve anticipated objectives,

The Geology project had a chequered history over the programme period as the initial objectives were modified following changes in project personnel (Project Leader changed jobs and moved out of the area). As a result, a new project team and project planning did not start until Year 3 and was then also impacted by Covid-19 regulations which restricted the number of guided walks that could be delivered and interaction with the wider community. Despite this the project delivered a high level of outcomes focused on development of a Geology App (launched in Year 5), which enable users to follow trails (a total of 11 walks) and improve understanding of the underlying Geology of the Forest. The project also engaged with schools developing Geology packs as teaching resources for primary school utilisation along with an explanatory video and a comprehensive range of rock samples. Guided walks were also delivered in Year 5.

The Heritage Craft Skills project was also affected by a slow start and then by Covid-19 regulations which limited the number of workshops that could be delivered and thus the extent of community engagement with the project. The focus was on teaching people a range of traditional skills based on the use of natural resources including: skinning, tanning and utilising leather, making and using natural dyes, spinning and carding wool, woodworking, willow weaving, coppicing, and traditional blacksmithing. The project is linked to the New Leaf Project which ran a series of training workshops (e.g. coppicing, bushcraft, bowl carving) to generate income from the general public and support New Leaf participants on their courses. Covid-19 had a significant impact reducing the ability to deliver workshops (outside under canvas) in Year 4 although these started up again in Year 5.

The Buried Heritage project engaged in exploration of the archaeology of the Forest, undertaking LIDAR surveys and archaeological digs. The project attracted large numbers of volunteers who learned about the industrial heritage and developed skills related to archaeological surveying and excavation. For example, three teams of volunteers were initially established for Lidar validation and Built Heritage survey, and they are progressing through the 1,700 points identified by the original LIDAR survey, validating them as they go. One issue noted early in the progress reports was a lack of capacity to manage the volunteer demand. A school archaeological pack was produced and launched in 2019 with 13 schools signing up to a training day on how to utilise the resources. Volunteers attended training

sessions as well as taking part in excavations (such as the Roman enclosure at Ruardean Hill). Open days attracted large numbers of visitors and school visits to the sites; and lectures at local history meetings extended community engagement.

Covid-19 resulted in suspension of field work in years 4 and 5 and slowed down the LIDAR survey work, resulting on stoppage during lockdown periods, however, analysis work on previously completed surveys was able to continue. A planned dig was also halted by the existence of Japanese Knotweed which made it unviable leading to extension of work on two community digs near Coleford (at Mile End and Worcester Walk, although the former turned out to be a 'sterile' site). Overall, the project was highly successful in raising interest in local heritage across local communities.

In a similar way, but with a focus on the cultural heritage, Voices from the Forest also generated a high level of engagement from local communities and attracted volunteers who undertook training in interviewing, recording and preparing oral histories. This was one of a suite of three projects exploring oral histories, memories, and dialect. Project personnel worked with the Dean Heritage Centre providing access to archives and community engagement. Covid-19 resulted in more focus on website development creating new sections, re-branding, and re-structuring, as well as uploading materials. Social media activity was also undertaken (Facebook, Twitter) attracting people to the websites, along with creation of a podcast series (launched in Year 4) and logging of interviews to make them better suited for accession within archives. A Covid-safe approach to recording oral history interviews was also developed. Community engagement in Year 5 also included teaching primary school children to undertake interviews, linking into the KS2 curriculum and developing a project based on local residents.

The Dean Heritage Centre's Oral Histories project complemented Voices from the Forest through digitising and cataloguing previously recorded interviews with local people, capturing their memories of living and working in the Forest. The focus was on upgrading older taped conversations to a digital format in order to ensure the interviews were not lost or degraded. The work required gaining copyright consent from relatives of those recorded. A key aspect of the work was cataloguing each recording to make them more usable for researchers or those seeking information on specific topics or issues. A total of 170 tapes were digitised over the programme period (exceeding the target of 136), and with the additional recordings from Voices of the Forest increases the number of oral history recordings held at the Dean Heritage Centre to over 200. The Pandemic resulted in the closure of the Dean Heritage Centre and halted other work as restrictions meant that permissions for recordings could not be obtained. Volunteers were also lost requiring additional work in Year 5 to recruit new volunteers.

The Forest Dialect was designed as a three-year project working with oral history recordings in the Dean Heritage Centre, training volunteers in cataloguing and transcription. A number of recordings (12) were selected for the research and transcribed. A total of 20 transcripts were utilised for dialect research and linguistic analysis and a report submitted. Community engagement in the final year was cancelled due to the pandemic restrictions, although there was a contribution to a Radio 4 programme, publication of a Journal article, and promotion through a website, Facebook and Twitter.

The aim of the Built Heritage project was to improve the condition of specific sites through small scale conservation works at: Trafalgar Colliery, Darkhill Iron Works, Titanic Steelworks, Soudley Packhorse Bridge, Oakwood Tramway, Oakwood Mill drift mine, Blue Rock Trail and Blakeney Limekiln. Following reallocation of budget underspend, the Worcester Walk Community Project shed was added under the Built Heritage project, with refurbishment works completed to enable its use as a tool shed for the project. Similarly, the Rewild project were allocated extra funds to deliver the 'Springs and Wells' refurbishment project.

At the start of the project some clearance work was undertaken (e.g. Bracken and vegetation clearance at Darkhill; tree work at Oakhill tramway) and consultants were appointed to specify works to be undertaken and to manage contractors to undertake the work. Bat and other ecological surveys were also undertaken to ensure the proposed work would not have an adverse impact. Contracts for work at Titanic, Darkhill, Soudley Packhorse Bridge, Trafalgar Colliery and Blakeney Limekiln were issued in 2019 and work began in 2020. In Year 4 the works at Darkhill and Soudley Packhorse Bridge were completed, and tenders issued for smaller scale works at three other sites (along with ecological surveys). In Year 5 Oakwood Tramway and Mill Hill Drift Mine entrance stonework was completed, while the Blue Rock Trail was delayed due to Crayfish Plague but was completed in 2021.

The Built Heritage project suffered from a number of problems, a lack of a clear direction, and delays caused by Forestry England requirements and procurement system, which has been described as a 'heavy handed and blunt instrument' (Member of Programme Board interview, 2021). One Member of the Programme Board noted the following, identifying problems but also noting that there were benefits even where a project was not entirely successful:

*"Built heritage was never a proper project; from the start we didn't really know what to do with it. We got an informal group together...but we never had a key leader moving it forward. It's been a learning curve. But the Foresters' Forest has flagged up all the things we need to do to preserve and protect built heritage. It has built capacity and confidence to do things."*

In the absence of a single project leader, the FF Programme Team drove the project forward, firstly overseen by the Contracts Manager and then by the Programme Manager).

There were also conflicts with ecological goals and requirements for surveying, monitoring and agreeing modifications to activities before planned work could be undertaken (e.g. bats, butterflies). In some cases health and safety concerns also limited proposed improvements, such as at remote mining sites in the woods (e.g. Trafalgar Colliery).

*"Built heritage got held back because of this. There was a lot of frustration from people who just wanted to get on and do the work on the ground, a lot of frustration for example with the ecological stuff...At Dark Hills for example we all agreed on what work was needed but it was a battle just to take the ivy off the walls because the work conflicted with butterflies - it turned out the butterflies need it – it's a frustration but we came to a compromise."*

(Member of Programme Board interview, 2021)

Built Heritage was one project largely unaffected by the Covid-19 Pandemic in terms of delivery, although some of the planned training workshops had to be cancelled. Covid was not a major problem as most of the construction work was carried out by paid contractors who continued to work following Covid–19 guidance, rather than volunteers. The original budget included a small amount of funding for volunteers, but this was re-allocated to the Rewild Springs and Wells project, who had a large group of volunteers to clear the silt from St Anthony’s Well (Programme Manager Personal Communication, January 2022).

**Figure 5. Revealing our Past: Summary of project outcomes**

Revealing Our Past: Extent to which outcomes achieved (Low / Medium / High)										
As at Yr 5 Q2	Heritage will be:			People will have:			Communities:			
Project Title	Better managed	In better condition	Identified/recorded	Developed skills	Learned about heritage	Volunteered time	Environmental impacts will be reduced	More people/wider range of people will have engaged with heritage	Local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit	Comment
Built Heritage			Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes		Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Project started late; long time to determine what works to undertake; required licences and ecological surveys; limited role for volunteers, high use of contractors.
Buried Heritage			High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Outcomes impacted by Covid-19 Pandemic
Voices from the Forest			High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Trained a lot of volunteers; produced rich material to give more nuanced view of history of Forest taking into account lives of women and children. Podcasts on CDs - very positive response - helped people in lockdown. .
Forest Oral History	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Outcomes impacted by Covid-19 Pandemic
Forest Dialect	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		
Geology			Medium level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Original objectives could not delivered as project personnel left and the project was re-developed to reflect different set of skills. Outcomes impacted by Covid-19 Pandemic
Heritage Craft Skills				High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Outcomes impacted by slow start to the project and Covid-10 Pandemic which has reduced numbers of workshop participants



### 3.1.4 Celebrating our Forest

The 'Celebrating our Forest' theme included projects focusing on a wide range of issues within the Forest, including:

- Music
- Renovation of a bandstand
- Literature
- Support for those with dementia
- Foraging edible resources
- Litter picking
- Celebration events

In relation to NLHF outcomes the main focus was on engaging with people and communities, although five projects (Figure 6) also delivered one or more improved heritage outcomes (in terms of management, condition, or recording of heritage). As Figure 6 illustrates not all projects were able to deliver full outcomes, largely due to the impact of Covid restrictions which forced the cancellation of events (significant impact on the musical projects and Edible Forest Skills) and in some cases, re-allocation of funding.

The two projects focused on music, Scarr Bandstand and Musical Landscape, had very different objectives. The Scarr Bandstand project was focused on renovation of the bandstand ensuring its use as a cultural and heritage site into the future. A range of physical improvement activities was carried out including installing boar-proof fencing, signposting, clearing of weeds and Himalayan Balsam, and hedgerow planting (with input from Wye Valley Youth Rangers). In Years 1 and 2, a programme of events was completed resulting in every Brass Band in the FoD, and several local choirs, performing at the bandstand.

The project noted a lack of volunteers and potential for 'burn-out' of core volunteers (an issue identified in the mid-term evaluation). Covid-19 had an impact resulting in cancellation of all events in Year 4 (and some in Year 5), although Arts Council funding was able to be carried across to 2021. Other negative impacts included cancellation of project planning meetings and concerns over loss of local support. By the end of Year 4 the project also reported that heavy weed growth on a car park re-surfaced with FF funding only two years previously and the loss of the site manager, a key volunteer. On the positive side the area around the bandstand was widely utilised for family recreation by the local community during lockdown periods, and the bandstand itself utilised for socially distanced exercise classes. The Friends of Scarr Bandstand also ran a successful series of events during Year 5. Success also included reductions in graffiti, litter, debris and vandalism, and provision of a safe and pleasant community space. An estimated 3,550 people benefitted from using the site and recorded data indicates steadily increasing numbers of visitors and local people.

The Forest Musical Landscape project had two broad aims, the first involved collection and archiving of artefacts and documents relating to the history of bands in the Forest and by the mid-point of the project a range of artefacts, (e.g. programme sheets, uniforms, instruments, photographs and other ephemera such as trophies) had been collected for archiving in the Dean Heritage Centre. The other project objective was a focus on increasing awareness of the musical heritage of the Forest among the local community through musical events and going into schools to encourage involvement. Twenty concerts were delivered at a variety of

venues (not achieving the originally target of 30) before Covid-19 restrictions forced cancellation of events in Years 4 and 5. Plans for a mural also had to be abandoned along with a series of planned musical events in Year 5. The budget was re-allocated to a concert commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Imjin in Year 5. The school's work was viewed as "quietly successful", raising awareness and offering young people a pathway into music following a period of cuts in local authority support for music tuition, and around one quarter of schools in the Forest were reached (Project Leader Interview, 2022)

Forest literary heritage was explored through the Reading the Forest project with the aim of bringing together in one place the 'disparate and hidden body of Forest Literary works' with additional information provided and landscape links mapped. The project identified and recorded 48 authors (exceeding the target) and created a web resource and literary trail map. Volunteers were trained, producing 10 specialist book researchers and reviewers; 3 site editor & administrators; 3 multi-media editor/producers. 1 FoD Literary Heritage teacher advocate, with an additional 61 people contributing to site content. Public events were delivered to engage the wider community (with 1,882 visitors) and school resources developed. The project was very active on social media and during lockdown a series of podcasts was developed and made available on CDs, targeting those 'less digitally proficient', and proved popular:

*"The work has drawn people in and given a more nuanced and fuller history of the Forest."*

Numbers of podcast listeners were good for what was a relatively small element of the project and attracted members of the 'Forest diaspora' spread across the world (Project Leader interview, 2022).

A total of 9 schools started using the resources with steadily increasing numbers of pupils making use of the materials. The Project Leader noted the difficulty of working with schools, requiring active engagement with teachers in order to utilise the resources created. Activities included a four-day project with one primary school, including visits to the Dean Heritage Centre and specific sites, writing workshops in schools, writing portraits of local people, and engaging secondary school pupils in an exploration of 'A Fortunate Man' (John Berger, 1967). Project personnel also worked in partnership with the Forest Musical Landscape project as part of a Heritage Open Days event of music and poetry, and there have been multiple presentations of material on BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

Some of the natural heritage resources of the Forest were accessed through the Edible Forest Skills project. The rather broad project aims include: 'improving the management and condition of the local environment through increased knowledge of heritage and renewed interest in growing organic food and community growing spaces with more people growing / preserving heritage trees'.

In the first three years project workshops included the following:

- Mushroom Foraging
- Fermenting Foods
- Brewing Country Wines
- Pruning Fruit Trees
- Propagation

- Wild Meat Weekend
- Grow Your Own Mushrooms

The project also linked up with a Community Celebration project to teach foraging. A total of 332 people participated in a total of 26 training courses (partially meeting output targets). As with other FF projects Years 4 and 5 were impacted by Covid 19 and restrictions on utilisation of the Forest England estate which reduced the number and type of workshops that could be delivered.

The Love Your Forest project operated as a partnership consisting of the FF programme with Hubbub, Suntory, FoD District Council, Forestry England and FoD/Wye Valley Tourism. The project encompassed a range of activities including the following:

- litter picking events
- a 'Trash-converter' van visiting schools & events,
- a litter picking badge for Scouts & Girl Guides
- branded 'rewards' for litter pickers given out after litter picking events
- branded litterbins installed in four town centres and at Forestry England sites
- a temporary recycled art installation at Beechenhurst.
- Reward Recycle machines at Co-op Coleford and Dean Heritage Centre

Litter-picking events attracted a significant number of volunteers of all ages and by the end of Year 5 a total of 1,570 bags of litter had been collected.

mindSCAPE targeted a very specific population with the overall aim of 'enabling care home residents living with Dementia and their carers to undertake landscape themed artistic activities'. By the end of Year 4 the project had delivered 80 mindSCAPE activities (meeting the target output), produced four resource booklets, three exhibitions of work, and involved 18 care home employees in mindSCAPE activities assisted by 20 Volunteers. Volunteering was not possible in the final two years due to Covid-19 but the project produced videos of activities for carers or families of those living with dementia.

Community Celebration aimed at increasing community awareness and interest in local heritage. The project went through several changes of plan due to the difficulties of delivering specific project ideas and the impact of Covid-19 which required postponement of events and changes to deliver more activities digitally. Despite these challenges a wide range of activities were undertaken including 11 commissioned public performances / events based on history of the local area, 16 Vlogs/Blogs, 7 Podcasts and 14 local exhibitions. Evaluation over the programme period following events indicated a total of 734 members of the community who say they are better aware of their local heritage. Following changes to delivery plans Year 5 involved helping community groups develop banners (through participatory workshops) for a final FF programme celebration.

**Figure 6. Celebrating our Forest: Summary of project outcomes**

Celebrating Our Forest: Extent to which outcomes achieved (Low / Medium / High)										
As at Yr 5 Q2	Heritage will be:			People will have:			Communities:			
Project Title	Better managed	In better condition	Identified / recorded	Developed skills	Learned about heritage	Volunteered time	Environmental impacts will be reduced	More people/wider range of people will have engaged with heritage	Local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit	Comment
Community Celebration			High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	No events held in years 4 & 5 due to Covid
Edible Forest Skills	Low level of outcomes	Low level of outcomes		Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Low level of outcomes	Low level of outcomes		Years 4 and 5 few workshops run, very few participants due to Covid impacts.
Musical Landscape			Medium level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Covid-19 impacted events and activities in years 4 & 5. Worked successfully with schools. Raised awareness, provided tuition.
Love your Forest	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes				High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	No activities/events held March 2020 onwards due to lockdown restrictions.
MindSCAPE				High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Volunteering not possible in final year due to Covid-19. Despite this significant number of care home people trained and 80 activities undertaken over 4 year period.
Reading the Forest			High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Awareness of lit. heritage increased enormously. Worked with schools, brought in visitors; organised visits. Complex set of outcomes.
Scarr Bandstand	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Seasons of brass band concerts, choirs and professional theatre successful; all organised and staffed by volunteers. Community groups use the site for their own events. No large events in 2020 due to Covid 19 restrictions. Site improved for disabled access; litter and vandalism reduced.
Interpretation and events				High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	Some uncertainty over Outputs delivered as data not always recorded and some based on survey sampling (i.e. sample data not population data). Many of targets exceeded but Covid 19 had big impact on activities in Yr 4.

### 3.1.5 Securing our Future

The fifth FF Programme thematic area looked more to the future and how the living heritage could be protected and enhanced through increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding of the unique cultural heritage of the Forest. The main focus on the projects were on developing awareness, knowledge and skills among local people and engaging a wider sector of the community with their heritage (Figure 7).

Two projects (Forest Explorers and Youth Rangers) engaged with young people across the Forest of Dean area. The aim of Youth Rangers is to engage with young people (14-18 years of age), raising awareness of the Forests' natural, built, and cultural heritage, and developing skills in practical conservation, media use, first aid and health and safety. A total of 36 Young People + 3 school groups (with 60 participants in total) have benefited from the project. A total of 22 events were delivered over the 5 years (less than the original target because of Covid lockdowns and restrictions). Forest Explorers was aimed at engaging with younger children (aged 5-13) and their families. A monthly programme of heritage-based activities was developed with 39 sessions delivered over 5 years (less than the original target output due to Covid-19 impacts in years 4 and 5 which initially stopped all activities and later resulted in a lack of bookings and operating under the rule of six meaning multiple repetition of sessions). It was an interesting project delivered jointly between GWT and RSPB, neither of which were engaging with family groups in the FoD before the FF Programme started. Over the course of the project an estimated 1,600 people were involved.

One disappointment within this theme was the failure to engage with commoners (Future for Commoning) as there was no enthusiasm from the commoners to get involved with the overall FF Programme. However, one independent grazier has been involved with the programme, benefiting from equipment provided to run a flock of Herdwick sheep on specific Forestry England sites that needed grazing (Programme Manager Personal Communication, January 2022). The other project that faced some difficult challenges was New Leaf which had the overall aim of supporting disadvantaged groups (single parents, home educators, young people, unemployed and vulnerable adults, etc) to access social forestry and acquire skills in coppicing, green wood turning, and traditional craft skills.

Not all projects ran smoothly from start to finish. With New Leaf, for example, there were some initial project management challenges requiring additional expenditure related to repairs to vehicle purchases, costs related to refurbishment of Kensley sheds, and a change in leadership, all of which delayed the project start. One project leader resigned and the Rewild Project took over as the project lead. Licences for using Kensley Sheds and a coppicing area were signed with Forestry England.

The project delivered New Leaf courses to 71 young people and unemployed and vulnerable adults (slightly exceeding the target number). A Social Forestry Women's Coppice Team was created to carry out coppicing work following chainsaw training and the project received funding to provide activities one day per week for pre-excluded children in the FoD.

In Year 4 both Rewild and New Leaf had to cancel workshops due to Covid-19. Rewild ran workshops in Pole Lathing, Traditional Tool Use & Maintenance, and Wood carving for beginners. New Leaf started to help disadvantaged groups (single parents, home educators etc) gain access to social forestry for two days per month. In Year 5 the project received

some match funding from The Barnwood Trust to help pay for the delivery the Rewild Project enabling provision of four days per week of activities for participants. The New Leaf project received increasing referrals from social prescribers and self-referrals from local mental health services interacting with approximately 35 people in need per week and recruited additional volunteers to assist with the 'people care' side of the project.

By Year 5 the New Leaf Social Forestry Project was engaging with approximately 45-60 per week. An additional day of heritage craft skills enabled engagement with a broader range of people in need, including those with mobility issues and a Home Education Project re-started after the summer (the project is currently engaging with approximately 30 children and 20 parents per fortnight).

The aim of the Future for Freemining project was twofold: first, to support Freeminers to work together in a spirit of co-operation to ensure that the traditions of freemining continue; and second, to help freemining become more financially viable and sustainable. Early on in the project, the two distinct areas of activity were separated through creation of the Freemining Futures CIC. The CIC focused on the purchase and installation of a briquetting machine which will contribute to the financial viability of freemining, while the Freemining Association would concentrate on increasing skills and knowledge of freemining through training and raising awareness in the wider community. The project held 36 meetings over the 5-year programme period (greatly exceeding the original target of 12). A positive outcome from the project was that it brought the freeminers together, a group of people who normally work in a very independent way and are not easy to get organised (Project Leader Interview, 2021). Other key outputs include a mine rescue vehicle, which was fitted out for rescue emergencies, and 16 young trainees working towards their 'year and a day'. In addition, the project trained 21 miners in the use of Nonex explosives, 8 miners in chainsaw use, 7 miners in basic First Aid and 2 with Advanced First aid.

Purchase of the briquetting machine from India was a complex process requiring paying for a local organisation to visit the site to verify production, organising international freight and design and erection of a building to house the machinery. The project was a large undertaking for a group that had no experience in undertaking that kind of work:

*"What we have done is big stuff, it was a big challenge; to find a machine and bring it here from the other side of the world during a covid pandemic and get a building designed and built to house it."*

(Project Leader Interview, 2021)

The Project faced and overcame a significant number of challenges despite the initial lack of experience and skills.

*"We had a slow start in setting up the CIC. We had an ineffectual solicitor who slowed us up significantly and in hindsight we should have got someone else. We were on a steep learning curve to run a CIC, we have to organise meetings, produce accounts and make annual submissions, it's not just meeting up in the bread shed and deciding what we are going to do."*

(Project Leader Interview, 2021)

The impact of the Covid pandemic was huge and brought the project to a halt effectively, setting the project back a year (Project Leader Interview, 2021). In Year 4 it delayed delivery

of the pre-fabricated building and delivery of the briquetting machine from India. An engineer from India who would oversee the assembly was unable to travel and the Freemaners ended up assembling the machinery themselves. Covid-19 restrictions caused delays to both assembly of the machine, testing, and training of new freemining recruits. It also created difficulties in terms of organising meetings to progress action. In addition, the CIC had to negotiate with Forestry England for a lease for use of the site, and work with Western Power Distribution to establish and upgrade the power supply.

The Working with Schools Project aimed at raising awareness and understanding among teachers and children about the local natural, built and cultural heritage, with the aim of building local pride to ensure future protection and promotion. The project was fully embraced by Lydbrook Primary school which re-developed their curriculum to make use of the locally generated resources about the FoD heritage, which proved highly successful. Teachers reported improved interest and engagement from pupils and greater awareness among families who learned about their local heritage from the children.

A survey of schools in the FoD district provided 32 responses (which included some multiple responses from schools) indicating that 10 of the respondents had utilised aspects of the Forest heritage in their teaching before the FF programme started. Utilisation tended to be 'sporadic' and inconsistent, although for some schools it included visits to specific sites such as Clearwell Caves and Dean Heritage Centre (Vare, 2021). A total of 80% of respondents indicated they had heard of the FF programme and the free teaching resources provided. Respondents were asked about utilisation of 12 sets of resources (including history, Hidden Heritage App, archaeology pack, literature resources and Love Your Forest materials (litter and recycling)). In most cases respondents noted that resources were utilised by one or two classes in a school, except for the 'history scheme of work' which was utilised across the whole school in six cases. Across all resources around 12 – 14 respondents indicated they had never heard of the resource and a smaller number indicated the resource was in the school but not utilised. The evidence suggests that around half of the sample utilised the resources. The majority of respondents indicated that the resources were of value in relation to meeting Ofsted requirements. It is also worth noting that the levels of recognition of the resources are higher for those resources produced earlier in the project cycle.

There are multiple reasons why the resources have received limited use. The FF project team identified difficulties communicating with teachers requiring multiple phone calls and emails to each school, pressures on teachers' time, the time and effort required to integrate new materials into a curriculum, and more recently the increased workload created by Covid-19 and associated burden of developing on-line teaching methods (Vare, 2021).

Interviews with teachers and head teachers revealed a range of benefits in terms of increased pupil engagement and interest, increased enthusiasm from teachers, and increased awareness and knowledge of the local area, extending into the wider community through the families of pupils. Half of the respondents indicated that the FF resources had 'increased use of outdoor learning in the area around the school' (although this had been severely impacted by the Pandemic in the previous 2 years). Interviews also revealed some of the difficulties of utilising the materials including the impacts of Covid, the quantity of materials provided, the need for additional support to understand and absorb the complexity

of provision (Vare, 2021) as over half of respondents (55%) stated they needed expert help to 'make the most of these resources'.

An additional output linked to the school project has been the 'Story of the Forest' book targeted at children and produced by local award-winning author, Andy Seed. Schools have been given free copies and are utilising the book which provides a history of the Forest from pre-historic times to the present. The FoD History Society were involved in its production and indicated its success:

*"The Book is a nice tangible result. It's such an easy read, any teacher can pick it up and use it straight away. We were part of the school project starting in Lydbrook and some of our members were involved in writing some of the material; there were lots of different contributions. It has been much more successful than I thought it would be."*

(FoD History Society interview Nov. 2021)

The feedback on the book is that both adults and children enjoy reading the 'Story of the Forest' and have learned about the Forest from it, even long-time residents have expressed support. Andy Seed has also produced a sequel, the 'Wildlife of the Forest' for children, which has been delivered in March 2022.



**Figure 7. Securing our Future: Summary of project outcomes**

Securing Our Future: Extent to which outcomes achieved (Low / Medium / High)										
As at Yr 5 Q2	Heritage will be:			People will have:			Communities:			
Project Title	Better managed	In better condition	Identified / recorded	Developed skills	Learned about heritage	Volunteered time	Environmental impacts will be reduced	More people/wider range of people will have engaged with heritage	Local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit	Comment
A future for Freemining	High level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		No meetings in Yr 4 due to Covid. Briquette machinery shipping and installation delayed by Covid. Increasing number of new, younger people involved.
A future for Commoning										Not able to engage with commoners. Conservation grazing achieved by other means.
Forest Explorers				Medium level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Covid-19 impacted attendance and delivery of activities in yrs 4 and 5.
New Leaf	Low level of outcomes			High level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Extent of FF funded outputs and outcomes unclear. Appear to be only partially achieved. Lack of recorded data.
Youth Rangers				High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes	High level of outcomes		High level of outcomes		Data on outputs is incomplete. Not all events delivered due to Covid-19.
Working with Schools					High level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes		High level of outcomes	Medium level of outcomes	Limited uptake by additional schools of resources provided.

## 3.2 Stakeholder perceptions of Foresters' Forest Programme outcomes

### 3.2.1 Perceived significant areas of success

Discussion groups were held with small groups of Project Leaders and volunteers in November 2021 along with face-to-face or on-line interviews with a range of stakeholders and members of the Project Management team. Participants in the discussion group and interviewees were asked about their personal perceptions of significant areas of success resulting from their involvement and understanding of the FF Programme. The findings were grouped in terms of four outcome areas: heritage, people, communities, and opportunities (Table 9).

In terms of outcomes for heritage, both Forestry England and the PL discussion groups identified the consensus on biodiversity developed across the multiple organisations and individuals involved in monitoring, managing and protecting the ecology of the Forest.

*“The consensus built up among the ecological community is now very effective. It took a long time to build, which is not surprising given the national level rivalry between member driven organisations. It required a team approach and...it's the FF programme that brought them together...the funding had to be used to bring them together because they are all operating on Forestry England land. It's been a hard-won success.”*

(Forestry England Interview, 2021)

The Apps were also singled out for praise in terms of their use as a material resource providing information on local heritage, and beneficial to both local residents and visitors. Some concern was expressed, however over potentially low levels of use of the Coleford and Cinderford Apps which may relate to lack of information about their existence.

The involvement of the FF Programme with local schools and production of educational resource packs, materials and the 'Story of the Forest' book were identified by multiple stakeholders as a key area of success. Some stakeholders indicated a high but limited impact due to the lack of take-up by schools in the area. However, it was also recognised that integrating materials into the school curriculum took time and effort which had been in short supply over the final two years of the project due to the Pandemic.

The Archaeology project was also identified as having a significant impact on the wider Forest Community through engagement with people, training of volunteers, and increasing awareness and appreciation of the richness of the archaeological resource that exists in the area.

**Table 9. Perceived success of activities under the FF Programme**

<b>Out-Come for...</b>	<b>Identified success</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Heritage</b>	Consensus on biodiversity	➤ Developing a consensus on biodiversity and the natural heritage of the Forest across a wider range of people.	PL discussion group
	Ecological community consensus	➤ Consensus built among the ecological community is now very effective. It took a long time to build, but it's the FF programme that brought them together.	Forestry England
	Recognition of archaeological significance	➤ It's a unique place that is archaeologically rich. The archaeology was shaped by the character of the place and people who were living and working in it.	PL discussion group
	Improvements to condition	➤ Dark Hills Iron works has been improved ➤ Scarr Bandstand stands out as a major improvement.	Coleford Town Council
	Increased resilience & sustainability	➤ Free Miners worked together; they stuck with a difficult project and succeeded	Forestry England
	Information resources	➤ Data collected from surveys (e.g. on reptiles, water resources; birds, bats, etc.) and stored in the county environmental records centre. ➤ The resources produced: Apps, timelines, podcasts; a lot of filming of activities. ➤ Podcasts – never heard of these when the programme started but now appreciate the value – the Pandemic led to a switch in outputs for some projects. ➤ The Apps (Coleford, Cinderford, Hidden Heritage, Geology)	FoD District Council  FF Programme Team  Coleford Town Council
	Schools involvement	➤ The involvement of schools has been good – it has sown the seeds for future generations. ➤ Some of the educational learning resources can make a very broad curriculum locally focused. A few schools have picked this up (e.g. Lydbrook, St John's). ➤ Lydbrook School – telling the story to the next generation.	PL discussion group  Coleford Town Council  Forestry England
Educational materials	➤ Our biggest success is the Story of the Forest book – vastly exceeded anything we had hoped to do for the children. ➤ Excitement in Schools for local history; new history book sent into schools, curriculum development and implementations (albeit limited schools). This is a long-term gain.	FoD Local History Society  Community Stakeholder Group	
<b>People</b>	Interest & awareness	➤ We have generated more stakeholders with interest and awareness of the heritage. ➤ New Leaf has made a difference to people's understanding and awareness ➤ A number of talks given by FF project leaders, e.g. Paul Rutter on ancient trees; Jason Griffiths and Roger Deeks from the Reading the Forest project – there's been a lot more crossovers and adding breadth to our activities. ➤ An increase in environmental awareness and a 'groundswell of environmental appreciation' ➤ Increased awareness of cultural assets viewed as a significant change delivered through the FF programme. ➤ Numbers of volunteers and in-kind contributions, especially coming back after covid-19 "reflects the	PL discussion group  Coleford Town Council  FoD Local History Society  FoD District Council

	<p>passion of local people” for culture, heritage and environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Projects have drawn in passionate people and this will support legacy.</li> </ul>	Community Stakeholder Group
Knowledge & skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ People gained more knowledge about the artistic side of the Forest.</li> <li>➤ Free mining- trained up younger people.</li> <li>➤ Archaeological project trained people in wide range of activities</li> <li>➤ Re-wilding people learned heritage craft skills.</li> <li>➤ The FF impact has been fantastic; given us a chance to work with professional archaeologists. A lot of people took up the training passport over the five years – got their skills and experience signed off.</li> <li>➤ Lots of people are keen to learn something – but only the bits they are interested in.</li> <li>➤ “Rewild carved out a niche for themselves, this has been really impactful”. They are an enthusiastic and high-communicating team.</li> </ul>	<p>Coleford Town Council</p> <p>Community Stakeholder Group</p>
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reading the Forest has been a huge success - delivered a high level of engagement.</li> <li>➤ Scarr bandstand - an example of a project that had improved the condition of cultural heritage and ‘ignited the community’ to engage with the project.</li> <li>➤ Breaking down differences between old foresters and incomers, people wanting to learn about their new home.</li> </ul>	<p>Forestry England</p> <p>FoD District Council Community Stakeholder Group</p>
Changed perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ People’s perception of Forestry England changed, social messages became more informative – some people got better understanding of Forestry England operations and processes.</li> </ul>	FF Programme Team

Out-Come for...	Identified success	Description	Source
<b>Communities</b>	New organisations	➤ Worcester Walk Community Project – a new organisation created by the FF programme have become a very vibrant group and developed into the Friends of Worcester Walk – a new community group.	FF Programme Team
	Quality of environment	➤ Love your Forest – we have seen the benefits of regular litter picking – but not really seen any change in behaviour (i.e. of those littering) ➤ We gained another mural as a result of the Reading the Forest project.	Coleford Town Council
	Increased membership of local organisations	➤ Archaeological projects were very popular; brought in new members for the Dean Archaeological group.	
	Tourism/local information	➤ FF created a good heritage walk, helpful for tourists who often don't know where to go (because most forest trails are not signposted). ➤ The Geology App has superseded an old leaflet we were printing – given us something better we can give to visitors and locals. ➤ The Apps (Coleford, Cinderford, Hidden Heritage, Geology) are a big community gain – but there are not enough people downloading it.	Coleford Town Council
	Engagement with events	➤ Events had huge numbers of people - “thrilling to see people going away having learned something” ➤ Music – Scarr Bandstand with audiences of 500+	Community Stakeholder Group
<b>Opportunities</b>	FF Programme involvement	➤ A lot of people stepped forward because the FF programme provided opportunities. ➤ Lot of people got involved. ➤ Most people do what they are interested in ➤ A lot got involved because there were so many projects and it created more opportunities. ➤ Involvement in the FF programme raised the profile of the Historical society with all sorts of organisations in the Forest. Now Parish councils, town councils, Forestry England all come to us to ask for information	PL discussion group  Coleford Town Council  FoD Local History Society
	Raised awareness and understanding	➤ Foresters' Forest has been a fantastic project, a real eye opener. It has enabled increased awareness of links between the archaeology, oral histories, the dialect, music, and so on.	PL discussion group
	Inclusivity	➤ Archaeology project engendered huge local interest with open days, school visits as well as volunteers working there. “It has been very inclusive, if you can't dig then they find other jobs for you such as sorting, washing finds...”	Coleford Town Council
	Improved networking	➤ A lot more networking has been an outcome - we have got to know people better and found we have overlapping interests ➤ The networking impact has been profound.	FoD Local History Society
	Improved relationships	➤ Forestry England is more proactive now with users of the forest. Their social media is more informative now and less about telling people off. ➤ Good Collaboration – between Forestry England, external partners such as Environment Agency, Natural. England, GWT, and the project leaders.	FF Programme Team

In terms of the impact on people, the PL discussion groups noted an increase in the number of stakeholders with interest and awareness of the local heritage, making reference to New Leaf and Reading the Forest as successful in raising people's understanding and awareness. The FoD District Council suggested it was difficult to ascertain the extent to which changes in environmental awareness and appreciation could be attributed solely to the FF Programme. Other factors were also identified as influential, including the heightened awareness of environmental issues as a result of the media attention on CoP 26 (held in the UK in 2021) and the effects of the Pandemic. It was suggested that outside of the Foresters' Forest core team and programme stakeholders the term was 'not common language'.

Coleford Town Council also identified an increase in skills and knowledge created by involvement of people in the Programme highlighting Free mining, the Archaeological project and Re-wilding as projects successful in training people. Communities were also identified as benefitting in terms of the development of new community groups (Friends of Worcester Walk), increased membership of local organisations (Archaeology, Local history), improved quality of the environment (e.g. litter picks by Love Your Forest), and provision of new forms of local heritage information (e.g. the Apps).

An additional category of outcomes arising from the FF Programme overall relates to 'Opportunities'. The PL discussion groups noted that many of the (38) individual projects would not have taken place without FF Programme funding and support. The high level of involvement by people in projects was identified as a success by PLs and other stakeholders. It was recognised that many people only got involved with *'particular elements of a project that interested them'* and one reason for a high level of involvement was because *'there were so many projects it created more opportunities'*. Projects were also identified as 'inclusive' and would integrate people whatever their skills and capacity (Archaeology). There were also projects targeted at those with disabilities (mindSCAPE, Walking with Wheels) and disadvantaged groups (New Leaf). Stakeholders also noted that they and their organisations had benefitted through raised awareness and understanding of the heritage of the forest and the connections between different elements. This in turn had opened up relationships between different project areas of interest and improved networking.

### 3.3 The volunteer experience

One area of success identified in many of the project outcome evaluations was the high level of volunteering that occurred across the FF programme with the target for volunteer hours being reached by the mid-point of the programme period.

More than 1,000 unique volunteers have been involved over the programme period with a total of 37,208 recorded volunteer hours, with an estimated value equivalent to £831,227. The total volunteer hours recorded by FF Programme theme, 2017- June 2021 are identified in Table 10:

**Table 10. Volunteer hours contributed by FF Programme thematic area (April 2017- December 2021)**

<b>Thematic Area</b>	<b>Total Volunteer hours</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>	<b>Total volunteer Value</b>	<b>Percentage of total value</b>
Our Stronghold for Nature	12,007	32.3%	£322,848	38.8%
Exploring Our Forest	5,405	14.5%	£85,975	10.3%
Revealing Our Past	8,306	22.3%	£180,037	21.7%
Celebrating Our Forest	8,475	22.8%	£184,426	22.2%
Securing Our Future	2,709	7.3%	£54,331	6.5%
Project governance	306	0.8%	£3,610	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,208</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>£831,227</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Foresters' Forest Programme Team, 2021

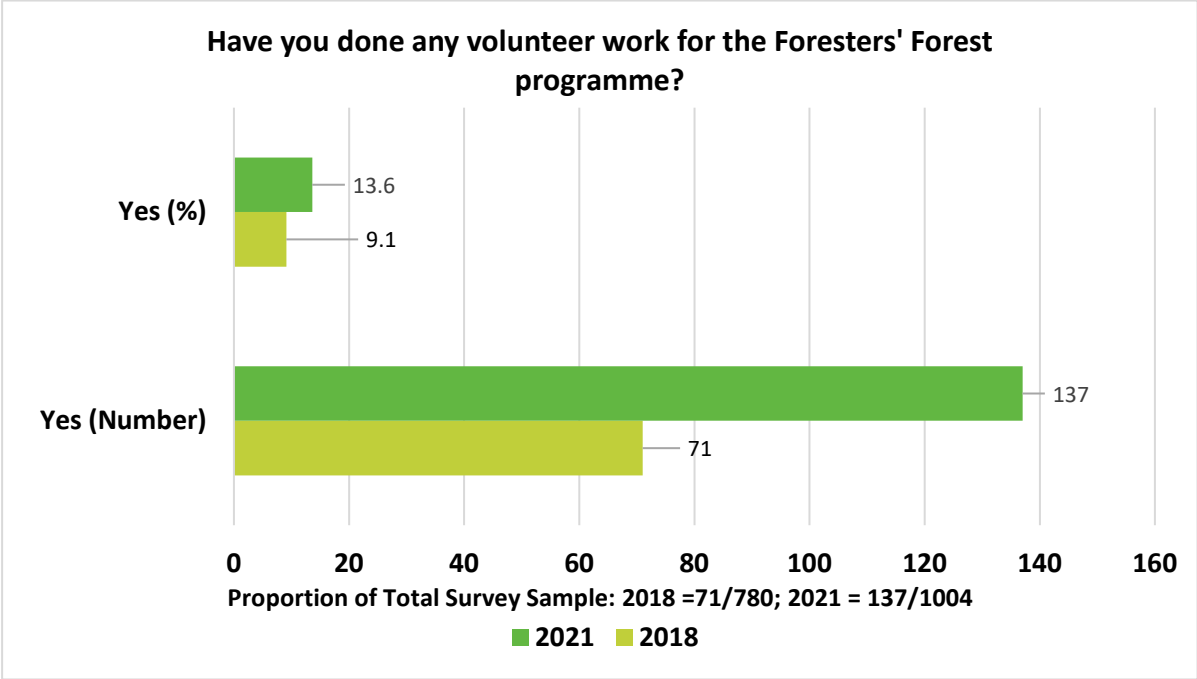
### On-line Survey response from volunteers

The on-line surveys undertaken as part of the evaluation over the 2017- 22 period indicated an increase in the proportion of volunteers in the survey sample from 9.1% of respondents in 2018 to 13.6% in 2021 (Figure 8). It cannot be inferred from this finding that there is a growing number of people in the wider community volunteering with the FF programme. It could reflect the fact that more people had had an opportunity to volunteer, or just be a sampling characteristic (i.e. those who have volunteered are more likely to be aware of an on-line survey,). The 2021 survey indicates the majority of the volunteers (85%) are residents, while in terms of employment the majority were either employed full- or part-time (60%), whilst 29% were retired and 4% unemployed (Figure 9).

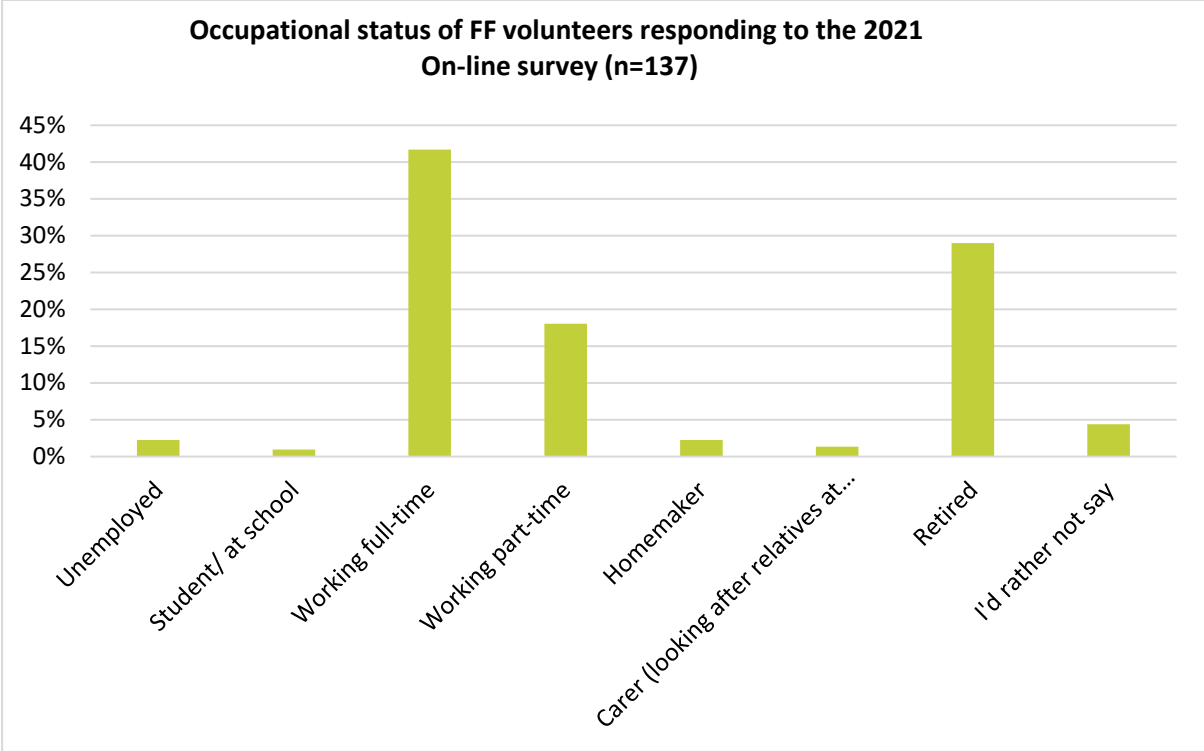
Volunteer numbers varied greatly across the 38 projects with highest numbers engaged in Love Your Forest, Buried Heritage, Reptiles, Butterflies, Heritage Open Days, and Waterways, ponds and mires. Some respondents volunteer for multiple projects and a total of 300 responses were received from the 137 respondents identifying themselves as FF volunteers. The pattern of activity was very similar to previous surveys with lowest numbers of volunteers linked to Built Heritage, mindscape, Geology, Edible Forest, and Forest Dialect. This reflects the variability in project use of volunteers, as well as the stage of development of projects.

The most common types of activity identified were litter picking, doing surveys or data collection, conservation work, and organising events.

**Figure 8. On-line survey respondents with experience of volunteering for the FF Programme (2018 and 2021 comparison)**



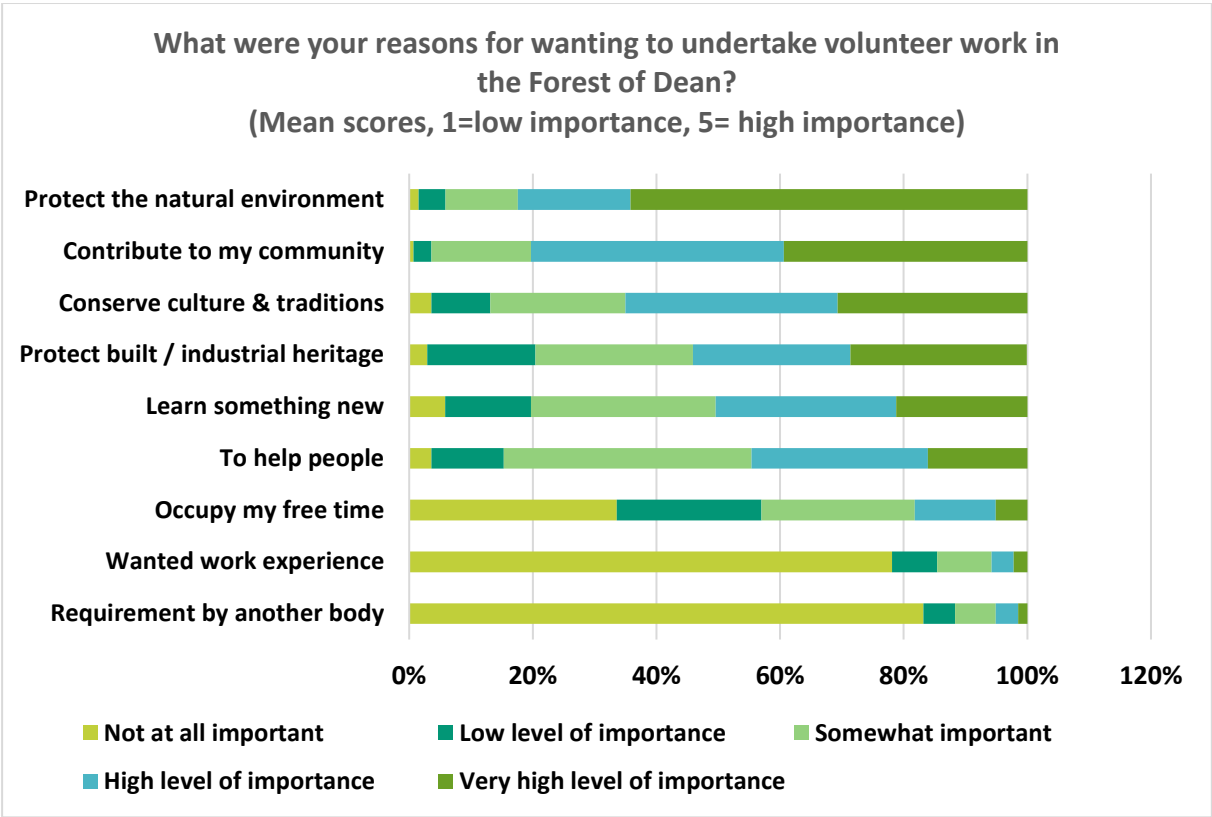
**Figure 9. Occupation status of survey respondents with experience of volunteering for the FF Programme (2021 survey).**





Respondents were asked for their reasons for engaging in volunteer work in the Forest of Dean (Figure 10). There are clearly multiple reasons that motivate people to volunteer and just under two-thirds of the sample indicated that the response with the highest level of importance was 'I wanted to help protect the natural environment of the Forest', and almost 40% of the sample indicated that they wanted 'To contribute to the community where I live'. In addition, 65% of the sample rated 'It was an opportunity to help conserve the culture and traditions of the Forest' as high or very highly important. The least important reasons for engaging with volunteering were for gaining 'work experience', because it was 'a requirement', or to 'occupy free time'.

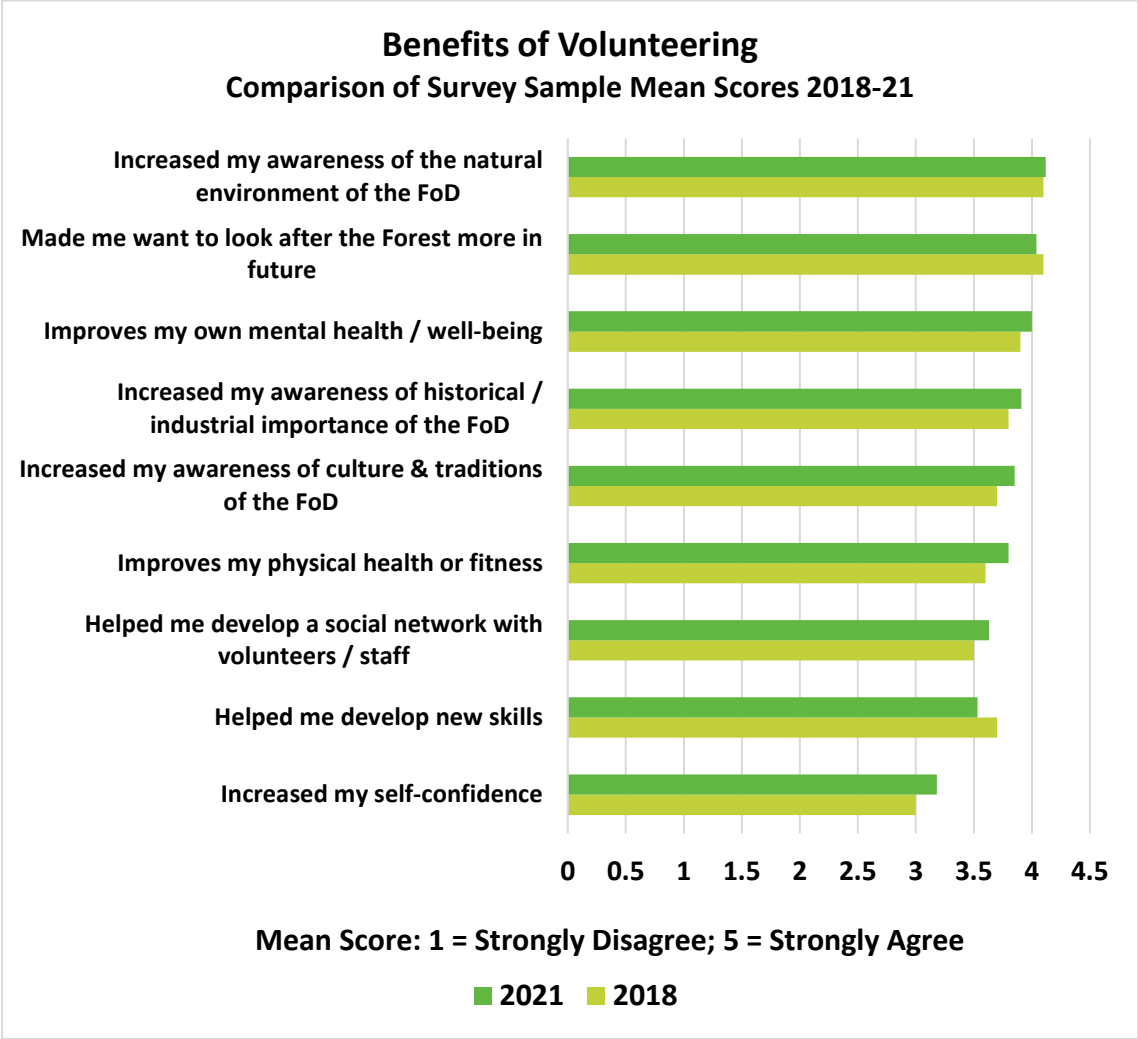
Figure 10. Reasons for wanting to undertake volunteer work (2021 On-line survey; n=137)



Survey respondents were also asked about the benefits obtained from volunteering for the FF Programme. Figure 11 compares Mean scores for each statement across the two surveys carried out in 2018 and 2021 revealing a similar pattern of responses in terms of the benefits gained, with no statistical difference between the scores. Highest Mean scores were for the statements relating to wanting to look after the Forest more, and increased awareness of the natural environment of the Forest of Dean. Respondents also agreed that volunteering improves their physical and mental health (2021 Mean scores of 3.8 and 4.0 respectively). Lowest scores were for an increase in self-confidence ((2021 Mean score of 3.18) and development of new skills (2021 Mean of 3.53).

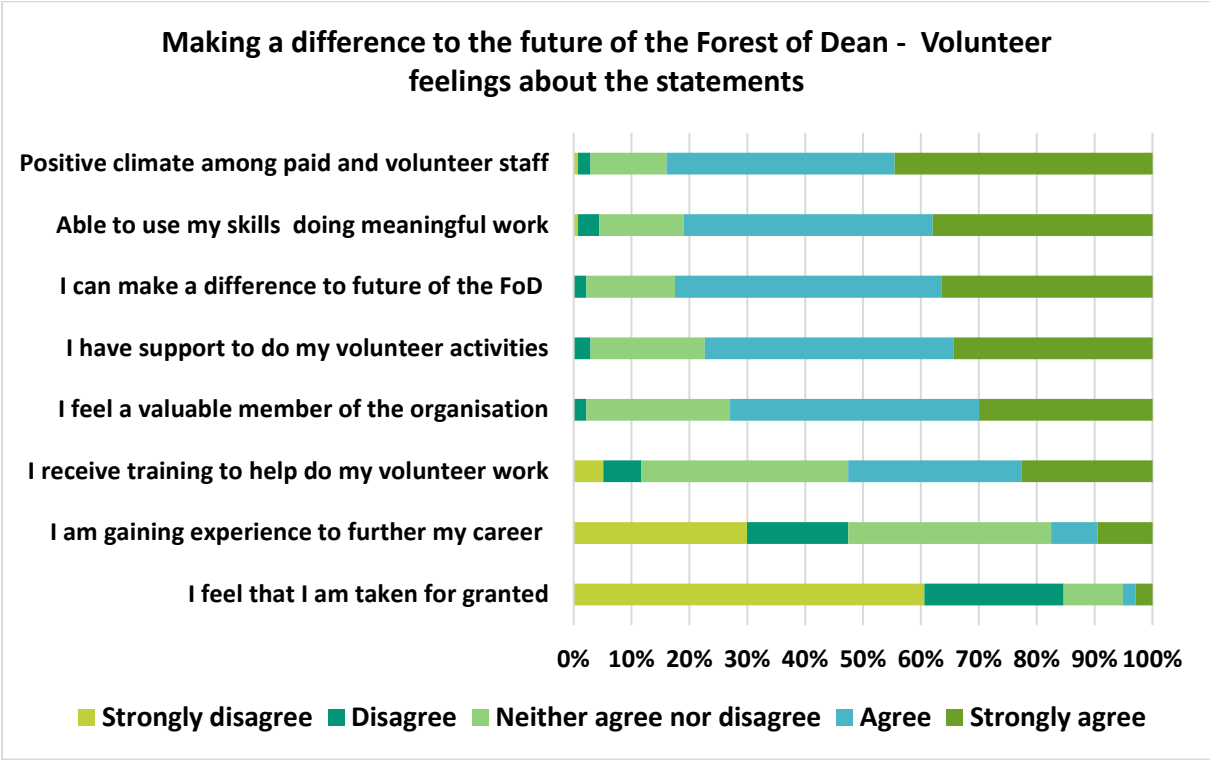
Other benefits considered important include an increase in awareness of 'local culture and traditions', and 'historical and industrial importance' of the Forest.

Figure 11. Personal benefits from FF volunteering activity (Comparison of Mean scores across 2018 (n=71) and 2021 (n=137) On-line surveys)



Volunteers were asked to respond to eight statements asking about their volunteer experiences (Figure 12). Overall, a high-level of positive experience is recorded in the survey data. More than 80% of respondents agreed ‘strongly’ or ‘very strongly’ that they could make a difference to the Forest of Dean, that there is a positive climate in the team including between paid staff and unpaid volunteers, and that they are using their skills to do meaningful work. Similarly, 73% said they felt a valued member of the organisation and 77% that they were receiving the necessary support and guidance to achieve their volunteer activities. The scores for ‘gaining work experience to further my career’ were more mixed and show a shift to the middle ground, with more people disagreeing than collectively agreeing or strongly agreeing. It is worth noting that 85% of volunteer respondents ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ that they were ‘taken for granted’, suggesting that overall the volunteering experience from this sample were positive.

Figure 12. Perceptions of the volunteering experience in the Forest of Dean (2021 On-line survey, n=137)



Volunteers were given the opportunity (an optional question) to propose improvements that could be made for volunteers / volunteering. Out of 32 responses received, the main concern expressed was in relation to bureaucracy and the need to make it easier to do volunteering activities in the Forest. A second issue of concern was the need for better communications, both of opportunities to volunteer and between those Projects (or organisations) asking for volunteers and those who actually responded. Other issues raised included the need for more training, problems with travel in the Forest, especially on the weekend if using public transport, and the cost of travel, and lastly the need to vary the time of activities to allow working people to access volunteer opportunities and participate.

### 3.3.1. Volunteer Discussion Groups

Two volunteer discussion groups were held in November 2021 to explore the experiences of a small group of volunteers involved in a range of FF projects. Most of the participants in the discussion group had experience of volunteering on more than one project (Table 11). Activities range from working with disadvantaged groups to wildlife surveys, planting and digging ditches.

**Table 11. Discussion Group volunteer activities**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Project name</b>	<b>Type of work carried out (brief description: e.g. survey work; admin., etc)</b>
Volunteer 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wildlife</li> <li>• Batscape</li> <li>• Wetscape and ponds</li> </ul>	Woodland surveys Veteran and ancient trees Surveying gaps in hedgerows; planting hedgerows. Also, adder surveys Stream surveys
Volunteer 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forest Explorers</li> <li>• Love Your Forest</li> <li>• Glos. WT Pine Marten surveys</li> </ul>	Scat surveys (Pine Marten) Walking with Wheels Landscape photography Also: Newt surveys for GWT
Volunteer 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Batscape</li> <li>• Reptile survey</li> <li>• Lidar archaeology</li> <li>• Archaeology</li> <li>• Beavers</li> <li>• Worcester Walk</li> </ul>	Doing surveys; And 4 archaeological digs; Renovating hedgerows; planting fruit trees; Re-fencing enclosure
Volunteer 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worcester Walk</li> <li>• New Leaf</li> </ul>	Scything, hedge laying (for wild flower meadows); Offering a safe place for people with problems (New Leaf) – also green woodworking, turning; pottery; spinning, metalwork.
Volunteer 5:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Leaf</li> </ul>	Wide range of activities including felling trees, stacking firewood, green wood skills; working with disadvantaged people
Volunteer 6:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worcester Walk</li> <li>• Wildlife surveys</li> <li>• Lidar survey</li> </ul>	Survey work Finding anomalies in LIDAR data Fencing, drainage channels

Participants indicated a wide range of benefits when asked about the enjoyable aspects of their volunteering with the FF programme. These include strong learning and social elements in terms of developing skills and enabling volunteers to meet and engage with like-minded people, but also with those from other sectors of society with whom they would not normally engage. Benefits mentioned include the following:

*“I get to volunteer on something I know nothing about. It inspires me to do more.”*

*“A sense of achievement. This year on Worcester Walk we achieved a lot.”*

*“I retired 4 years ago and it gets me out of bed in the morning - also I can dip in and out of projects.”*

*“I’m 6 years retired and wanted something to do. Wildlife has always been a hobby and this was a great opportunity - I had just inherited a bit of land on Blakeney Hill, I was improving it and was able to apply what I learned from volunteering.”*

*“Picking up new skills”*

*“Meeting people, it’s nice to get out. New Leaf was an eye opener for me, meeting addicts and people with health problems, kids that had been excluded.”*

*“You meet people from all walks of life”*

*“Learning in the field is the best way. You can read books but sometimes you need to be shown how to do something.”*

*“Working with people with expert knowledge”*

*“Learned a lot from project leaders and other volunteers”*

*“I learned a lot on the archaeological project. With the Lidar survey we went to parts of the woods I wouldn’t normally go to - we were getting off the beaten track.”*

(Volunteer Discussion Group, November 2021)

For some there are more altruistic motives, such as ‘Giving something back to the forest’, while for others it is this mix of benefits that makes their volunteering experience enjoyable:

*‘I was getting out into the Forest doing conservation work, wildlife surveys and meeting people and I saw parts of the forest I would not otherwise have seen’.*

*“The Food Festival at Speech House was how I got involved but there is no overall structure to what I’ve done, I’ve pinballed, finding things of interest. It’s great to meet other people and join in with other groups occasionally.”*

(Volunteer Discussion Group, November 2021)

However, a small number of participants in the discussion group revealed they were not always sure when they were working on a Foresters’ Forest project, as several of them were also volunteering through GWT and the Dean Green Team. While they made clear references to activities undertaken on FF projects, they also mentioned projects delivered through other organisations, for example:

*“Unlocking the Severn project – gave access to Gloucestershire County archives.”*

*“I’ve been involved in so many voluntary activities, I don’t always know if it’s a Foresters Forest project. I’ve done Sphagnum Moss surveys, butterfly work, habitat improvement with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT). I did an audio recording course and used it by doing stuff on a community radio station; we did all kinds of recordings. I also did a course at the Dean Heritage Centre and I’m a member of GWT.”*

*“With the Dean Green Team I helped with preparation work for the Beaver re-introduction including wildlife surveys and fencing. Also worked on waterways and improving drainage channels.”*

*“I was never quite sure if I was working for the Foresters’ Forest or not.”*

(Volunteer Discussion Group, November 2021)

Volunteers also noted some of the more negative aspects of volunteering work. For the participants of the discussion group this seemed to consist of experiences of working outside in bad weather (e.g. 'Driving in the cold rain to a place you've never been before', 'A training day for scything when it was pouring with rain the whole time'), and the paperwork required to undertake activities (particularly in relation to Health and safety and the long wait to obtain permission to do something). It was interesting, however, to observe how sharing these more difficult experiences also seemed to create some bonding within the group of volunteers discussing the issues.

Relatively few challenges were identified with respect to volunteer involvement in the FF projects. One discussant (who stated he was a 'born and bred forester') noted he had met very few other 'born and bred Foresters' on the projects he was involved in, surmising that although they were 'very proud of the Forest they don't seem to get involved' suggesting that:

*"One feature of the Forest is that people are very attached to their local patch but don't necessarily care about the larger Forest."*

Others stated that there were no real challenges in volunteering and groups were very welcoming:

*"I've been welcomed by each group and they always investigate what skills you can bring to the group."*

*"It's very welcoming, very easy to get involved; the only thing is finding the time to do all the things you want to do."*

(Volunteer Discussion Group, November 2021)

The discussants did note the difficulties in publicising projects, suggesting that awareness of projects among the community was low (*"I would say less than 1 in 10 would know about FF even though it was in the local newspaper from time to time"*). Some noted they had heard or seen very little about the achievements of the FF projects (*"I've seen some photos but not much else"*). It is worth bearing in mind that these final perceptions may have been affected by the impact of the Pandemic with a significant drop-off in both volunteer numbers and project activities over the preceding two years.

The discussion group participants also indicated they felt their volunteering activities have been sufficiently recognised. One volunteer indicated he felt part of the FF Programme having engaged in project activities. Several indicated they appreciated being thanked for their efforts through volunteer celebration events and awards of badges and certificates:

*"I feel whenever I put effort in it has been appreciated by the people I've been working alongside. It's a good community (of people)."*

*"Two times a year we all met somewhere in the Forest for a get-together – all the projects. Volunteers and experts talked together. People talked about projects, some I had never heard of before and they gave out certificates and badges."*

*"I'm always being thanked. I attended three recognition events – they were very good. That side of things (the volunteer events) was done really well."*

(Volunteer Discussion Group, November 2021)

## 3.4 Community engagement and social outcomes

A key concern for the evaluation is to determine the impact of the FF Programme on the wider community of the Forest of Dean. The analysis of project level outcomes in Section 3.1 of this report identified the perceived effects on individuals and the community in terms of the NLHF criteria (people will have developed skills and learned about heritage; communities will have reduced environmental impacts, more people/wider range of people will have engaged with heritage, the local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit). It is clear from the analysis that few projects addressed the reduction in environmental impact, which was not the focus of the FF Programme, and in almost all thematic areas individual projects struggled to identify ways in which the community would be a better place to live and work purely because of an improvement in the heritage. In terms of the impacts on people, however, the project evaluations did indicate high outcome levels for skills development and learning.

Additional interview data and discussions have also demonstrated the value placed on learning about heritage and skills acquisition by volunteers, project leaders, and other stakeholders. Understanding the impacts on the wider community has proved more elusive. Whereas some projects have identified numbers of individuals attending events, clicks on websites or other social media indicating a level of engagement it is difficult to assess the proportion of the community that has benefitted and in what specific ways their communities are improved. It is clear that for some projects, in particular the ecologically focused 'Stronghold for Nature' projects, it may be some years before the changes initiated by the FF Programme become apparent (or measurable). It is also worth noting that none of the projects under this theme identified 'the local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit' as a target outcome, and only three indicated 'more people/wider range of people will have engaged with heritage' as an outcome. In addition only two projects under the 'Revealing our Past' theme and one project in the 'Securing our Future' thematic area included the local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit' as a target outcome

The outcomes from many activities under the 'Securing our Future' thematic area (Forest Explorers, Youth Rangers, Working with Schools) may also take years or decades to mature, and impossible to predict as they will influence the way young people think and will act in the future. Other projects, however, will show more immediate results in terms of community benefit (e.g. the Apps that were created, Built Heritage improvements, Bream Heritage Walk, Worcester Walk Community project, Freemining, New Leaf), and under the 'Celebrating our Forest' theme: Musical Landscape, mindscape, Reading the Forest, and Scarr Bandstand.

Assessing impacts on the wider community also depends on understanding synergies between project outcomes and the extent to which local residents and visitors are aware of FF Programme and project activities, which in turn relies on the success of communication strategies. As some of the stakeholder interviews and the discussion with volunteers (Section 3.3) illustrated, despite the multiple channels of communication, awareness of the

FF activities may still be very low. This section will explore the impacts on the wider community and try to shed light on both short and long-term outcomes.

### **3.4.1 Community engagement: Project Leader Discussions**

Project Leader discussions explored some of the issues highlighted above. Sectors of the community that engaged directly with projects varied significantly depending on people's interests and the nature of the volunteer work offered and events delivered (Table 12). Worcester Walk for example tended to engage mostly retired people from the local community, Bream Heritage Walk tended to attract locally retired people and also a wider age-range of visitors looking for an interesting walk in the Forest. Conservation grazing involved people through active volunteering (e.g. stock checkers), also engaged more widely through attracting large numbers of local residents and families with children who came to look at the animals. The independent grazier providing a small flock of sheep for grazing on Forestry England sites to improve habitat (this is separate to the GWT Conservation Grazing project) also noted the improved engagement with local rangers, and the wider community through people coming to see the animals.

Buried Heritage tended to attract older retired people (both residents and visitors) as volunteers but also had widespread impact on the wider community through open days, school visits, and provision of educational resources for schools. Freemining, on the other hand, while targeted a much smaller cohort of younger people for training, owing to the level of commitment required, but also reached other sectors of the community through guided tours at Hopewell Colliery, contributing to the Story of the Forest book, and school visits. Only two projects indicated engagement with one of the most difficult sectors of the community to reach, the 16 – 24 years age group. Youth Rangers targeted the 14-18 years age group, engaging a significant number over the programme period in a wide range of activities and Reading the Forest indicated a low level of engagement through involving teenagers in creating podcasts.



**Table 12. Project Leader Discussion Group: sectors of the community most engaged with projects**

<b>Project name</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>In what ways have they benefited?</b>
Project 1: Worcester Walk	Residents Old/retired	Involvement in a local community issue; getting to know others in the community
Project 2: Bream Heritage Walk	Residents / Visitors Old/retired	Survey of users reveal it is mostly older people doing the walk. The volunteers are mostly older people.
Project 3: Conservation grazing	Children/Young families/ Residents	. Get a little bit of support from volunteers. We get to know the rangers – it's like building a community.
Project 4: Buried heritage	Residents / Visitors / Old / retired	We sustained a large number of volunteers over 5 years. Largely older people but one was younger. We get the younger retired people who are looking for something to do. On open days the audience was a real cross section of the community, we also had school visits and the kids brought their parents back. We got a lot of dog walkers.
Project 5: Freemining	Residents / Young	We have seen quite a resurgence of younger people having a go, in the past it was always an old man's thing. We have to get at the younger generation in school.
Project 6: Reading the Forest	Mostly Old / retired / residents  A few young people 16 – 20yrs.	Getting stuff into schools is not easy – it tends to be older people who get involved with the project – tends to the nature of heritage – older people have the interest. We did get some teenagers involved with the podcasts – getting a few 16 – 20 year olds and they have the technical know-how.
Project 7: Heritage Open days	Wide cross section of the community and visitors	A few other projects got involved with the Open days. We have tried to work with Nicola at Dean Heritage Centre. We could survive if all the projects came together.

### **3.4.2 Community engagement: reported outcomes by project**

Certain projects targeted specific sectors of the population that are often left out or ignored. These included: mindSCAPE, targeting those in care homes with dementia (and their carers), and Walking with Wheels aimed at supporting those with disabilities to get out into the Forest. Interview evidence with Project Leaders also demonstrates that the impact of project activities went further than those directly benefitting to include their wider families (in the case of Walking with Wheels it enabled sharing of memories across generations; for mindSCAPE the outputs from activities could be shared with family members and there were exhibitions of work done by those in care homes). The Voices from the Forest and Oral Histories projects engaged with capturing memories of older residents of the Forest, which are then made available more widely through the archives at the Dean Heritage Centre.

There is limited information on the extent to which different sectors of the community engaged through attendance at events, or utilisation of Apps. Some of the projects provided

estimates or actual numbers of those attending events, and engagement with websites and social media, which are summarised in thematic groups below (Tables 13 - 16). The focus of Tables 13 - 16) is on project engagement with the wider community but in some cases (e.g. Worcester Walk, Heritage Open Days) the number of volunteers has been included as these were the target community, or the main form of community engagement.

**Table 13. Revealing our Past: Five-year cumulative project community engagement (to end of Yr 5 Q2)**

<b>Revealing our past: Cumulative engagement 2017-21</b>		
<b>Project</b>	<b>Engagement with people</b>	<b>Wider engagement with the community</b>
Buried Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 5 Site open days</li> <li>➤ 5 presentations with public attendance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 10 x radio/ newspaper articles.</li> <li>➤ 20 x updates to website and/or social media (Facebook, Blog, etc.).</li> <li>➤ Data and information deriving from surveys available online.</li> </ul>
Voices from the Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Events with participation: Project launch, website launch, and Festival of Voices from the Forest.</li> <li>➤ Total = 230 participants (not including visitors to the Forest Showcase)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 499 page views of web resource.</li> <li>➤ 100 people accessing Voices from the Forest Collection at DHC and Glos Uni-Eprints.</li> <li>➤ Number of people reached via social media &amp; podcast over 28-day period in Yr5Q2: 4,635 through Facebook; 1,127 Twitter; 268 website; 1,680 podcast.</li> <li>➤ 50CDs produced.</li> </ul>
Forest Oral History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Volunteers trained to transcribe and catalogue oral histories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 23 requests for access to recordings up to start of year 4.</li> <li>➤ 'Happy is the Eye' film about Forest memories utilising some of the oral histories launched at DHC and received on-line viewings. 60 responses to oral history questionnaire at Dean Heritage Centre.</li> </ul>
Forest Dialect		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 23 organisations engaged (Some outside FoD)</li> </ul>
Geology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 8 Guided walks with multiple participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 1 'Geoheritage of the Dean' App and school packs delivered</li> </ul>
Heritage Craft Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 215 people learned about heritage skills in workshops</li> </ul>	

**Table 14. Exploring our Forest: Five-year cumulative project community engagement (to end of Yr 5 Q2)**

<b>Exploring our Forest: Cumulative engagement 2017-21</b>		
<b>Project</b>	<b>Engagement with people</b>	<b>Wider engagement with the community</b>
Bream Heritage Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 113 respondents to an online survey indicated they learned something about local heritage during the walk</li> <li>➤ 47 people confident to walk in and around their village</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ First run of 500 booklets used up. 500 more printed in YR4 Q3.</li> <li>➤ Website with information</li> </ul>
Heritage Open Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ High level of volunteering over 5 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Website</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 13,786 visitors - gradually increasing numbers over 5 yrs.</li> </ul>	
Hidden Heritage App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Individuals can download the App onto their phones</li> <li>➤ Level of use not clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 8,243 downloads Hidden Heritage of the Dean; 1,548 downloads Coleford's Hidden Heritage; 197 downloads Cinderford's Hidden Heritage</li> </ul>
Walking with Wheels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 808 people accessing the Forest with Trampers</li> <li>➤ 368 'returner' users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Project leader reports families/friends often accompany the user.</li> </ul>
Worcester Walk Community Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 41 people volunteering their time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 21 local people commenting on improvements to site.</li> <li>➤ Local people use the site (e.g. dog-walkers)</li> </ul>

**Table 15. Celebrating our Forest: Five-year cumulative project community engagement (to end of Yr 5 Q2)**

<b>Celebrating our Forest: Cumulative engagement 2017-21</b>		
<b>Project</b>	<b>Engagement with people</b>	<b>Wider engagement with the community</b>
Community Celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 24 performances of a play (Passing the Baton, although production of the play itself was not part of the FF Programme), and 1,350 people watching)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 22,000 Engagements on social media</li> <li>➤ 712 people who say they better understand their heritage</li> <li>➤ 120 people watched the launch of the Mushets docu-drama at Coleford cinema</li> </ul>
Edible Forest Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 332 people on training courses/workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Participants in workshops/courses (not necessarily from the local area)</li> </ul>
Musical Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 20 concerts at a variety of venues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Local people attend musical events</li> </ul>
Love your Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Large number involved in litter picks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Trash-converter van visits schools</li> </ul>
MindSCAPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 80 mindSCAPE activities run for care home residents.</li> <li>➤ 18 care home employees engaged; 20 Volunteers assisting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Outputs of creative activities shared with families of those with Dementia</li> <li>➤ 4 Resource booklets produced targeted at carers</li> <li>➤ 3 exhibitions of work</li> </ul>
Reading the Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 1,882 visitors to 5 events (Excluding Forest Showcase events)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Schools resources created and used;</li> <li>➤ No. of school children using materials annually = 167 (steadily increasing)</li> <li>➤ 9 schools using resources</li> <li>➤ 946 visits to web resource .</li> </ul>
Scarr Bandstand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Musical performances from bands in the Forest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Estimated 3,550 people using site (over 5 yrs)</li> <li>➤ Site used for exercise class, family recreation as well as performances</li> </ul>
Interpretation and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 238 local people say they have visited a local site (Based on sample survey data)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 19,152 visitors to website and followers of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (totals combined)</li> </ul>

**Table 16. Securing our future: Five-year cumulative project community engagement (to end of Yr 5 Q2)**

<b>Securing our future: Cumulative engagement 2017-21</b>		
<b>Project</b>	<b>Engagement with people</b>	<b>Wider engagement with the community</b>
A future for Freemining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 4 minibus tours;</li> <li>➤ 2 teacher days,</li> <li>➤ 8 school visits with 135 pupils</li> <li>➤ 1 event tour for 60 people.</li> <li>➤ 6 guided walks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Input to Story of the Forest book</li> </ul>
Forest Explorers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Total of 600 children over 5yrs</li> <li>➤ 39 sessions held over 5 yrs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Families accompany children to the sessions</li> </ul>
New Leaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Delivery of courses to 71 young people, unemployed &amp; vulnerable adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤</li> </ul>
Youth Rangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 36 Young People + 3 school groups (20x3=60) recruited in Autumn 2018.</li> <li>➤ 22 events run over 5 yrs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Number of promotional videos produced by Youth Rangers and shared with public</li> </ul>
Working with Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lydbrook School adapted curriculum to give strong FoD focus</li> <li>➤ Other schools utilised resource packs to different degrees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Range of resource packs produced by other FF projects, available for use by schools on the West Gloucestershire Schools Partnership website</li> <li>➤ 'Story of the Forest' History Book and 'Wildlife of the Forest' Book given to schools in the FoD area, and available for purchase</li> <li>➤ Families attend school presentations and support field visits.</li> </ul>

### **3.4.3 Community engagement: evidence from the 2021 on-line survey**

The on-line survey carried out in the Autumn of 2021 (Year 5 Q3) provides some indirect evidence of the level of awareness of the FF programme across the wider FoD community and regular visitors. Figure 13 illustrates stated awareness levels across the 2018-21 period. A total of 49.8% (n=500) of the 2021 survey sample indicated they had heard of the Foresters Forest before taking the survey. This compares to 44.2% in the 2018 survey (n=345). Considering the sub-set of Residents only, the difference between those who were aware of the FF Programme and those who were not is slightly greater (55% compared to 47%) over this time period. A smaller proportion of Visitors (30% in 2021) had heard of the programme compared to residents. This is unsurprising but visitor responses may have been affected by Covid-19 restrictions on movement and activities during the 2020-21 period.

The 2021 data indicate that almost half of the sample (which includes visitors) are aware of the FF programme, a larger proportion compared to 2018 suggesting an increasing level of programme awareness over the time period. It must be borne in mind the sample also includes a significant number of volunteers (13.6% of the sample), who might influence the overall pattern of responses. Assuming the sample is broadly representative of the wider population we could state that approximately half of the population of the FoD area is aware

of the FF programme and the data suggest a slight increase in awareness between 2018 and 2021.

A total of 16% of respondents (n=160) indicated involvement in some form of activity, event, or training course run by the Foresters' Forest programme (compared to 12% of respondents in the 2018 survey (Figure 14). A small increase in participation is visible for Residents between 2018 to 2021 (13% to 13.8% of the sample) whilst Visitor participation dropped from 7% in 2018 to 2.1% in 2021 in the period. This latter difference is likely to be the result of the Covid-19 regulations in terms of the decrease in the opportunities for participation and a reluctance of some sectors of the population to travel and or engage in activities with others.

Figure 13. Awareness of the Foresters' Forest Programme (Comparison of 2018 and 2021 survey data)

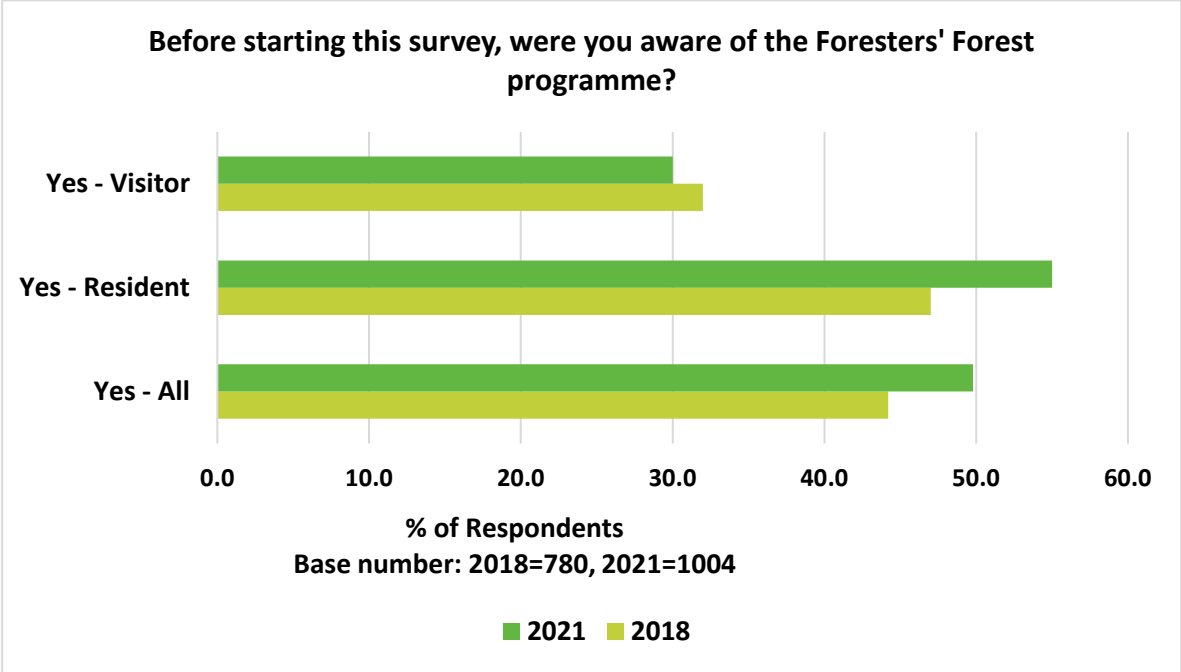
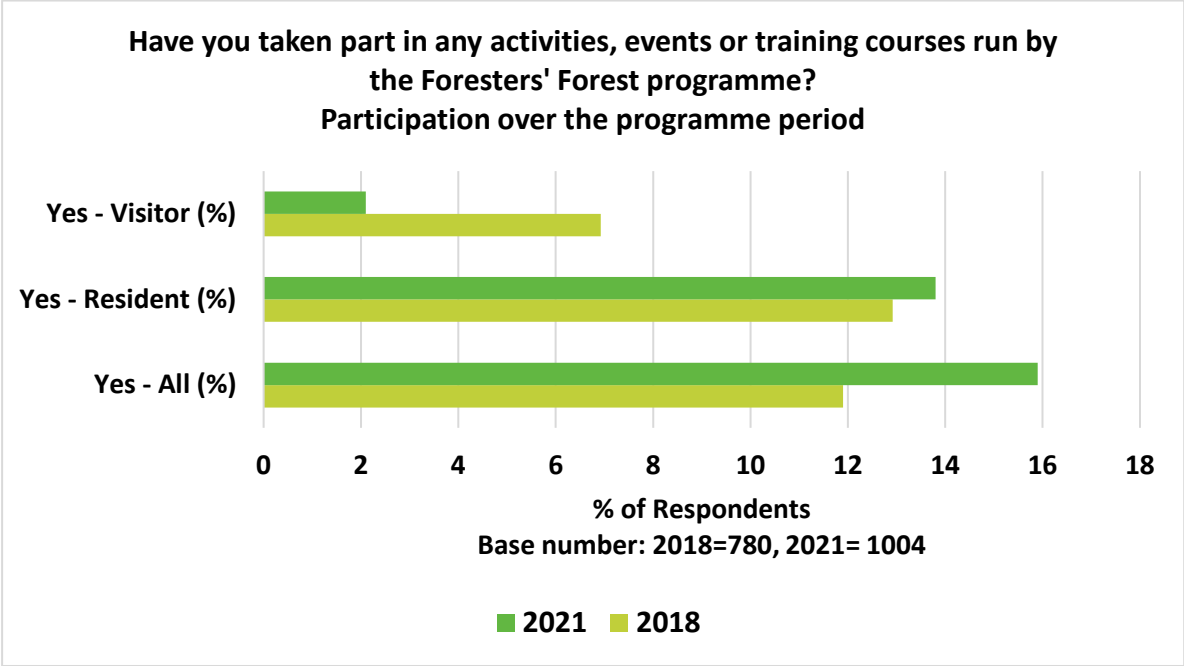


Figure 14. Participation in Foresters' Forest activities (Comparison of 2018 and 2021 survey data)

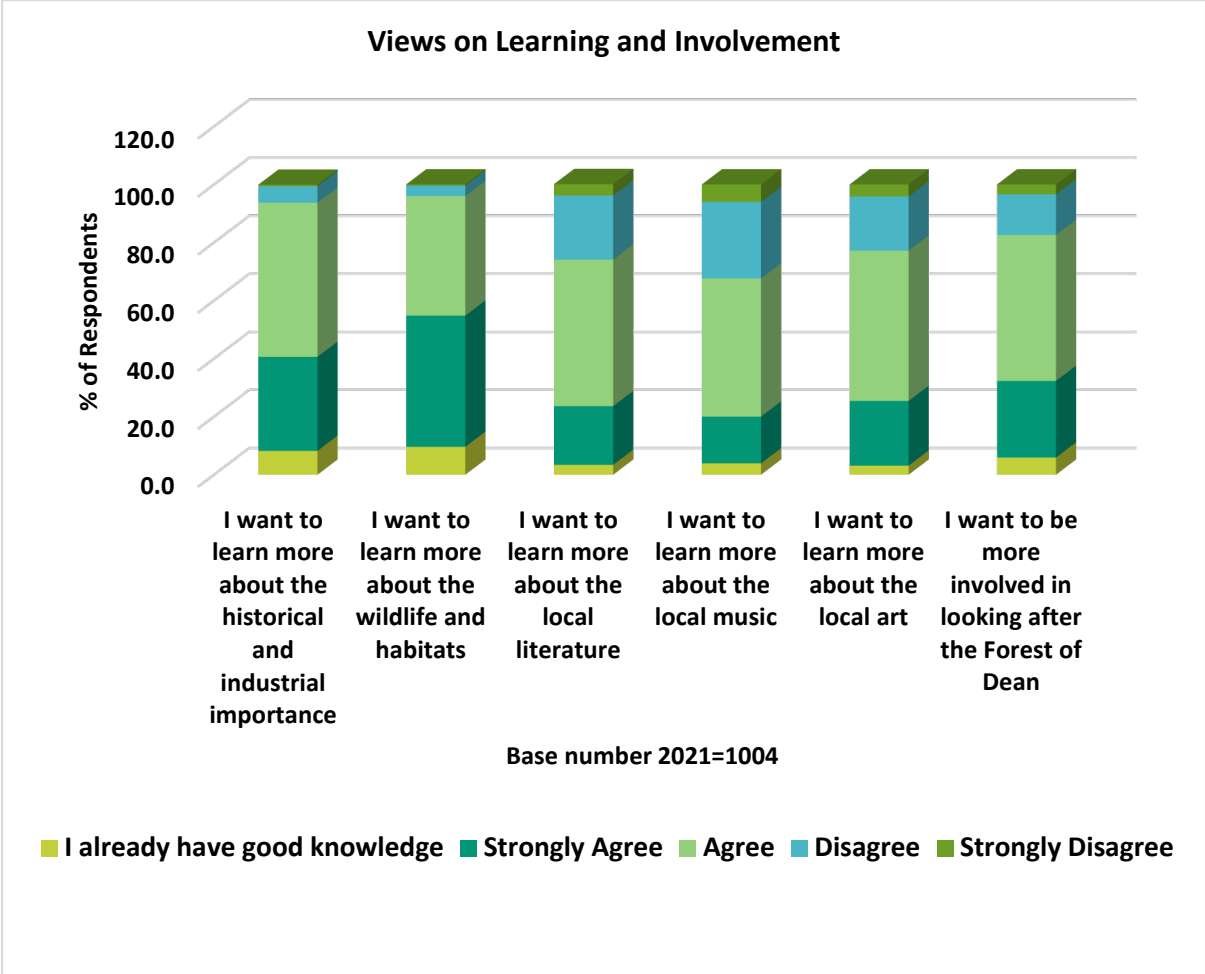


**Learning and involvement**

Respondents were asked for their views on learning more about the Forest of Dean (Figure 15). Agreement with statements about want to learn more was strong (above 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing) for statements about 'the wildlife and habitats of the Forest of Dean' and 'the historical and industrial importance' while learning about 'local music' scored the lowest level of interest (63% agreeing or strongly agreeing). In each question, a small proportion of respondents reported already having a good knowledge (ranging from a low of 3% for local art to a high of around 10% for wildlife). Overall, the responses suggest a high level of demand among the wider community for learning about all aspects of the Forests' heritage.

A final question asked whether respondents wanted to be more involved in looking after the Forest of Dean with approximately threequarters of the sample indicating agreement or strong agreement. The response suggests a strong latent demand to be involved while the extent to which respondents actively engage with the FF Programme or events is not known.

Figure 15. Views on learning and involvement (2021 On-line survey)



**Knowledge of the heritage of the Forest of Dean**

Respondents were asked to self-assess their knowledge of a variety of heritage topics relevant to the Foresters’ Forest programme. For the purposes of the survey, ‘heritage’ was defined as:

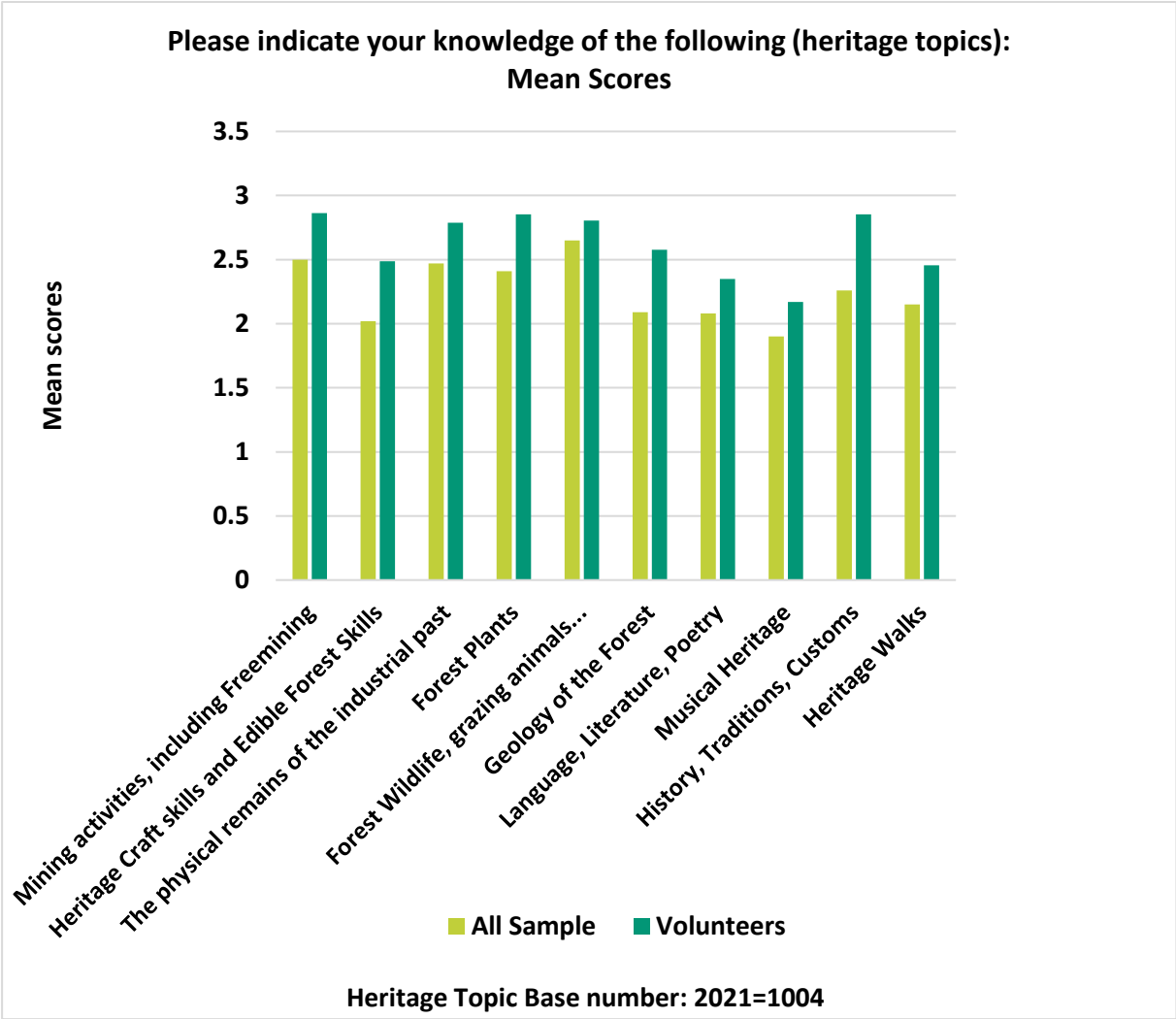
*“...anything that has originated from the historic activities of previous generations. This could be the language or dialect, music, literature, the natural environment, industry, buildings, local rights to use resources, or even the very appearance of the landscape around us.”*

Heritage was divided into three sub-groups: built and industrial heritage, natural heritage, and cultural heritage, with questions being asked in the survey that related to each of these.

The majority of respondents (63% up to 93%) reported that they had some knowledge of the topics from ‘I know a little’ up to ‘I know a lot’. The majority of respondents in each case stated, ‘I know a little’ while a smaller proportion (maximum of 15%) stated, ‘I know a lot’. This weighting towards a lack of confidence in self-reported knowledge is more visible when viewing the mean scores for each topic (Figure 16) where the number of topics scoring a mean of greater than two is limited to half of the topics, including Mining, Physical remains of the

industrial past, Forest Plants, and History and traditions; whilst only Forest Wildlife, grazing animals etc. scores higher than a Mean of 2.5. The data suggest that knowledge about Musical heritage, Geology, Language, literature and poetry, and Heritage craft skills is the lowest among sample respondents while knowledge about Freemining and Forest wildlife score highest. This is not surprising and fits the pattern of responses found in previous surveys (2018 and 2019). Comparing the full sample response to that of volunteers reveals that for every aspect of heritage knowledge, those who indicated they had engaged in volunteer activity were more knowledgeable. However, there is no evidence to assess the extent to which the FF Programme contributed to the observed difference, and how much may be due to differences between individuals who volunteer and those who do not. Figure 3.15 indicates that only a small proportion of (total survey) respondents attribute their heritage learning directly to the FF Programme.

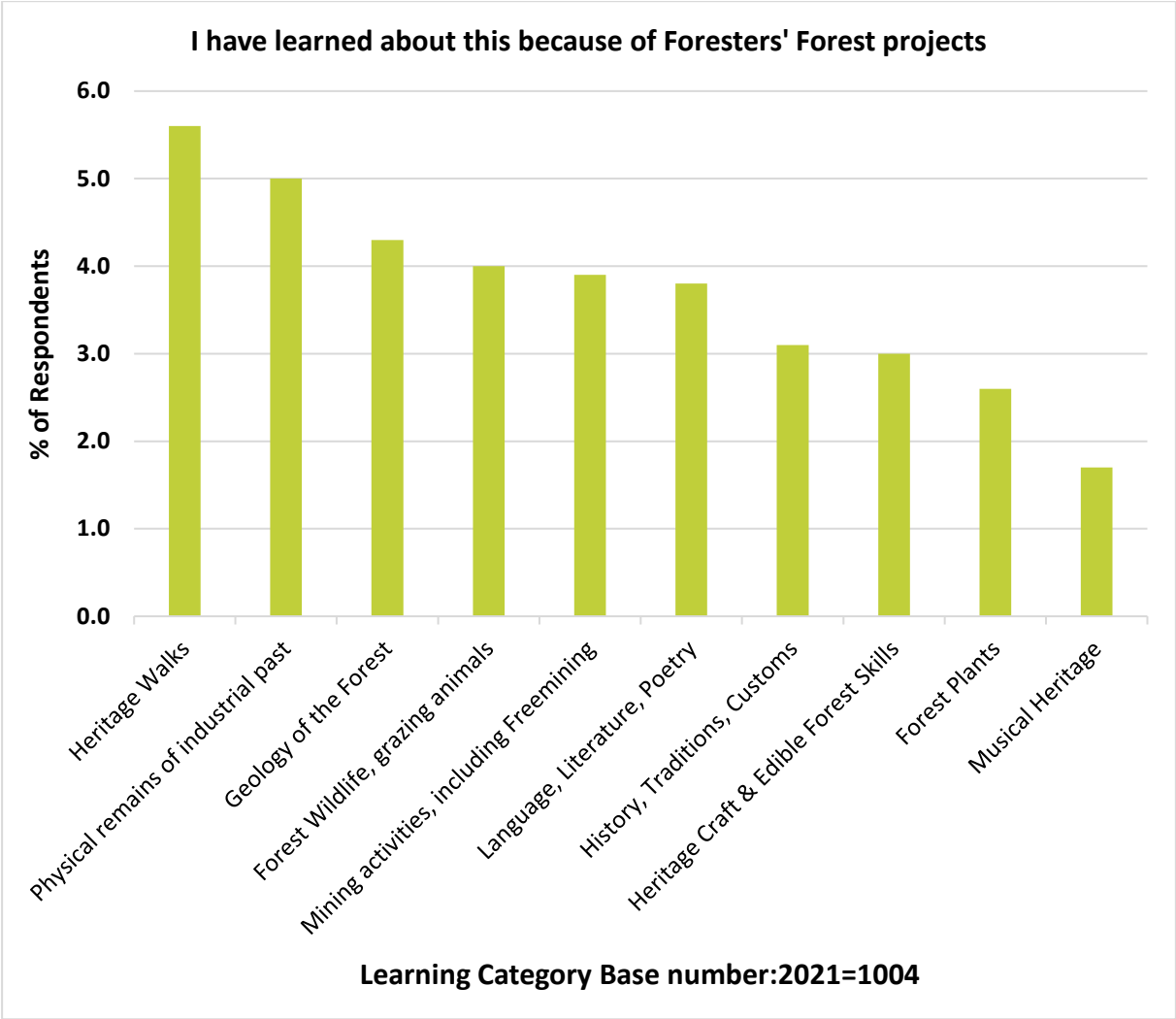
Figure 16. Self-reported knowledge of heritage topics: comparison of volunteers with non-volunteers (2021 on-line survey Mean scores)





Respondents were also asked if the knowledge of the topics they had reported was gained as a result of interaction with the Foresters’ Forest programme. Across all of the topics in the survey, between 1.7% and 5.6% of respondents reported that the programme was responsible for their learning. The highest scoring of these topics were ‘heritage walks’ and ‘the physical remains of the industrial past’, both of which had high participation rates and are particular to Foresters’ Forest activities (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Attribution of learning about heritage to the Foresters' Forest programme (2021 On-line survey)



### 3.4.4 Organisation and relational outcomes

During stakeholder interviews there were several references to the lack of engagement by the Commoners of the Forest, although with some recognition of the difficulties involved. Lack of trust is a key factor contributing to the lack of engagement, which may take a significant amount of time and effort to overcome.

*“Disappointing that commoners not involved. There were some principled arguments from commoners as to why they did not want to get involved but people would like to see more grazing in the Forest.”*

(Programme Board Member Interview, 2021)

In the Project Leader discussion Group a number of organisational and relational outcomes were identified. One change resulting from having to engage with Forestry England permission processes, was an increase in trust between local organisations and Forestry England arising from understanding the rationale behind permission requirements. One project Leader noted the initial level of frustration in trying to get things done through the Forestry England administrative processes and had *“a natural suspicion of Forestry England”*. Having gone through several years of the process, however, he indicated that it had got easier as *“we now know how it works”*. The Freemining project commented on new forms of relationship that had developed between the Freeminers Association and Forestry England based on entering into a contract for leasing of land (for the briquetting machine building), which brought unexpected costs (solicitors fees) as well as a more formal long-term relationship. Other projects run by local projects facing the same situation include Scarr Bandstand and the those run by Rewild (New Leaf; Heritage Craft Skills).

Not all local organisations were able to adapt to the difficulties of formalised relationships based on applications through the permissions process and decided not to run events on Forestry England land (Heritage Open Days). The more formalised relationships require a certain amount of capacity building and time and effort to engage, which is difficult for small organisations operating with few resources.

Overall, local organisations benefitted from the Foresters’ Forest Programme through opportunities created by access to funding, engaging in a more formalised way with Forestry England and other local organisations, and building skills and confidence among personnel. Coleford Town Council noted significance of the FF in raising the profile of local organisations, enabling them to grow and engage with each other, and for new people to get involved:

*“Before Foresters’ Forest there were organisations doing things,...What FF did was expand what was here. It got some of the groups talking to each other, which itself was quite a significant achievement. It provided an opportunity for these groups to ask themselves and each other ‘Where are we going?’.”*

(Coleford Town Council, 2021)

The Forestry England perspective on the benefits from involvement with the programme were described as a desire *“to enhance the heritage of the forest”* in any way possible, along with a recognition that if Forestry England did not offer to host the programme it would not have happened. Forestry England, however, were clear that they did not want to dominate

the programme or its objectives, aiming at a 'light touch approach' which has been "a tightrope walk to get the balance right" (Forestry England, 2021).

## 3.5 Making a difference: a summary of the Foresters' Forest outcomes

Project outcomes described in Section 3 focus on the extent to which individual projects delivered against the nine NLHF outcome criteria. The analysis revealed high levels of outcome attainment in the majority of projects. Over the programme as a whole the major focus was on outcomes improving heritage identification/recording and condition, developing learning and skills in people, volunteering and engaging with the wider community. Project outcomes targeted at improving environmental quality and making communities better places to live were limited in scope. The NLHF outcomes, however, only partially describe the impact of the Foresters' Forest Programme on the wider community of the Forest of Dean. The aim of this section is to explore some of the wider impacts and benefits arising from engagement with Foresters' Forest over the seven years of Programme development and delivery.

Evidence for the wider community impacts described below come from thematic analysis of interviews and discussion groups conducted with Project Leaders, Programme personnel, and other stakeholders during the period October 2021 – February 2022, and exploration of the Legacy plans and project progress reports. Themes were identified as stemming from changes in:

- human and social capital
- heritage condition
- access to, or use of, material resources
- application of technology

The analytical results are summarised in the 6 diagrams below (Figures 18 – 23), developed from tables of output and outcome evidence which can be found in Appendix 1. Wider outcomes are described under six broad themes:

- Consensus and Recognition
- Heritage condition
- Information resources
- Inclusiveness
- Community engagement
- Building capacity and resilience

The focus of the analysis is on exploration of the ways in which the FF Programme has 'made a difference' not just to the heritage of the area, but to the people living in the Forest, and their capacity to influence and shape their communities after the Programme ends in 2022. Each theme is summarised in the diagrams below illustrating how the projects contribute to wider outcomes across the Forest of Dean.

### Making a difference: Consensus and Recognition

Figure 18 illustrates broad outcomes arising from the implementation of the FF Programme. Stakeholders identified development of a consensus on biodiversity management arising from partner organisations working together on the same land area to achieve multiple goals (e.g. improvements in habitat for butterflies, birds, reptiles, and grazing animals). Forestry England viewed the FF funding opportunity as a means of getting agreement from (sometimes rival) organisations to work towards a common goal of improving biodiversity in the Forest of Dean.

Consensus for improving biodiversity is a positive outcome for future management of the Forest. Consensus also occurs at smaller scales within community groups of interest. One key outcome of the FF Programme was development of agreement among Freeminers on how to secure the future sustainability of freemining, resulting in bringing together very independent-minded individuals to establish purchase of a briquetting machine and develop a new CIC to manage it.

Additional outcomes, which also have potential to change the way the Forest of Dean is managed arise from changed perceptions or 'recognition' based on new evidence. The recognition of high ecological value of the forest waterways arising from research carried out under the Wetscapes, ponds and mires project has the potential to alter forest management to protect the future of this aquatic resource.

Recognition of the significance of Forest of Dean heritage also applies to the cultural heritage and archaeological remains. The work carried out under the Buried Heritage project (ground truthing the LIDAR survey, excavations) has revealed a much richer archaeological resource that was previously thought existed, with the potential to alter thinking about how the forest was settled and utilised. Finally, discoveries made through research carried out under the Reading the Forest project have led to a re-think about the extent and significance of the literary heritage, in particular through discovery of a more extensive literary heritage going back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Voices from the Forest and Oral histories projects have also unearthed new ways of looking at the Forest through exploring lives of a wider cross-section of society (e.g. women, children).

Recognition of how new information can alter understanding and perceptions of an area have the potential to open people up to new ideas about the significance of the natural/cultural heritage, making new management and partnership approaches possible - a significant outcome for the FF Programme.

### Improved Heritage Condition

As described earlier in Section 3, there has been considerable improvement in some aspects of heritage condition across the Foresters' Forest area. In terms of natural heritage, conservation grazing and active habitat management has had a positive impact for butterflies, birds, and potentially for other species (e.g. Adders). Management around Bat roosts, and hedge gapping (as well as enhanced understanding of flyways) has led to improved land management favouring bats at specific sites, and training local landowners has improved the scope for more wildflower meadows in other parts of the Forest (Figure 19).

Figure 18. Making a difference: Consensus and recognition

**Making a difference: Consensus & Recognition**

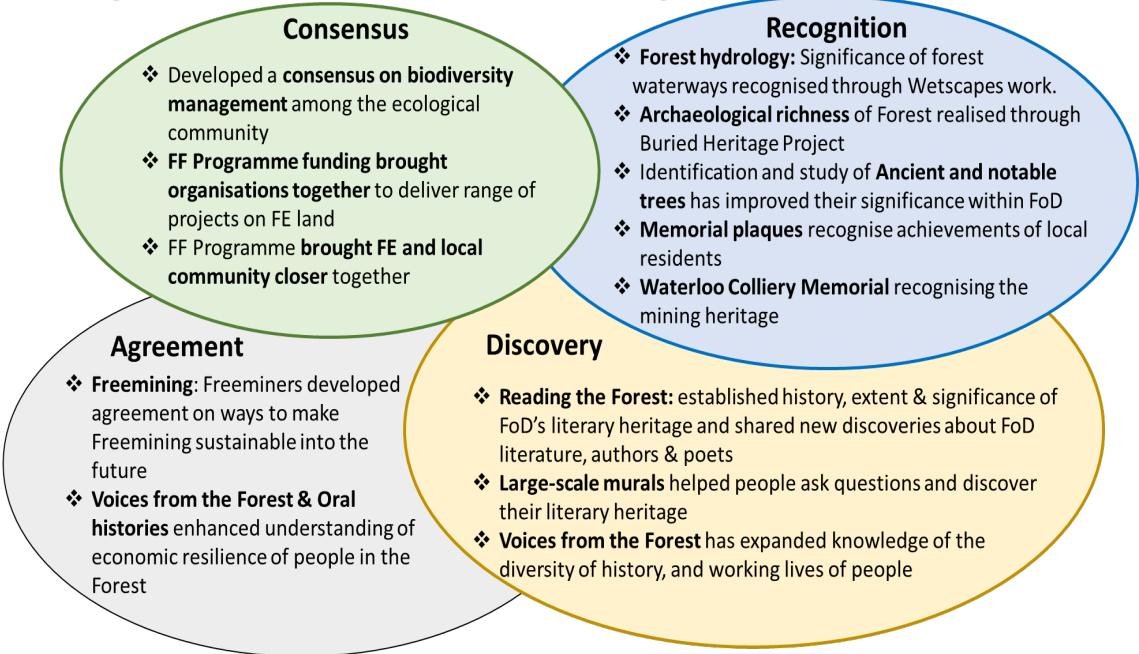
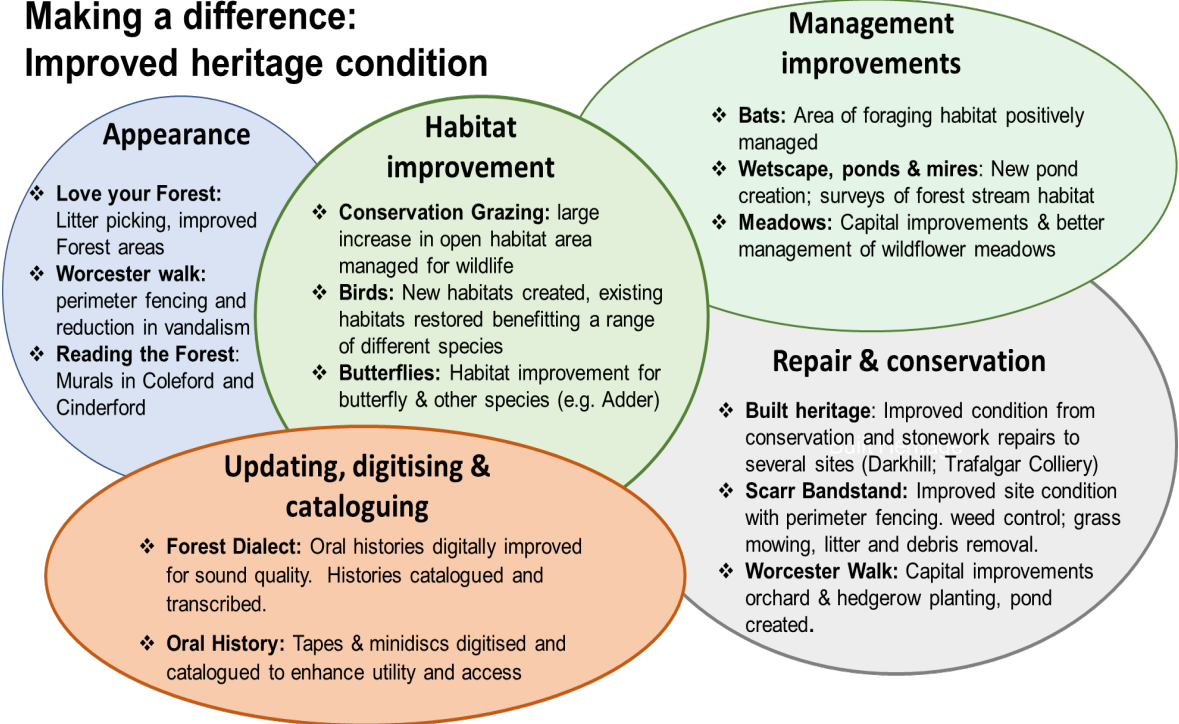


Figure 19. Making a difference: Improved heritage condition

**Making a difference: Improved heritage condition**



For built heritage, repair and conservation work has improved the condition of a number of sites. Community activity to tidy-up and improve Worcester Walk has resulted in a fenced area more highly valued for local use, and on a wider scale the litter picking organised under the Love Your Forest project has improved appearance of Forest areas (though it may not have had much impact on littering behaviour). In terms of cultural heritage, the oral histories project that focused on digitising and cataloguing of old interviews has resulted in better condition of a historical archive for future use, while Voices from the Forest has added additional material to the archive.

### Information resources

A major focus of effort under the FF Programme for many projects was identifying and recording information about the current state of the natural, built, and cultural heritage. Figure 20 illustrates the number of projects involved in generating information, summarising the material generated by wildlife and habitat surveys, monitoring, the LIDAR surveys, and validation of archaeological sites. In addition to the data collected, many projects have also developed websites and produced a range of supporting material (such as reports, presentations, podcasts). A significant outcome has been the educational materials prepared by several projects for schools, and the 'Story of the Forest' and 'Wildlife of the Forest' books targeted specifically at primary schools, which together provide a range of resources to assist schools in adapting their curriculum to encompass a local heritage focus.

The Musical Landscape project enhanced the level of materials deposited with the Dean Heritage Centre (including old programmes, instruments, uniforms and trophies) many of which were associated with the brass bands linked to coal mines. The suite of cultural heritage projects around recording of local resident's memories has improved the accessibility of oral histories as well as adding new ones to the collection at the Dean Heritage Centre. Reading the Forest published an anthology of Forest authors and produced podcasts during the lockdown period as an additional resource, and the heritage Apps (Geology, Hidden Heritage of the Dean, Cinderford, Coleford) provide information resources in an alternative format that can link people with the past at specific geographic locations.

In addition, the FF Programme Team delivered a range of interpretive activities and materials targeted at the wider community. These included guided walks and mini-bus tours visiting specific project sites (e.g. for teachers, local Councillors, tourism providers), and interpretive materials (such as a series of films, a 'Map & Guide' leaflet and more interpretation boards for Conservation Grazing (3 boards), and a Buried Heritage interpretation board at Ruardean Castle).

The wider community benefits from access to the enhanced information resources through learning and increasing knowledge about the local area. The use of digital technologies has enabled provision of material in different formats targeted at a range of audiences. Information provides the basis for understanding and improved future management of the heritage resource of the Forest.

Figure 20. Making a difference: Enhanced information resources

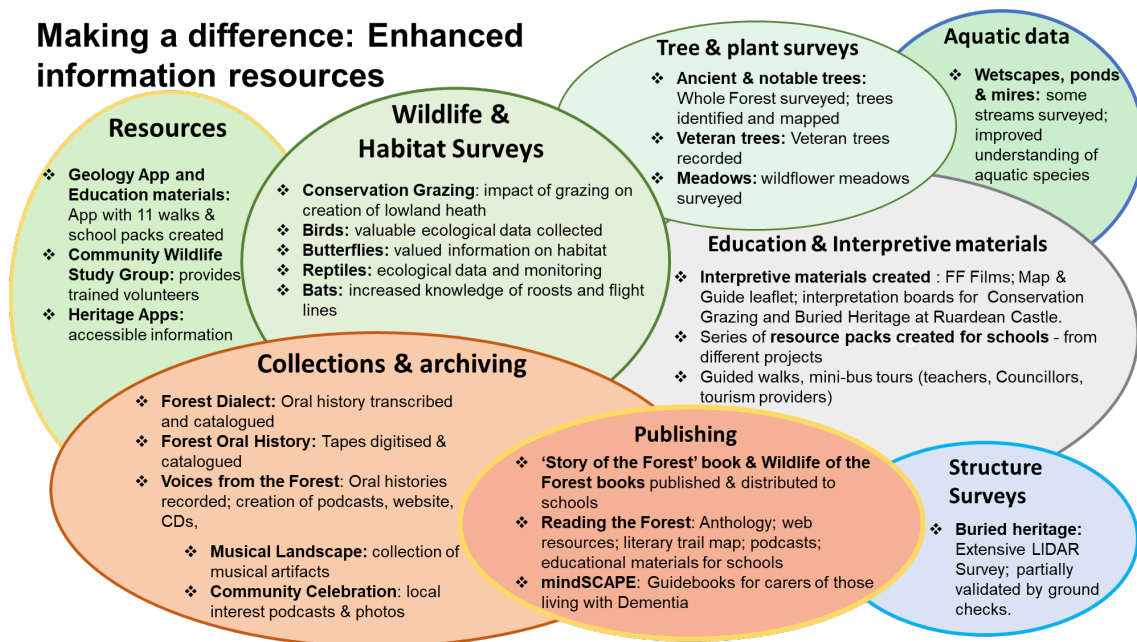
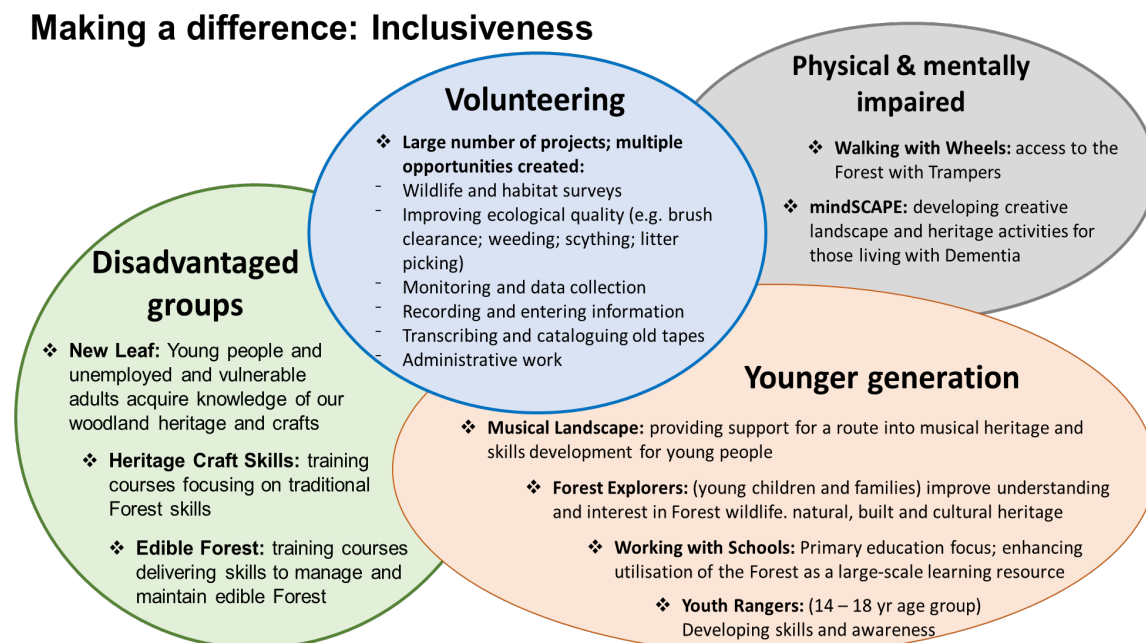


Figure 21. Making a difference: Inclusiveness





### Inclusiveness

A significant outcome of the FF Programme was its inclusiveness, in terms of having a range of projects targeting very different sectors of the population, and through provision of volunteering opportunities across the community (Figure 21).

Projects targeted the young (Forest Explorers, Youth Rangers; Schools; Musical Landscape), those in care (mindSCAPE), and the physically impaired (Walking with Wheels). Disadvantaged sectors of society were also supported through provision of courses and skills workshops delivered through the New Leaf and Heritage Craft Skills projects. Access to Forest Explorer activities was maximised through only requiring a nominal contribution (£1 per child per session) while the Musical Landscape project introduced young people and adults to the musical heritage. Project volunteers went into schools and provided tuition, creating an alternative route into instrument playing closed-off with the loss of local authority support for music tuition. The project increased the self-esteem of those involved as well as making people more aware of and proud of their local musical traditions.

Volunteering enabled people from all sectors of the community to engage with activities and subject areas that interested them. Some volunteering work (such as habitat improvement) required a certain level of physical fitness, while other tasks could be geared to those less active (recording and entering data, transcribing). The wide range of projects created opportunities for older and less physically able to engage as much as younger and fitter sectors of society.

The Buried Heritage project, for example, was over-subscribed with volunteers but took on people with a range of abilities from digging trenches to washing and recording finds. Volunteers in discussion groups and in response to the on-line survey indicated they were made to feel welcome, and their contributions valued.

### Community engagement

A significant area of success for the FF programme was the level of community engagement in FF Programme and project activities (Figure 22). Projects raised awareness through presentations, talks, guided walks, creation of information resources. Community Celebration for example put on performances that increased awareness of the local heritage, while the Freemining project took people on guided tours underground, undertook school visits and contributed to the Story of the Forest book. The Musical Landscape project delivered performances raising awareness of the musical heritage and engaged with schools providing a 'road into music' for some children.

Projects and the FF Programme itself organised open days and events including music at Scarr Bandstand (which had high levels of attendance), wildlife engagement days, and archaeology open days. There were more active means of engaging with heritage for young people through Forest Explorers and Youth Rangers, and skills workshops (New Leaf and Heritage Craft Skills) which had large numbers of participants. In addition, projects offered a range of ways to get involved from accessing web-based resources to volunteering.

A number of projects engaged with schools through offering open days, visiting schools, and/or producing resource packs for teachers. Some of these activities were highly successful (e.g. visits to local sites) but the early engagement organised by the FF

Figure 22. Making a difference: Community engagement

### Making a difference: Community engagement

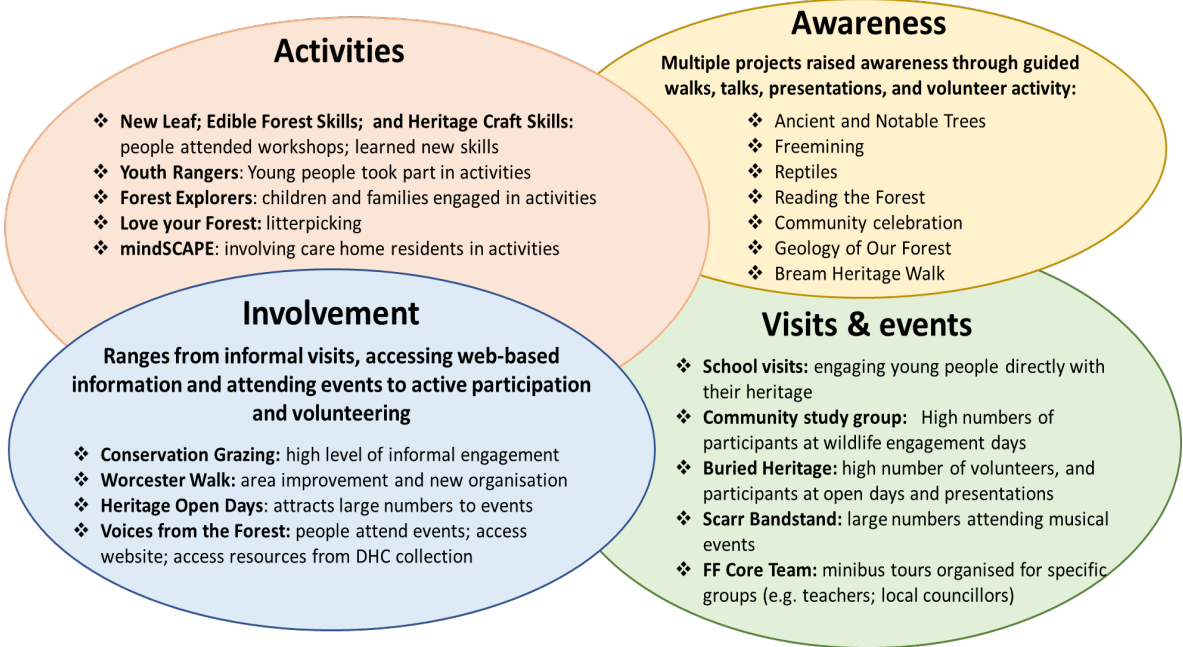
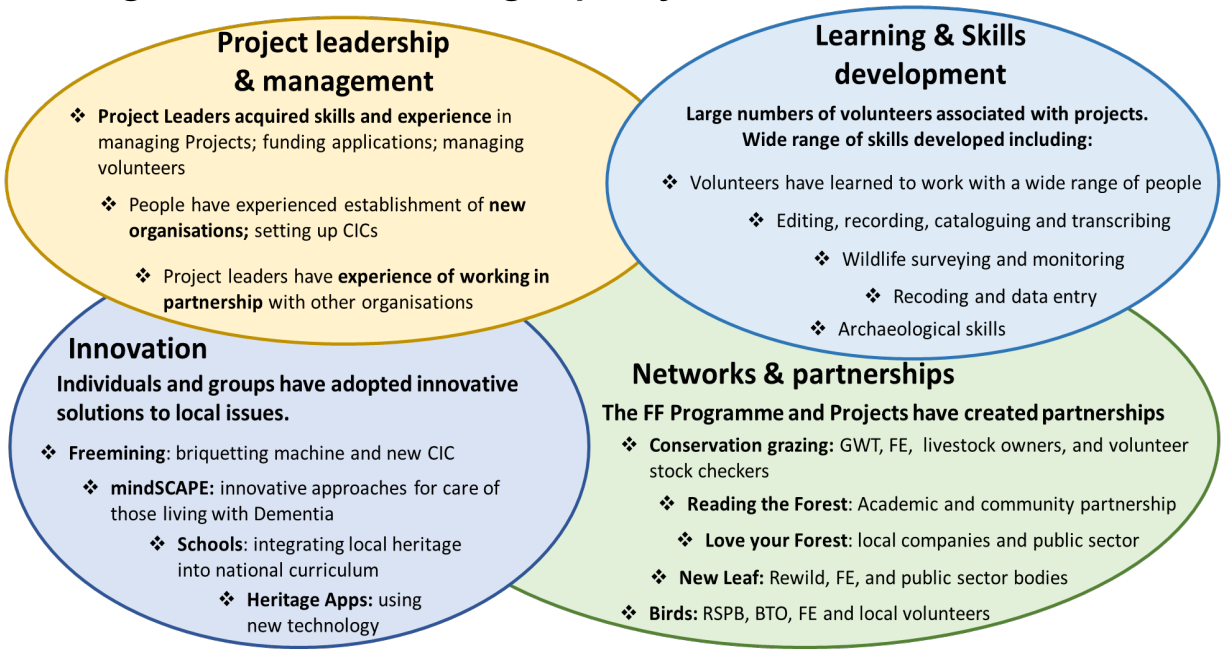


Figure 23. Making a difference: Building capacity and resilience

### Making a difference: Building capacity and resilience



programme team was limited by the impact of Covid (which reduced teacher capacity for engagement), and the difficulty for teachers to engage with new materials with limited time and support from head teachers. One Project Leader noted the high level of input required to make the resource packs useful:

*“We had an expectation of working with schools at the start of the programme. We saw ourselves as producing resources for schools, but we realised that was no use - unless you go in and work with the teachers. You need to spend time with the teachers, explain the resources, and sometimes just to take the load off them by delivering activities.”*

(Project Leader interview, 2022)

Over the five-year delivery period large numbers of people either volunteered, participated in, or attended, events, and accessed the new information resources created by the Programme. The on-line survey results also suggest a strong latent demand for additional learning about the natural, built and cultural heritage of the Forest, and the over-subscription of volunteers to some projects suggests a strong desire for more active engagement in certain aspects (such as wildlife and natural heritage, archaeology). Engagement generates greater understanding and awareness of local heritage resources, with the potential to make the local community more aware of the current and future threats and management needs, and more open to innovative solutions.

### Building capacity and resilience

The final diagram (Figure 23) identifies the impact of the FF Programme on building capacity and resilience in local communities and organisations. Individuals and community groups have had the opportunity to develop project management and leadership skills, through experience. A small number of individuals have been involved in establishing new organisations (Freemining CIC; Friends of Worcester Walk community group). Project leaders have gained experience of managing volunteers and working in partnership with other organisations. The capacity for developing, bidding for funding, and implementing local projects, is stronger than it was prior to the FF Programme. In addition, a large core of volunteers exists with a desire to continue involvement in ‘looking after the Forest’ and many are trained in aspects of surveying/monitoring, data collection and recording, and habitat management.

The FF Programme also includes organisations or individuals who have adopted innovative solutions to the challenges facing their community or activity of interest. The Freeminers set up a CIC and purchased a briquetting plant from abroad that will enhance the sustainability of Freemining in the forest, activities that would have appeared impossible before the FF Programme. The Hidden Heritage and Geology projects used new technology to develop Apps allowing people to connect directly with local heritage on their phones, mindSCAPE developed innovative approaches to engage those living with Dementia with their heritage, and the School’s project promoted opportunities to re-vamp the curriculum to teach primary school children about their local areas.

### Summary of outcomes

This section has described a range of wider community outcomes arising from the Foresters' Forest Programme. Taken together, the project activities, the inclusive nature of the programme, the use of volunteers, the emphasis on partnership working, the knowledge and awareness generated by new information, and recognition of the significance of some of the local heritage, have created hidden benefits for the Forest of Dean communities.

The activities undertaken by projects, the new information generated, the level of engagement, and experiences of volunteers and project leaders has laid a foundation for more effective involvement of the local community in the future conservation and management of their heritage. The increased knowledge and awareness of heritage, the social capital and skills that have been developed, and the management and leadership experience, has the potential to make the area more resilient and adaptable to future change. How that might happen is briefly explored in the final section of this report.

# 4. Legacy

## 4.1 Project legacy arrangements

The majority of FF Projects have completed forms focussing on their planned legacy. A key outcome from the Programme is that 26 out of the initial 38 projects are planning to continue operation into the future (Tables 17 and 18). A large proportion of the Stronghold for Nature projects will continue with support from Forestry England and other partners that have been involved with delivery (e.g. RSPB, GWT, BTO). These are the projects that have had a management focus based on improving the condition of the natural heritage (Biodiversity) of the Forest. FoD volunteers, some with key expertise (e.g. David Dewsbury on Reptiles), will also be involved in project delivery, in relation to Reptiles, Dean Meadows, Butterflies, Wetscape, and Blakeney Weir. The four projects not continuing, mostly involved with collecting and recording information, are unlikely to develop further because their tasks are complete

Only three of the Exploring our Forest projects will continue. Heritage Open Days will operate as before, delivered through the MCTI Partnership based in Coleford, Walking with Wheels will continue to operate and the Worcester Walk project will continue to develop but be re-labelled as 'Friends of Worcester Walk'.

The four projects under the Revealing our Past theme will continue but mostly at a lower level of activity and will be reliant on obtaining funding from other sources.

The majority of projects under the Celebrating our Forest and Securing our Future themes will continue. Rewild will deliver Heritage Craft Skills, Edible Forest, and New Leaf, operating out of Kelsey Sheds under a Forestry England licence agreement and funding activities from other sources. Love Your Forest will continue to be delivered through a partnership between Forestry England, local authorities and the private sector. Community Celebration will be run by Wyldwood Arts but along with Reading the Forest and Scarr Bandstand will need to find other sources of funding to achieve their objectives.

Projects targeted at the younger generation have a more uncertain future. Youth Rangers will continue to be delivered through Wye Valley AONB whilst, the future of the Forest Explorers will depend on continued volunteer activity but overseen in the short term by GWT and Forestry England, and the existing materials from the Working with Schools project will be promoted through West Gloucestershire Schools Partnership. The Freemining Association will continue its work of maintaining cultural heritage and funding activities through operation of the briquetting machine.

The dependence on Forestry England support for the continuation of activities is high for a significant number of projects that operate on Forestry England land and require licences to continue their work (7 projects), or expert/supervisory advice and support from personnel (8 projects). This reliance illustrates the key role played by Forestry England in underpinning the FF Programme activities utilising the Forestry England estate.

Table 17. Planned approach for projects continuing after March 2022

	<b>Projects Continuing after March 2022</b>	<b>Planned approach</b>
<b>Stronghold for Nature</b>	Conservation Grazing	Continued by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, under agreement with Forestry England
	Birds	Continued by British Trust for Ornithology volunteers, liaising with RSPB and Forestry England
	Community Wildlife Study Group	Continues as Wildlife Study Group, directed by Forestry England
	Reptiles	Continued by David Dewsbury, working with Forestry England
	Wetscape, Waterways, Ponds and Mires	Ponds work continued by David Dewsbury, Waterways volunteering will continue, directed by Forestry England
	Blakeney Weir	Volunteers will continue to monitor the eel pass each Spring
	Butterflies	Continued by Forestry England and local volunteers
	Deans Marvellous Meadows	Dean Meadows Group will continue
<b>Exploring our Forest</b>	Heritage Open Days	Continued by Coleford Area MCTI Partnership
	Walking with Wheels	Countryside Mobility will continue the Tramper service, working with Forest Holidays, The Speech House Hotel and Forestry England
	Worcester Walk Community Project	Continued under licence from Forestry England, finding funds for future activities
<b>Revealing our Past</b>	Buried Heritage	The LIDAR Survey element will continue, led by Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service and supported by Forestry England
	Voices from the Forest	Will continue, likely to need external funds
	Forest Oral History	Dean Heritage Centre will continue this work
	Heritage Craft Skills	Rewild Project will continue this work, with other funds
<b>Celebrating our Forest</b>	Community Celebration	Wyldwood Arts plan to continue community projects, supported by other funds
	Edible Forest	The Rewild Project will continue this work, with other funds
	Love your Forest	Love Your Forest campaign will continue: partnership of Forestry England and Forest of Dean District Council
	Reading the Forest	Will continue, likely to need external funds
	Scarr Bandstand	Will continue under licence from Forestry England, seeking external funds to rebuild the roof on the bandstand
<b>Securing our Future</b>	A future for Freeminning	Will continue. Freeminers Association may need funds, depending on income from sales of briquettes
	A future for Commoning	Local grazier will continue, working with Forestry England
	Forest Explorers	Will continue, hopefully run by volunteers, supported by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust & Forestry England
	New Leaf	The Rewild Project will continue this work, with other funds
	Youth Rangers	Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will continue with Youth Rangers
	Working with Schools	Learning Resources from various projects transferred to West Gloucestershire Schools Partnership (WGSP) which will continue to promote their use amongst schools in the Forest

Table 18. Proposed actions in relation to projects not continuing after March 2022

	Projects Not continuing	Proposed action
Stronghold for Nature	Batscape	Continued by Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat SAC (Special Area of Conservation) Policy document
	Woodland Flora	Project Complete. Forestry England will use information gathered.
	Ancient and Notable Trees	Project Complete. Forestry England will use information gathered.
	Veteran Trees History	Project Complete. Forestry England will use information gathered.
Exploring our Forest	Bream Heritage Walk	Geoff Davis will continue to oversee the route, working with Forestry England, and will provide supplies of the walk leaflet
	Hidden Heritage App	Complete. All three apps will continue to be available to download for FREE: Hidden Heritage of the Dean, Coleford's Hidden Heritage, Cinderford's Hidden Heritage
Revealing our Past	Built Heritage	Project Complete
	Forest Dialect	Project Complete
	Geology	Project Complete
Celebrating our Forest	Forest Musical Landscape	Project Complete
	Mindscape	Project Complete
	Interpretation and events	Project Complete. Identifying partner organisations who can host some Foresters' Forest website content FOD Local History Society, Dean Archaeology Group and West Gloucestershire Schools Partnership

## 4.2 Long-term legacy of the Foresters' Forest Programme

Stakeholders were asked for their perceptions of the longer-term legacy of the Foresters' Forest Programme. The views of two local authorities interviewed at the end of 2021 are summarised in Table 19. Interviewees noted the value of improved condition of the natural and built heritage, and of enhanced awareness of the Forest of Dean heritage. The most important legacy outcomes were identified for people and communities in terms of access to the physical assets developed (such as the Heritage Apps), volunteer involvement, and "a *'re-valuing' of the 'Forester' by other people*" suggesting there is a higher level of respect for those who have lived in the Forest all their lives (and/or are 'born and bred') in terms of the embedded knowledge and memories they hold, some of which will have been passed down from previous generations. The extent of such views is unknown, but it does suggest that a greater awareness of the value of the cultural heritage has seeped into the wider community, possibly as a result of projects such as Reading the Forest, Voices of the Forest, the murals and plaques that have been created in the local towns, and the Schools project.

Coleford Town Council interviewees admitted that there were “*Lots of possibilities in terms of what will realistically happen*” in the long-term but stated that “*...it would be a travesty to lose the stronger connections that the community has developed because there has never been a better opportunity to work with Forestry England*”. Coleford TC interviewees also suggested there had been missed opportunities for the town council to work with community anchor organisations.

Local authorities were also careful not to put too much emphasis on the FF programme as the sole causal mechanism for the changes identified. Interviewees noted that many of the organisations operating across the Forest were already in existence before the programme started, they accessed the funding that became available and now that the programme is finishing the perception was that they will reduce their level of activities and operate at a smaller scale in the future. The Town Council was aware of the benefits the Programme had created, however, and were keen to ensure these are not lost once the ‘FF umbrella’ disappears.

*“The way I see it is we started out with some organisations already existing, we expanded because of FF and when it’s gone we will continue going on, but reduced again. It’s now more about the individual organisations building back their own identity again into the future.”*

*“Changes have come not just from FF. There is an increased awareness about the heritage of the Forest. The FF plays a part in that and Covid also played a part because people were forced to start looking more closely at their local area and going for local walks, discovering places they had never visited.”*

(Coleford Town Council Interview, 2021)

Forestry England also suggested that in terms of physical benefits for the Forest, some activities that were operating previously were badged under the Foresters’ Forest Programme and would revert to carrying on operations as they had before the programme started. Examples given include the Birds, Reptiles, and Butterfly projects. Other activities, such as Wetscapes, would not have occurred without the Foresters’ Forest funding and support and this was identified as significant through highlighting the importance of the waterways that will change thinking about Forest planning and management (Forestry England, 2021).



**Table 19. Local Council perceptions of the long-lasting effects from the Foresters' Forest Programme**

Long-term outcome	Description	
For heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ There is an increased awareness about the heritage of the Forest.</li> <li>➤ Lasting outcomes will be better habitats and environments in some areas of the Forest and safeguarding of the industrial heritage.</li> </ul>	<p>Coleford TC</p> <p>FoD district Council</p>
For people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The open days and the Coleford Area Walking Festival – we always include 3 or 4 elements of the FF in this event.</li> <li>➤ It's amazing how many local people don't know the area. Things like Bream heritage walk really add value.</li> <li>➤ Those people who got involved had good experiences - we had a thousand unique volunteers.</li> <li>➤ There has been a 're-valuing' of the 'Forester' by other people – incomers and even by those who have lived here for decades. A re-valuing of those born and bred here for what they know about the area and the culture, for their cultural heritage, memories, and knowledge of what went before handed down from previous generations through family stories.</li> </ul>	<p>Coleford TC</p>
For communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increased awareness about the heritage of the Forest.</li> <li>➤ Opportunities provided to local organisations to expand their membership and activities</li> <li>➤ The improvements to heritage will require engaging people to take ownership of the resources. To a certain extent this can be undertaken by existing community groups such as the Forest of Dean Local History Society and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.</li> </ul>	<p>Coleford TC</p> <p>FoD district Council</p>
Material resources/ assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Physical assets such as the Apps and the walks (Bream Heritage walk, Coleford Heritage App) Worcester walk, Geology Trail and App).</li> <li>➤ The educational resources, for example the book just published – a fantastic publication - there's a very high demand for it.</li> <li>➤ The survey data collected will be useful, it will feed through into local plans for years to come.</li> <li>➤ Expressed hope that some of the material improvements would have a longer life span (e.g. the eel pass at Blakeney weir) but will require volunteer input and support.</li> </ul>	<p>Coleford TC</p> <p>FoD district Council</p>
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The networks that have developed among organisations involved in programme delivery</li> <li>➤ Stronger community connections developed with Forestry England</li> <li>➤ The Forest Forum will survive as Forestry England will always need a partnership element for their community work.</li> </ul>	<p>Coleford TC</p> <p>FoD district Council</p>

### Project Leader Group Discussion

Project Leaders were also asked about their perception of the future in relation to community engagement with the Forest (Table 20). The group agreed that “...a lot of projects will require a low level of funding to keep going in the future”, which would be difficult for some which may not survive. Project Leaders made reference to similar issues to those highlighted by local authorities. Training of younger people, materials resources (e.g. school packs), and capital investments in building, machinery and land were all identified as key elements of their project legacies. Discussants also noted the need for Forestry England licences to continue operations, and future funding for maintenance and operational activities, although in most cases the need was for small annual amounts of funding rather than large scale grants.

**Table 20. Project Leaders Discussion Group: Perception of the long-lasting effects from the Foresters’ Forest Programme**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Description</b>
Buried Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Building a website to be hosted by the Dean Archaeological Group.</li> <li>➤ The Group has been refreshed as a result of the FF programme and the hosting fees will be funded for 3 years.</li> <li>➤ Forestry England wants to continue the Lidar work and there are school packs for teachers</li> </ul>
Conservation Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue grazing. Already have new agreement with Forestry England.</li> </ul>
Freemining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Trained younger people. Improvements to training are a key legacy of the programme and we have identified needs and are sending people on courses where needed.</li> <li>➤ Major legacy was purchase of a building and a briquetting machine (to enable utilisation of small coal that could otherwise not be sold); will make Freemining financially more sustainable in the future.</li> <li>➤ Established a CIC to administer the briquetting machine.</li> <li>➤ The FF programme provided support for specialist training in addition to that delivered in the traditional manner, i.e. the older, experienced miners, training the younger ones. Positive outcomes include more mines being open and more people learning about mining that at any time since the 1980s.</li> </ul>
Worcester Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ We have formed ‘Friends of Worcester Walk’. We are designing a logo.</li> <li>➤ We will continue with an Forestry England licence – there is conservation work that needs doing each year</li> <li>➤ A lot of the capital investment work is done but the land will still need managing. Funding will be an issue; some money will be required for scything and mowing.</li> </ul>
Bream Heritage Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ We have created a walk along public footpaths and on Forestry England land.</li> <li>➤ Signage has been put up on big posts and they will last for quite a while.</li> <li>➤ The big issue is paying for a re-print of the guidebook (brochure &amp; map) hoping to get some sponsorship to pay for a print run.</li> </ul>
Group discussion on Forest Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ So much has been done and it will not cost much to maintain it, there are enough younger people involved now to carry it on.</li> <li>➤ Future will require a lead organisation. A body will be required to pull down funding, administrate, and coordinate activity into the future</li> </ul>

One of the PL discussion groups spent time exploring the need for a lead organisation, how it might operate, and what role it might play. Discussants noted the issue had been discussed multiple times over the previous couple of years. The idea of a Forest Forum that could encompass the 38 projects was explored but those present were asking themselves how it would be constituted and what it would do. Two options put forward were for an organisation that is more of a discussion group and means of communicating information versus one that 'had a few teeth' and would be prepared to challenge and influence policy makers. A range of options were discussed but no agreement on the way forward. The group noted it was an issue that needed to be resolved before the FF Programme ended.

### Volunteer perspective on the Legacy

Perceptions of the long-lasting impacts or effects from projects was explored in two volunteer discussion groups. Volunteers identified outcomes directly related to the projects they had worked on; specific benefits were identified such as the survey data generated, the capital investments (weir bypass, fencing, heritage apps). There was also a high level of concern expressed for the future of projects that they had worked on and what would happen after the project ended (Table 21).

Volunteers noticed several changes in project leadership and were concerned at the loss of expertise; they indicated a desire to maintain involvement but the need for leadership. There was also a strong feeling of not knowing or understanding what was happening to projects, and what the future might hold. Overall the hope was expressed that the FF programme would be able continue in some form and that they would be able to engage in project activities, and maintain the friendships and social relations that had been developed:

*"The fellowship of Forest friends and Forest people that I've met. It has inspired me to do more volunteering. It's not just the experts I met but the friends I have made."*

(Volunteer Discussion Group, 2021)

**Table 21. Volunteers Discussion Group: Perception of the long-lasting effects from the Foresters' Forest Programme**

Long-term outcome	Description
For heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Wildlife projects increased the biodiversity,</li> <li>➤ It captured the Forest information e.g. the wildlife surveys, the Oral histories.</li> <li>➤ The Lidar survey work is in progress, to cover the remaining areas of the Forest, finding anomalies in an area and producing data.</li> <li>➤ We are still monitoring the impact of the weir bypass.</li> <li>➤ Fencing to enable conservation grazing</li> <li>➤ The Sphagnum Moss survey data</li> </ul>
For people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Geoheritage Apps walk, the Hidden Heritage apps - those things won't fade away.</li> <li>➤ The FF project proved a lot of people want to get involved. The concern is who will take it on if they (the project leaders, the experts) move on. For example, with Wetscape a key Leader is leaving, and no-one has stepped forward.</li> <li>➤ With New Leaf I've no idea what's happening. I've no idea who owns the shed or the equipment. One of the Leaders has moved on. There are a lot of disadvantaged people who get a lot out of that project.</li> <li>➤ The change in people involved – they have come out of the woodwork. We have been trained, for example in surveys of invertebrates and we are now thinking of setting up groups of volunteers to carry on the survey. Some of the volunteers still want to do that.</li> <li>➤ We have created a body of people who know each other now but we need someone to stand up and coordinate things. It would be good to find a way to keep things going. Rosie Kelsall acted as a channel of communication.</li> <li>➤ We had a training course on doing small surveys and the Sphagnum Moss people are keen to get together to keep it going.</li> </ul>
For local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The history book that was developed for schools.</li> <li>➤ Worcester Walk changed the local landscape for the better.</li> </ul>

## 4.3 Future threats and potential opportunities to further develop project outputs/benefits

A wide range of stakeholders agreed that a significant number of groups involved with FF projects would continue beyond March 2022. Many groups that will continue were in existence before the FF Programme started and will pick up where they left off, but with less funding. Examples include:

- Forest of Dean Local History Society (it was there before – it will be there afterwards)
- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) (a stronger presence in the Forest than previously)
- Reading the Forest (there is a real commitment that it will continue)
- Rewild (now has access to alternative sources of funding for some of its activities)
- Dean Meadows Group (it was there before – it will be there afterwards)
- Freeminers (now stronger and more confident than previously)

The FF survey of projects indicates that 26 out of the 38 projects intend to continue, although as noted in Section 4.1, a considerable number rely on Forestry England for support and permits to undertake their activities, and most will have to find alternative sources of funding.

There are potential opportunities to build on the capital investments, body of work, volunteer skills, and good will generated through the five years of the FF Programme. Forestry England also has an outline strategy for future community engagement in its 'Our Shared Forest' document. This identifies potential Forestry England commitments in the future, focusing a lot on the natural and Built Heritage as well as commitment to seeing the Lidar work continue (Forestry England Interview, 2021).

A perceived threat to building on the FF Programme is the slow progress being made over creation of a community-based organisation that will coordinate and lead activities. Stakeholders interviewed about community engagement over the next five to ten years expressed some frustration at the slow progress and lack of agreement over how to move forward from the FF Programme. One suggestion put forward has been for a Forest Forum, perhaps formed from the existing Community Stakeholder Group of the FF Programme. The model would have a minimum of 2 meetings per year and an opportunity for all existing groups in the FF, and new ones, to come together to discuss issues, celebrate achievements, and share their experience and knowledge of the heritage of the FoD. Forestry England have offered to fund a Secretariat for whatever organisation is created (Forestry England Interview, 2021).

Two key sticking points revolve around the nature and role of the Forum and getting agreement on who would lead or chair it. One suggestion put forward is for the Verderers to take a more active role, but this is not universally supported.

More generally the biodiversity crisis is viewed as a potential threat (Forestry England Interview 2021) across the UK based on the lack of understanding of ecological relationships within a largely urban community. The lack of understanding makes it difficult to *"...get volunteers out to play an active part in monitoring the environment and being advocates for*

*change*” but a future opportunity for the Forest of Dean is the Biosphere Reserve Bid with a committee that is currently being considered. Forestry England noted that such a bid offered an opportunity that has not been available to the Forest of Dean area for a long time:

*“The ‘core forest’ has been pushed in for hundreds of years by industry and urban development – a biosphere reserve would be an opportunity for it to breathe out again and push outwards into the wider landscape.”*

(Forestry England Interview, 2021)

Coleford Town Council noted that the FF Programme created a funding opportunity to undertake a wide range of activities and also brought in new people with different skills. One interviewee identified the Apps as creating opportunities to attract more visitors and demonstrate the cultural heritage of the Forest. Interviewees indicated potential opportunities from building on new information on the Mushet family and what they did in the area, suggesting they could perhaps work with the Dean Heritage Centre on a ‘Festival of Mushet’.

# 5. Causal Mechanisms

## 5.1 Lessons Learned: what worked well and why

A number of factors influenced the overall impact and effectiveness of the Foresters' Forest Programme. These can be summarised under the following headings:

- Programme governance & management
- The role of Forestry England
- Programme support from NLHF
- Financial management & support
- Communications
- Project management & administration
- The nature of projects
- Community engagement
- Involvement of schools
- Volunteering
- Covid-19 Pandemic

Each of these factors will be described and their effects on Programme outcomes explored in more detail in the following sections.

### Programme governance & management

Stakeholders identified a range of factors contributing to the effectiveness of programme governance and management. Forestry England stated that a key reason for overall success of the programme was due to the involvement of a large number of grassroots projects, which 'emphasised the strength and breadth of the heritage of the FoD'. Community organisations were integrated into the planning, development, and delivery of the programme through representation on the CSG and Programme Board as well as project leadership. The high level of involvement combined with the way in which the Community Stakeholder Group (CSG) and Programme Board brought all the groups together was viewed as a major reason for successful programme governance over an extended period of time (FE, 2021) which included the initial failed bid, the development phase, the successful bid, and the five-year delivery period (in all a total of nine years).

The governance arrangements meant that local stakeholders sat on both the CSG and Programme Board, but decisions about Programme delivery were made at the CSG level which were then discussed and agreed by the Programme Board. The Programme Board was able to question and challenge CSG decisions and offer guidance.

*“The governance worked well. I could ask questions in the Programme Board meetings without having to get into debate about it with the project leaders sitting on the Community Stakeholder Group (CSG). We (the Programme Board) could challenge the CSG.”*

(Programme Board Member, 2021)

*“The set up was fairly clear – we were there because the CSG were doing the work; we were there to support them do that. The Programme Board respected the CSG decisions as they were the core of the project. Our job on the Board was to help them deliver.”*

(Programme Board Member, 2021)

The Programme Board also had a strong oversight role on financial allocations and expenditure. Quarterly reports on Project activities and spending enabled a high level of control and budget adjustments were made where required. When project changes or difficulties resulted in under-spending the Board acted by implementing re-allocation processes.

*“One year ago, for example, we were looking at an underspend and had to re-allocate funds but the Programme Board could see what was happening and we worked well with them. They always had a concern over underspend right from the start.”*

(Foresters’ Forest Programme Team, 2021)

The governance arrangements were not without difficulty and there were disagreements over programme delivery and managing conflict between projects and partners with different points of view. At one point, for example, when there were concerns about the slow expenditure of funding the Programme Board had to ‘apply pressure’ to ensure the Management team engaged in ‘difficult conversations with project leaders’. The problem was well managed by the Project Team but ‘the Board had to direct them’. Another issue was the conflict between local Forest of Dean based organisations and ‘external’ partners with specialist expertise leading or helping to deliver projects.

*“...an individual - representing an ‘external’ partner – had trouble at the CSG because his organisation was seen as ‘not of the forest’ but ‘doing unto the forest’. Therefore, initially there was a degree of hostility from some locally resident members. By the end of the delivery period, however, there was a grudging acceptance that they were doing good work.”*

(Programme Board Member, 2021)

The purpose of the CSG was to ensure that the programme funded what the community wanted, and not what big organisations ‘doing unto the forest’ wanted to see happen. This inevitably created some tension and conflict but overall, stakeholders agreed that the CSG worked (Forestry England, 2021). This surprised some Programme Board members who were unsure how such a large partnership with a large number of projects could possibly survive. The dedication and work of ‘very skilled people’ made it hang together (FoD District Council, 2021). An additional tension was created between the partners who were highly skilled and familiar with large scale project and programme delivery while others had no experience. One benefit from involvement of local organisations was that some are now upskilled and can engage in future funding bids.



## Programme management

A strength of the programme was the efficiency and effectiveness of the core delivery team based within Forestry England, which was widely agreed to be effective and efficient. Programme Board and CSG members noted that the project delivery ran smoothly and efficiently:

*“Sue (Programme Manager) has an innate ability to deal with detail. Programme management moved very smoothly.”* (Programme Board Member, 2021)

*“For project leaders, the central team are very efficient, helped people to learn about Forestry England operations and management.”* (Community Stakeholder Group, 2021)

Project Leaders, although they often found the administration a burden, also noted the strength and effectiveness of the overall management: *“The FF team with Sue as project manager, Helen and the others are a strong team, and very supportive.”* (PL discussion Group, 2021)

Being embedded within Forestry England was also viewed as a strength by the core delivery team, giving access to support systems and people with expertise, but even so Forestry England policies, processes and systems were initially viewed as challenging.

*“Everything is nailed down contractually. We have contracts, leases, licenses, permit systems – anything we do on Forestry England land has to go through one of these channels. It has been helpful to be located ‘in-house’, working on the inside, with all the paperwork. Some projects have licenses, but a lot have to go through permission system...It’s paper heavy – needs a 12-week lead in time – even though we are in the same building it does not go any faster.”*

(Foresters’ Forest Programme Team, 2021)

One weakness was the loss of a specialist Contracts Manager in Year 4) who had responsibility for tendering contracts and supervising contractors for the ‘works on the ground’ across a wide variety of projects. Her appointment ended ahead of the rest of the team because it was expected that all works contracts would be complete by then, but due to delays, changes in objectives, and late starts in some cases, works were not finished and it created additional work for the remaining Team (and wider Forestry England staff) members to manage the contracts and supervise contractors.

Programme Management also involved a high level of control over Finance Administration with regular reviews of the budget by both the Core Team and Programme Board. The Programme Board was particularly concerned to avoid underspend, which was a concern during the early part of the programme period as some projects were slow to start. Where it was clear projects would struggle to deliver their original objectives, funds were re-allocated to other projects to avoid underspend.

## The role of Forestry England

Forestry England hosted the FF Programme, providing office space, expertise, financial systems and administrative support, and the licences and permits to enable activities to take place on the forest estate (Programme Manager, 2021). Forestry England were also

identified as the key stimulus in “...having the vision to put the bid together in the first place” and played an essential role on the financial side by providing the accounting systems and ‘paying for everything up front’. Stakeholders generally agreed the Programme could not have been delivered without Forestry England support as the programme required a large organisation to support delivery. The close links between Forestry England and the FF Programme were also viewed as a two-edged sword. On the one hand being embedded in Forestry England provided access to administrative systems and permitting processes required by many projects. It also meant there were ‘always experts to call on when needed’ which made programme delivery efficient (Programme Manager, 2021). On the other hand, it led to lack of awareness of the separate identity of the FF Programme in the wider community and created a barrier for some stakeholders preventing engagement.

*“It was brilliant that Forestry England stepped in because their resources were required. It was not a comfortable way for them to work but overall, the Forest and its communities benefitted.”*

(Forest of Dean District Council, 2021)

Some stakeholders interviewed indicated a lack of understanding of the FF ‘brand’ across the wider community, suggesting that there was a significant amount of confusion between the FF and Forestry England, while others (usually those more closely connected to the Programme) felt the brand was strong (Coleford Town Council, 2021). In addition, some suggested that a barrier existed within the wider community based on resentment of the way in which Forestry England are perceived as managing the Forest estate. One recognised weakness of the Programme was the absence of representation from Commoners who utilise commoning to graze sheep in the Forest. Despite extensive discussion and the potential for financial support the commoners would not engage with the FF Programme.

*“A lot of people don’t rate the way they manage the estate – it created a barrier for the Foresters’ Forest, but they (Forestry England) also brought in a lot of rich resources to help deliver the programme. I’m not sure it could have been delivered without the Forestry England resources – after all they manage most of the land on which projects are based.”*

(Project Leader Interview, 2021)

*“The Commoners Association did not play ball – which was not a surprise. They have a culture where they think everyone is against them, it makes them difficult to work with. There is a body of stakeholders that want the commoners there, but they are so hostile to everyone.”*

(Programme Board Member, 2021)

From the Forestry England perspective there were also costs and benefits of being closely involved with the FF programme. A key strength was the ability to influence the governance structure of the Programme. Forestry England noted that Landscape Partnership programmes operating elsewhere tended to have a more centralised structure with the result that the partnership tends to deliver the main partner’s objectives, rather than those of the local community. Forestry England noted they wanted the FF Programme to be built from the ground up and deliver local community objectives and not impose their own set of goals.

*“We were clear we did not want this to be ‘FE’s Landscape Partnership’ so we structured it differently from day 1, and we have certainly been successful.”*

(Forestry England, 2021)

One of the downsides was that their advice and guidance was not always taken up:

*“It has also been frustrating because in a community partnership we sat at the back and were very much ignored sometimes.”*

(Forestry England, 2021)

There were also internal costs involved in delivery of the FF Programme. Forestry England noted the friction created by establishing a separate FF unit within the organisation indicating there had been “a 7-year battle within Forestry England for FF to be seen as a part of the whole”. Part of this was due to an “ingrained bunker mentality” by some that “the FF people were coming in and telling ‘normal’ workers how to do their jobs”. There was also a perception that FF was creating more work and some of it involved novel activities within Forestry England (the example of licencing a bandstand was given). (Community Stakeholder Group, 2021)

Forestry England stated that programme delivery ‘really stretched our estates teams – which was never costed in’ and included, for example, all the agreements which had to be made between Forestry England and individual projects operating on the Forestry England estate. This alone was estimated to take a full year of Assistant Land Agent time (i.e. 20% of the work of an Forestry England Estate Agent over 5 years). In addition, farm tenancy agreements were drawn up for the grazing, along with licences for all activities taking place on Forestry England land (e.g. Rewild; Scarr Bandstand, Worcester Walk), adding significantly to the workload.

The Forestry England bureaucracy also created friction with project leaders in the early years of the programme delivery as many of them were not used to the level of planning and paperwork required. Even those familiar with paperwork requirements found the bureaucracy challenging.

*“Forestry England policy has been a challenge in places, the permissions process is slow and long winded. It’s a hurdle. It’s not always easy, for example, to know 8 weeks in advance exactly what day you are going to be able to go out, and exactly where, when it depends on the weather.”*

(Project Leader Interview, 2022)

Large numbers of projects have complained about the level of paperwork and time requirements to go through Forestry England permission processes in order to undertake even simple activities at each stage of the programme delivery (baseline, mid-term, and final evaluations all have evidence of project leaders complaining about the level of programme bureaucracy).

FE, however, noted their bureaucracy is ‘both a blessing and a curse’. In the early days of programme delivery it meant that everything moved very slowly, but in the latter stages of delivery the projects benefitted because the paperwork, which addressed health and safety issues and ensured careful planning, had been completed. The argument was made that the rigorous level of control made projects stronger, noting that projects such as the Freeminers

purchase of a building and a briquetting machine (from India), a very complex project, could not have been done 'without the pain of paperwork'.

## **Programme Support from NLHF**

The quarterly meetings with Laura Joyner and James Dennis were very helpful, providing the necessary advice, support and guidance for any query about project management issues and programme management procedures and claims. The Programme Manager reported that both NLHF contacts were extremely helpful in answering queries between the quarterly meetings, providing advice as needed to facilitate programme delivery.

## **Financial management & support**

Financial management systems worked well ensuring effective control of projects and enabling the Programme Manager, the CSG and Programme Board to track expenditure across the Programme period and make adjustments where necessary.

Re-allocation of funds were carried out where projects altered direction, made unplanned changes to objectives due to external factors (e.g. loss of a project leader), or where there were under-spends on project activity. The flexibility enabled increased output from projects that gained additional funding.

There is some evidence that the National Lottery funding also helped in leveraging additional funding (the Programme had a match funding target). Coleford Town Council, for example, noted that they "*part funded the Coleford Heritage App (£5,000), supported St. John's School pond (£1,000), and made a small grant to Wyldwood Arts*". The Environment Agency provided £30,000 for the eel pass at Blakeney Weir) and Natural England supported Conservation grazing. The Love your Forest Project was supported by Suntory, Hubbub, FoD District Council, Wydean Tourism and Forestry England. Forestry England noted that there was "*a lot of additional work that was not costed in*" noting one example of provision of £10,000 of supervisory support for Rewild activities (Forestry England, 2021) as well as additional support for supervising activities on the Forestry England estate.

On the project delivery side there was a high level of added value as it was clear from stakeholder interviews that the majority of project outcomes would not have been delivered without the financial support, which enabled capital investments (e.g. fencing, pond construction, design work, structural improvements to heritage, a building and briquetting machine, murals, plaques) resource development (materials for surveying, resource packs, heritage apps), and running events (Scarr Bandstand, promotional materials, volunteer thank-you events, exhibitions).

## Communications

The Foresters' Forest communications are seen as a strong mechanism underlying programme success. Both internal and external communications are rated highly by stakeholders. Internal communications between the Programme Board, CSG, Managers, Project Leaders and Forestry England were identified as good. It was noted that the Programme Board and CSG *"have an overlap in their Agenda's; there is some cross-population which helps to maintain links"* (Community Stakeholder Group, 2021).

The FF Programme Team had 4 Communications officers over the programme period (the first for only one year; the second unfortunately had to take long term sick leave and the work was then covered by an Agency person) the fourth and current Officer was recruited as a permanent replacement in 2019, which significantly improved the level of communications and visibility of the Foresters' Forest. Project leaders indicated that active communications were important for *"getting the public to know about the FF programme, which was a reason for success"* (PL discussion Group, 2021).

The FF Programme engaged with local newspapers and were successful in getting all of their press releases published but had less success with County-wide newspapers who were not interested in the stories submitted. The FF Programme had regular meetings with the Forestry England Communication Team in the District (4 people) to ensure each knew what the other was doing. The FF Programme developed a communications plan (populated with known events) which avoided the problem of being too reactive to events and trying to constantly respond to developments within 38 projects

*"We had a Comms 'plan' not a strategy. We wanted to run with themes through the programme because one of the problems of having a complicated programme is that everything gets 'bitty'."*

(Communications Officer, 2021)

Keeping in touch with volunteers was viewed as essential. The Programme Team kept in touch through a Volunteer Newsletter, which was sent out through FVAF. This element of communication was very important given the number of volunteers and reliance on their continued involvement. The Communications Officer noted that the FF Programme achieved *"...a higher rate of opening of the newsletter, which has never gone below 40%, than most marketing material which only gets 25-20%"*.

*"External communications have been very good, well branded, contributing to both volunteer recruitment and legacy."*

(Community Stakeholder Group, 2021)

Communications with the wider community were perceived as very challenging with some doubts remaining on the extent to which community awareness has been enhanced regarding the FF Programme and its activities. It was difficult to develop awareness of the Foresters' Forest as a separate programme of activity with its own funding stream when a lot of the work was being carried out in partnership with other organisations, and the FF Programme only had a five-year time frame. This created tension in terms of communicating as the role of the FF Core Team was perceived as *'pushing the partners to act as they will be around a lot longer than the FF programme'*. The result was an approach that tended to re-inforce partners' messages, making it very difficult to measure the impact of the FF brand.

*“I get the impression there are a lot of people who have never been reached. I have 32 partner organisations to share messages with – the FF message can easily get lost in the other messages the partners are putting out.”*

(Communications Officer, 2021)

Community and partner engagement through Sue Middleton was identified as a factor contributing to success using an extensive list of local contacts which enabled the Programme Team to reach out to the community and partners.

Once the Communications Officer was in place social media became a key aspect of communications. Social media was used effectively (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) with regular updates to inform stakeholders, volunteers and the wider community what has been undertaken and about upcoming events and opportunities. The Covid-19 Pandemic led to a change of focus with more emphasis on social media communications which enhanced the programme reach into the community.

*“(The Pandemic) did give me time to do the social media, reaching out to communities through Facebook gave us levels of reach we had never achieved before. Our reach now is 5,000 for a post and we have 2,000 followers now. For an average story 200 people might read it but I can increase the reach to 3,000.”*

(Communications Officer, 2021)

One weakness identified is the complexity of the programme with 38 projects and 32 partners, which made communications much more difficult in terms of understanding who to target and how to reach different sub-groups of the community with specific project interests.

Complexity was also identified as a difficulty for reporting project progress and outcomes, which relied on Quarterly reports from project leaders. Reporting was highly variable due to lack of experience and skills to deliver what was required on the part of some projects. The amount of material submitted also limited capacity of the Core Programme team to assimilate and analyse progress. In particular understanding the overall impact of outcomes from such a wide range of projects was difficult: *“It’s challenging to talk about what the project has achieved – we get asked at events but it is difficult to answer”* (Communications Officer, 2021).

Social media was viewed as highly successful and ‘a brilliant means of dissemination’. The success in communications also led some project leaders to engage more with social media and have developed their public engagement skills.

*“...we have had people all over the world interested – there is a large diaspora of people from the Forest – it has given me inspiration. In years 2 and 3 we worked on the murals of Forest authors in Coleford and Cinderford and we are still getting enquiries as to who is in them – it’s another form of public engagement...”*

(PL discussion Group, 2021)

## **Project management & administration**

A major difficulty for many project leaders was dealing with the Forestry England requirements and the level of bureaucracy involved. This was a weakness in terms of

programme delivery as it put a much greater burden on the core Programme team to support individual projects and ensure the relevant paperwork was correctly completed and submitted within the relevant timeframes. Not all projects were impacted in the same way, those led by a partner organisation familiar with the paperwork surrounding public funding and operating on Forestry England land had the experience and systems in place to deal with such issues. The main burden was felt by the smaller 'one-man' bands and community groups that lack the skills and experience.

The Programme team recognised the *“struggles project leaders have with Forestry England paperwork in relation to permission requirements where 12 weeks advance notice is required, risk assessments, provision of maps, and more recently the need to demonstrate £10 million liability insurance”*. Purchasing of equipment or services also requires abiding by National Lottery Fund rules requiring multiple quotes (on purchases above £10,000) and submission of a rationale for why a provider was selected. The FF Programme team itself also required project leaders to submit quarterly progress reports listing project activities and outcomes, which were utilised in reporting to the funding body (NHLF), which 'wanted to see the detail from each individual project' (Programme Manager Interview, 2021).

The overall programme administration was viewed by the core delivery team as very efficient. The requirement for quarterly meetings, reporting and financial claims gradually became routine for project leaders as they came to understand it would happen. The tight control over project administration and delivery did have the benefits of enabling greater control and identification of any problems arising, which could then be addressed. Project leaders varied in the extent to which they engaged with paperwork requirements, some providing detailed spreadsheets, others needing to be pursued through direct communications in order to collect the relevant information.

*“The biggest challenge was working within the confines of Forestry England procurement administration and bureaucracy – but we found a way through.”*

(Programme Board Member, 2021)

The importance of Project Leader inputs was a major strength. Project leaders were often balancing other jobs as well as finding time to plan and deliver the project, manage volunteers, engage in training, and do the paperwork. (Programme Manager, 2021). Without the enthusiasm and dedication of Project Leaders many projects would not have met their target outputs or delivered their intended outcomes.

Efficiency depended very much on individual characteristics as well as administrative skills. The programme management structure of CSG meetings followed by Programme Board meetings were based on provision of regular project reporting. The administrative burden was felt keenly by some, particularly those Project Leaders not backed up by larger organisational support. The following quotes illustrating the Project Leader perspective are taken from the Project Leader Discussion Group held in November 2021:

*“Tracking some of the outputs was difficult – the Excel spreadsheets the FF used were very badly designed, tracking the outcomes in the spreadsheets was awful so we designed our own.”*

*“As project leader I often felt like I was still at work and not just volunteering. Having to enter all the volunteer hours was quite laborious. I had to run committee meetings, do the agenda and the minutes, create posters for our activities, and there was a huge amount of email to answer.”*

*“The FF Team have been very helpful, but the risk assessments are OTT (over the top), they drive you round the bend.”*

*“Setting up the initial contract was a challenge and there were sensitive issues to address.... Setting up the licenses with Forestry England every year is slow but now the contract is in place it is relatively easy.”*

One project (Reading the Forest) stated they had not had any problems on the administrative side but noted *“we are shielded from the worst of the FF and Forestry England bureaucracy by being part of the University and it's the University administration people who do all the work”*.

## **The nature of projects**

Projects varied widely in character, from those developed and delivered by one person or small teams (e.g. Bream Heritage Walk; Hidden Heritage App., Reptiles, Ancient and Notable Trees) to those dependent on particular input of expertise (Buried Heritage; Forest Dialect; Reading the Forest; Batscape) and developed within an organisation or through partnerships of organisations (Love Your Forest; Conservation Grazing; Wetscapes) or wider communities (Worcester Walk; Scarr Bandstand; Schools project). There were successes and challenges for all types of project, whether a 'one-man band' or a Partnership. The majority of projects were highly successful in delivery of outcomes, assisted in many cases by dedicated teams of volunteers, and committed project leaders. Only a small number of projects failed to achieve their full range of objectives and challenges arose for a variety of reasons:

- internal conflict or dissent (Worcester Walk; New Leaf/Heritage Skills/Edible Forest)
- lack of agreement on project aims (Built Heritage;)
- loss of expertise (Batscape; Woodland Flora)
- Project leader moved out of the area (Geology)

The major problems occurred for projects with heavy dependence on an individual with key expertise which was then lost or withdrawn and not fully replaced (e.g. Batscape). In some case the challenges were overcome, in other cases the Programme was adaptable enough to enable changes in objectives and/or establishment of alternative arrangements to utilise funding. Thus, Bixslade Trail was incorporated into the revised Geology project as one of the walking trails in a new App. and the funding utilised to create interpretation panels about Freemining at Hopewell Colliery. Worcester Walk and the New leaf/Heritage Skills and Edible Forest benefitted from new leadership which resolved problems and led to successful outcomes.



Many projects brought people together to address long-standing issues and conflict between those with opposing views is to be expected. One example is Freemining, based on the idea of a briquetting plant to provide financial sustainability into the future. The Freemining community was highly fragmented but the FF funding and vision of a small core of leaders brought them together in order to develop and implement the project (PL discussion Group, 2021). Worcester Walk is an example of where new leadership was established with stronger community support enabling early conflict to be overcome and the project implemented successfully.

*“Worcester Walk was always difficult but from the mid-point of the programme there was a turn-around, caused by a change in the person running the project. Now they focus on what they can do and not what they cannot do.”*

(Forestry England, 2021)

One conclusion drawn from discussion with stakeholders is that “...‘*individuals matter*’ and you need a method that enables the aims of community projects to change and adapt to that”. The majority of FF projects are relatively small scale and reliant on some mix of partners, volunteers, and key experts. Changes such as loss of a project leader or key expert has significant ramifications, whether the person is replaced or not as any replacement is likely to bring different ideas or objectives to the project. The projects that were least effective in delivering objectives tended to be those where there were leadership conflicts, or project leaders and/or key experts were lost. Two projects under the ‘Stronghold for Nature’ theme (Batscape and Woodland Flora) both lost their Project Leaders before the mid-point of the programme period (withdrawn by NE as a result of funding cutbacks). In neither case were effective replacements found, reducing overall project effectiveness, and additional workload was added on to other people. Four other projects (Worcester Walk; New Leaf, Edible Forest, Heritage Craft Skills) experienced personality conflicts during the early phases of delivery, which reduced initial impact. All, however, resulted in high outcome levels following leadership changes.

A long-term programme of activities operating with multiple partners and stakeholders such as Foresters’ Forest should anticipate project management difficulties. The FF Programme Team dealt effectively with such issues as they arose but one problem that could not be addressed was the loss of salaried leaders from partner organisations with expertise. Leaders require more than expertise to be successful, they also need a high level of commitment to projects in order to enthuse volunteers and other stakeholders. Providing expertise alone does not ensure successful achievement of objectives. While it is difficult to plan for every eventuality a lesson to learn perhaps, is that the key role of project leader should receive more recognition, and back-up plans put in place from the start (e.g. requiring more than one person who could deliver a project; commitments of support from partner organisations for the full programme period).

## **Community engagement**

One feature of the overall FF projects was the focus on improving condition, management or recording of information about the heritage, along with developing skills and knowledge of

people (largely those involved as volunteers). At project level there was relatively less focus on wider engagement with the community and where it occurred it has been limited. This is due to a number of reasons: lack of funding, with not enough for some projects to engage with the wider community; limited staff resources where the project was led by an external body; and the effects of Covid-19 restrictions in the final two years of delivery which limited wider engagement. Two other factors influencing community engagement were identified as: lack of trust between community organisations and Forestry England; and the geographic boundaries of the FF Programme area.

*“The Commoners Association didn’t trust Forestry England which decreased their willingness to engage with FF. It’s a tragedy that they didn’t get involved. It’s a very old forest community and they have not trusted the FF programme as much as they could have done.”*

*“People questioned whether Foresters’ Forest was for them – a feeling the forest is not for us – we had a lot of problems with that, ‘whose forest is it?’”*

*“Geographic boundaries caused problems, they were arbitrary – confined activities to the statutory forest. There’s a lot of housing development around the Forest fringe yet little engagement with FF from those people.”*

(PL discussion Group, 2021)

There were notable levels of community engagement for some projects, some of it unexpected, particularly those involved with cultural heritage, such as Scarr Bandstand which delivered multiple musical events, and Reading the Forest, which attracted high levels of interest from the wider community and larger audiences than anticipated to events (delivered before lockdown regulations were introduced). The FF Core Team also reached out to the wider community through attending ‘Forest Showcase’ days, and ‘Thankyou’ events for volunteers.

Some projects which targeted specific sectors of the community for engagement (such as: mindSCAPE; Walking with Wheels; Schools project) had more success reaching into the community than anticipated. mindSCAPE reached beyond the target population of those in care homes with dementia to raise awareness among carers and families of those in residential homes; walking with Wheels reported a similar impact noting that those utilising the Trampers to access the Forest often came with extended families to experience a day out together. The Schools project also noted unexpected impacts on wider family members of children benefitting from integration of local Forest of Dean examples into the curriculum. In addition, some projects by their nature attracted a wider set of people either to open day events (e.g. Buried Heritage), or because of the nature of their activities (Conservation Grazing).

*“On my project we had 90 school children visit over 3 days – but only 6 of them had been in the woods before – and they all live here on the doorstep of the area! So that’s an achievement. We are bringing back sheep in a small way to graze the Forest, bringing back what people used to see. It opens a conversation with people who are local. People are starting to recognise the change and get behind it.”* (PL discussion Group, 2021)

## Involvement of schools

Involvement of Schools within the FF Programme enabled support for the process of integrating local issues into the school curriculum which had already been started by Lydbrook School, but also provided benefits to that project through creation of resources packs by several projects (Buried Heritage; Reading the Forest; Geology) as well as support from the local history society to produce the Story of the Forest book. The links created with schools also enabled several projects (for example, Buried Heritage, Reptiles, Freemining, Geology) to provide for school visits or develop relationships in other ways (Youth Rangers) and thus broaden their engagement with the wider community.

Gaining access to schools was a major success that would not have happened without the NLHF funding (PL discussion Group, 2021). In terms of long-term impacts and legacy, being able to teach the future generation about the Forest and raise their awareness of the cultural heritage is viewed as a major achievement.

*“In all three of my projects there has been a huge school involvement with teachers and Key Stage 2 involvement – it’s very rewarding.”*

(PL discussion Group, 2021)

*“We worked a lot with Sue Middleton and the Schools Project. The schools were not taking advantage of the local heritage. Clearwell Caves and Hopewell colliery provided awareness tours for local Councillors and Teachers and school days for children to visit. We (Freeminers) have also gone to schools to do visits, which have been very successful, and we had input to the Story of the Forest book. The schools are taking more account of the heritage now because of the FF programme (Lydbrook school, for example), but I have had more visits from schools outside the Forest than from within.”*

(Freeminers Project Interview, 2021)

## Volunteering

A strength has been the high level of volunteering across the FF Programme and the target for voluntary hours set by the NLHF was met half-way through the programme period.

*“Volunteering has been a big hit for the FF and the other aspect is getting into schools – neither would have happened without the NLHF money.”*

*“On the Worcester Walk project we had about 20 volunteers – a lot are incomers – and there’s a lot of local feedback so we are obviously having an impact.”*

(PL discussion Group, 2021)

One reason for the high level of volunteering was the wide range of choice and opportunities with 38 projects capable of engaging with a broad range of interest and that in itself brings in a lot of people. Volunteers are also linked to their local communities, which can enhance engagement (FF Programme Team, 2021). Without the enthusiasm and input from large

numbers of volunteers, and the efforts made to keep them informed about programme activities, many of the projects could not have been delivered. Success was assisted by the existence of the Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF) which had an existing database of volunteers and a means of contacting potential participants.

Heavy reliance on volunteers can also create weaknesses in programme delivery over the long term. Not all the FF volunteers are local, some come from outside the Forest of Dean, some are linked to other organisations (e.g. Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust). In addition, the number of registered volunteers is not indicative of levels of activity and only a small proportion are regularly active. A further problem is related to volunteer burn-out (an issue identified by the CSG and in some projects in the mid-term evaluation) and the impact on projects if key people (such as project leaders) move away or step down.

*“If some key people in projects stepped down some of the projects might fall apart in future.”*

(FF Programme Team, 2021)

*“People have been on the projects for 7+ years now, and are tired from constant activity, meetings, planning, reporting. We need new blood to keep it moving. In some ways some people are glad the programme is now ending.”*

(Community Stakeholder Group, 2021)

One further recognised weakness with volunteering was the lack of opportunities for volunteers to meet each other and develop stronger social relations, as well as obtain a greater awareness of the overall FF Programme of activities.

*“We also suffer silo effects and the only time the volunteers meet up with each other is at a ‘thank you’ event. Most of the projects don’t talk to each other, although a few do and some help each other, especially within thematic areas such as nature.”*

(Communications Officer, 2021)

This final point was reflected in the Volunteer Discussion groups where it was clear the volunteers did not know each other and also some were confused about which projects were actually FF activities. In several instances volunteers discussed projects that were delivered by partner organisations (such as GWT) but had no relationship with the Foresters’ Forest Programme.

## **Covid-19 Pandemic**

The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and government regulations are covered in more detail below. In short it had a significant impact across a large number of projects, closing down access to the Forestry England estate for all those projects engaged in wildlife surveys and other natural heritage work, retraction of partnership personnel who were furloughed, loss of volunteers who were shielding or not able to engage, and resulting in a wide range of

cancelled events. A few projects were able to stay on track, mostly those with volunteers working at home (e.g. Oral histories, Voices from the Forest).

The other big impact was a switch from face-to-face meetings and events to greater use of social media to communicate with volunteers and disseminate findings, and creation of podcasts, short videos, and films.

## 5.2 Additional factors influencing outputs & outcomes.

### Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The final two years of Programme delivery were overshadowed by the Covid-19 Pandemic which resulted in government regulations, and Forestry England restrictions limiting activities, a loss of volunteer support and cancellation of activities and events. A key impact identified by a number of stakeholders and Project Leaders was the 'loss of momentum and face-to-face contact' (Forestry England, 2021). Almost every project was affected in one way or another with a significant detrimental impact on wider outcomes for people and communities.

*“Projects were just getting going then mid-way suddenly it all stopped. There was a huge loss of momentum and they all had to start again to develop a trajectory of building on success.”*

(FoD District Council, 2021)

The Programme Board established operating procedures that were implemented through Sue Middleton and her team which kept things moving forward but another factor was the number of agencies involved as partners which were also grappling with Covid-19 restrictions in other areas of the business activities. The result was that FF activities decreased in terms of priority over the final two years of the programme for many agencies (Programme Board Member Interview, 2021).

Many of the Project Leaders interviewed noted the impact of the pandemic on activities, although for many projects the first year (2020, Year 4 of the FF Programme) was worse than the second year. The Musical Landscape project noted the effect on performances although they tried to maintain the rehearsals as much as possible (Project Leader Interview, 2022). The Dean Meadows project stopped all meetings during the Covid period although individual landowner management continued. Forest Explorers had to cease all activities during the first lockdown in 2020, then started operating again running multiple small group activities under the 'rule of six'. Re-starting activities were also delayed by Forestry England restrictions applying to the Forest estate. The Community wildlife Study Group had to cancel a large number of training events and lost a whole year of survey work in 2020 but indicated that a large number of volunteers returned in 2021 and surveys were conducted for the various projects with which volunteers were involved. It was also noted however, that even

at the start of 2022 some volunteers did not want to engage in any form of group activity either indoors or outside (Project Leader Interview, 2022).

The Project Leader Discussion Group noted a range of impacts on the projects with which they were involved (Table 22). Projects relying on survey work being undertaken during limited time periods that coincided with lockdown (e.g. Buried Heritage) or strict limitations on social interaction (Heritage Open Days) were affected more than those where desk-based work could continue (such as Reading the Forest). More than one Project Leader noted that more could have been accomplished were it not for the restrictions imposed under the Pandemic.

**Table 22. Project Leader Discussion Group: Impact of Covid-19 on project delivery**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Impact of Covid-19</b>
Buried Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primary focus of our project - the Lidar Survey has to happen between January and April – when the bracken has died back.</li> <li>• In 2020 we got shut down after 6 weeks which cut the season short and we lost all of the 2021 season.</li> <li>• The Lidar survey suffered, we lost momentum.</li> </ul>
Conservation Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were set up already and you can't stop sheep from grazing but our planned community engagement was all put on hold.</li> </ul>
Worcester Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We lost momentum.</li> <li>• Schools couldn't come and visit and it is still difficult as schools are still catching up and not doing visits.</li> <li>• We did administration and office stuff instead.</li> <li>• The bracken and bramble took over although there were more people using the area while lockdown was on.</li> </ul>
Bream Heritage Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were a small team and not really affected. We found not having the Forest Review (local newspaper) published made a difference because people get a lot of their information about the FF through that.</li> </ul>
Heritage Open Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We worried about numbers coming to events, so we cancelled all of 2020 indoor events.</li> </ul>
Reading the Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We had to cancel one event – we postponed it and only recently put it on. Lots of participants pulled out so we did it on a less ambitious scale.</li> <li>• Covid affected the production of podcasts- we couldn't interview people.</li> <li>• The lockdown enabled us to get on with other work because we were not running any events.</li> </ul>
Freemining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We couldn't commission the briquetting machine because we couldn't go in the building, we couldn't meet, it stopped everything.</li> <li>• The machine was bought from India and a technical person was supposed to come over to assemble the machine but the guy we worked with was in hospital, so he never came and we had to work out how to do it ourselves. It put the brakes on but it didn't stop us from sorting it out.</li> <li>• We had to curtail mining activity and stop all training</li> </ul>

## Volunteer Discussion Group: perceptions of the impact of the Pandemic

The volunteer Discussion Group supported the Project Leaders description of the Covid-19 impact, on the projects they were involved with, stating:

*“Everything shut down - even the Lidar work. We were allowed to walk in the Forest but not do the Lidar survey – you could have done it safely but we were not allowed to. We lost a whole season (January to May) and that put us behind.”*

*“In New Leaf we lost momentum. It doesn’t take much for the people there to get kicked back, and some didn’t return.”*

*“All the wildlife projects stopped because they (Forestry England) didn’t want it taking place.”*

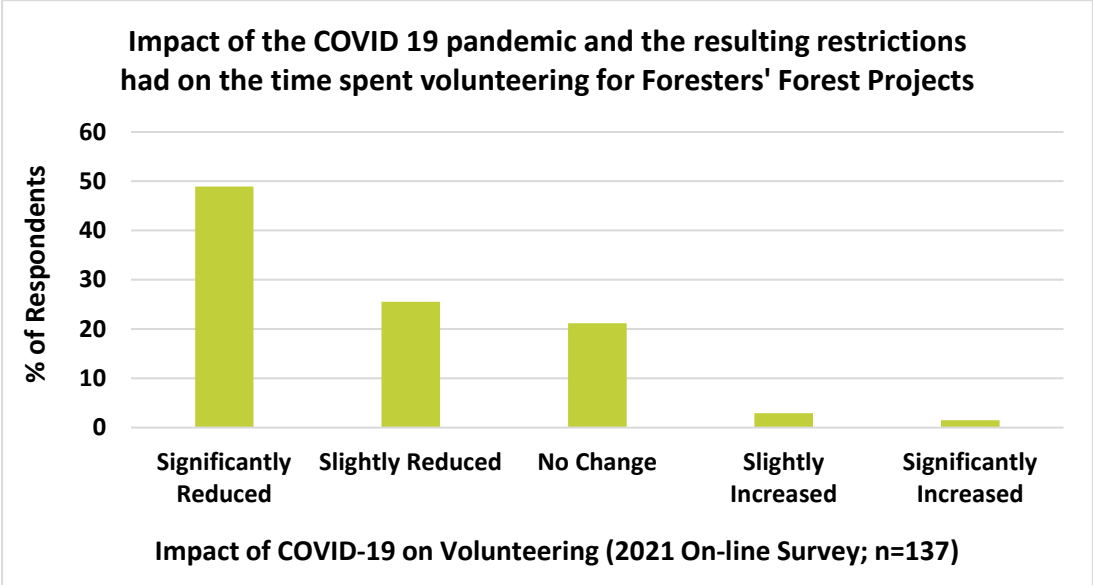
*“Devastating effect. My volunteering came to an end for 18 months because most of the things I was doing involved working together. First, we had government restrictions and then the organisations said they couldn’t run the courses. We couldn’t do outdoor stuff – not even first aid.”*

*“I’m vulnerable so I isolated seriously and decreased my time with other people.”*

## Findings from the 2021 on-line survey

The results of the 2021 on-line survey emphasise the scale of the impact of the Pandemic on FF volunteers. Nearly three-quarters of volunteers responding to the survey noted that their involvement had been ‘significantly reduced’ (48.9%) or ‘slightly reduced’ (25.5%) while 21% (n=29) reported no change to their activities and, interestingly, 4.4% (n=6) reported that they had either ‘increased’ or ‘significantly increased’ their activity level (Figure 24). This might be as a result of a changed focus of work (e.g. working on administration or other computer-based activity), or as a result of having more time to engage in project work (some project tasks, such as entering or recording data, could be done by working from home).

Figure 24. The impact of COVID-19 on volunteering (2021 on-line survey; n=137)



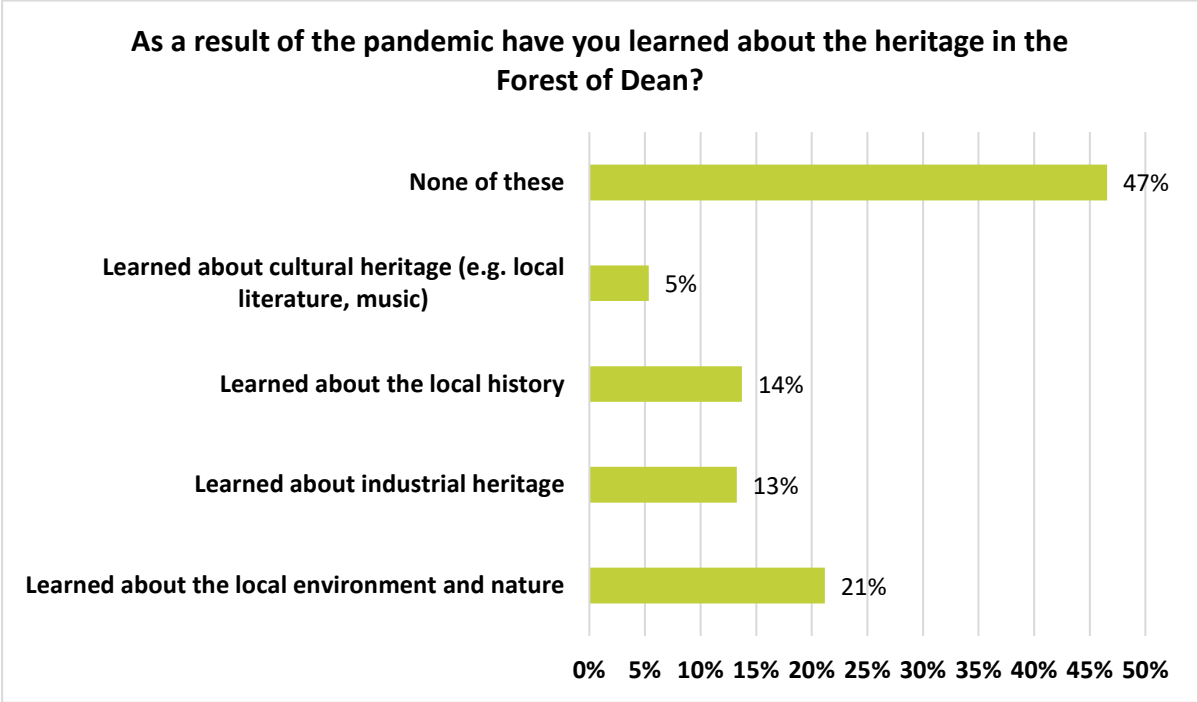
**Impact of Covid-19 on learning**

Survey respondents were also asked about their learning during the Coronavirus Pandemic period. Multiple answers were permitted to this question to allow respondents to state each area that they may have learned about and as a result 1,276 answers were received from the 1004 respondents. Just under half of the population (47%) indicated that they had not learned anything during the Pandemic period (Figure 25). For those stating they had learned something, 'Learning about wildlife, environment and nature' had the highest proportion of respondents (21%) while 14% of respondents indicated learning about local history, and 13% about industrial heritage.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) stated that there had been no change to the amount of learning they had done as a result of the pandemic, whilst 14% reported doing less and 23% reported doing a greater amount of learning.



Figure 25. Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic on learning about heritage (2021 On-line survey; n=1,004)



### 5.3 Summary of Lessons Learned

The causal mechanisms identified in Section 5.1 are those factors which have had a significant influence on programme (and project) outcomes over the development and delivery phases. These mechanisms are operating across most Landscape Partnership projects with potential to influence both positive and negative outcomes (Table 23). In relation to the Foresters’ Forest Programme most of the mechanisms operated to enhance positive outcomes, and there are lessons to be learned here both for other landscape partnerships, and for the organisational structure that will be put in place in the Forest of Dean after March 2022.

Table 23. Summary of lessons learned

Causal mechanism	Direction of impact	Impact significance	Lessons to be learned
Programme governance	+ve	Extremely High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets the overall programme context and influences strategy and partnership relations</li> <li>• Influences programme delivery, management and relationship with local communities.</li> </ul>
Programme management	+ve	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient systems are essential to manage multiple projects over time</li> <li>• Sufficient resources required to be effective</li> <li>• Time spent in training project managers during inception phase is essential</li> </ul>
Role of Forestry England	+ve -ve	Extremely High Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides resources, support, expertise</li> <li>• Difficult to brand a separate programme operating within the organisation</li> </ul>
Financial management & support	+ve	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong oversight required where there are multiple projects operating over time.</li> </ul>
Communications	+ve/-ve	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular and constant communications are essential for holding programme together over time and engaging support</li> <li>• Partnership work makes communications difficult – agreed strategy required at project inception</li> <li>• Social media is extremely important but not everyone uses it</li> </ul>
Project management & administration	+ve/-ve	Varies low to high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project managers vary in capacity to engage with management and administration.</li> <li>• Some 'hand-holding' will be required, particularly for community organisations</li> </ul>
The nature of projects	+ve/-ve	Varies – low to High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depends on project characteristics and level of support available (i.e. is the project managed by a large partner or is it a 'one-man band')</li> <li>• Level of commitment important</li> </ul>
Community engagement	+ve	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can happen in multiple ways – both direct and indirect</li> <li>• Unexpected links created into communities through project activities</li> </ul>
Involvement of schools	+ve -ve	High Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables engagement with wider community</li> <li>• Impact on future perceptions and attitudes</li> <li>• Difficult; requires time and effort, not easy to gain access to teachers</li> <li>• Teachers need support - not just resources</li> </ul>
Volunteering	+ve -ve	High Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides opportunities for engagement</li> <li>• Time consuming to manage</li> </ul>
The unexpected: Covid-19 Pandemic	-ve	Extremely High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect the unexpected</li> <li>• Engage in scenario planning at start of programme period</li> </ul>

The direction and significance of the mechanisms are summarised below (and in Table 15).

❖ **Programme governance**

- Governance sets the stage right from the start in terms of deciding who can be involved, roles, and overall aims and objectives.
- Developing governance structures to achieve sustainability goals requires a high level of inclusivity and an approach that develops human and social capital rather than frustrates it. Actions and goal achievement might take longer and require smaller steps but will also generate a sense of ownership and build future capacity.

❖ **Programme management, financial and administrative support**

- Programme management over long time periods is demanding, requiring effective rules, administrative support and guidance.
- Strict financial regulation and oversight is required to keep multiple projects on target.

❖ **The role of Forestry England**

- Provided guidance, administrative systems, resources, and financial support. Without Forestry England (or similar level of organisational support) the FF programme would not have been as successful.
- The initial governance approach established by Forestry England was an important contribution to successful programme implementation

❖ **Communications**

- Internal communications are important, ensuring partners, project leaders, volunteers, and other key stakeholders are informed of events and engaged in governance and management processes
- External communications are essential for gaining support from the wider community. It is important to engage with both social media and more traditional forms of communication. A communications plan/strategy is required right at the start of programme development; resources are required to pay for a communications/engagement officer (either PT or FT).

❖ **Project management & administration**

- Inexperienced project leaders will require additional guidance and support.
- Training sessions to build capacity are likely to be required throughout the programme development and delivery phases
- Administrative processes need to be simple, adaptable, and relevant to project and/or activity scale.

❖ **The nature of projects**

- Individuals can make a difference to project success/failure. Not all individuals are suited to project leadership/management.
- Conflict (within and between projects) should be expected and conflict resolution processes available.

- Initial assessment of project demands and monitoring of delivery capacity might help identify problems early on.
- ❖ ***Community engagement and Involvement of schools***
  - The nature of projects will determine the type and level of engagement.
  - Involvement of schools provides a way to communicate and engage with local communities beyond the school gates.
  - Long-term impacts only arise when the head teacher supports involvement and teachers need delivery support not just resource packs.
- ❖ ***Volunteering***
  - Volunteers are a great benefit and produce deeper community engagement but require a lot of support.
  - In a complex multi-project environment volunteers need to be informed about how their work contributes and which programme they are working on.
  - Volunteer burnout is a real issue on long-term projects and programmes. There is also a danger in reliance on individual expert volunteers to deliver projects, and/or individuals working across multiple projects. Monitoring systems should be put in place to identify potential 'hot-spots'.
  - Regular social/thankyou events make a positive difference.
- ❖ ***Covid-19 Pandemic***
  - Expect the unexpected through scenario planning.
  - Maintain risk assessment processes as part of project and programme management.

# 6. Recommendations

## 6.1 Taking it forward: recommendations for the future

Interviews with stakeholders and discussions with project Leaders revealed a strong concern for the future of the Forest, and the legacy of the Foresters' Forest Programme. There is an acute awareness that the Programme has generated a significant legacy (described in Section 4 of this report) but how to maintain it into the future is shrouded in uncertainty. A total of 26 projects out of the 38 operating have indicated they will continue in some form, although it is not clear if they are all financially sustainable in the long-term. There are also concerns over the material legacies of projects, the websites, Apps, databases, and information resources that have been generated. Many of these need to be housed or regularly maintained in some manner. There is a real danger that many of the benefits generated by the Programme will be lost in the medium to long-term (i.e. after three years).

The most significant challenge facing those involved in delivery of the FF Programme is deciding what should replace it, how it should be constituted, what should it do, and who will lead it (e.g. future roles for Forestry England and the Verderers). There have been a number of discussions throughout the current programme period. A recent consultation document noted the following, which encapsulates the conundrum, should a new body focus only on data collection to ensure the conservation of heritage – or should it be 'a catalyst for change'? Should it be some form of pressure group lobbying for change, or an organisation that is 'consulted' over future development? The same document indicated a desire to build on the social capital created under the FF Programme, the need for fund-raising capabilities, and a requirement to be 'respected, reasonable, inclusive and trusted'.

*'The proposal to continue the Foresters Forest in a new guise is an opportunity to capture the knowledge accumulated. It is also more than simply an accumulation of knowledge. It could be a catalyst for a forum that has the potential to do more to protect, enhance and balance the undoubted pressures our Forest will experience in the future.'*

(Source: Foresters Forest Forum development: A consultative proposal, Dec. 2021)

Following a discussion and indicative voting for two alternative proposals the Community Stakeholder Group decided in the short term to adopt the proposal for a 'Foresters' Forest Forum' hosted by Forestry England (with a community steering group) to ensure that 'the Foresters' Forest momentum is not lost, which will give more time for a new organisation to evolve' (Updated Summary of Votes and Comments for Future CSG Format, 2022-01-21). There was some concern expressed in the document over the capacity of the Verderers to lead a new organisation (also concerns over lack of diversity and inclusivity, and the

administrative demands of setting up a new organisation). There was also concern expressed that a new Forum might just become a 'talking shop' without capacity for action and comments on the need for any new organisation to be able to evolve to meet future demands.

The commentary in the document clearly reveals the difficulty of the decision for many of those involved. There is a desire to be more pro-active, to have an organisation that is inclusive and representative of the wide range of interests of Forest communities, can pull down funding, and one with capacity to make things happen.

It is not the role of this evaluation to comment on proposals for the future. What it can do is highlight the achievements of the past seven years of Foresters' Forest development and delivery and comment on the nature of the benefits generated, which may serve as a foundation for future action.

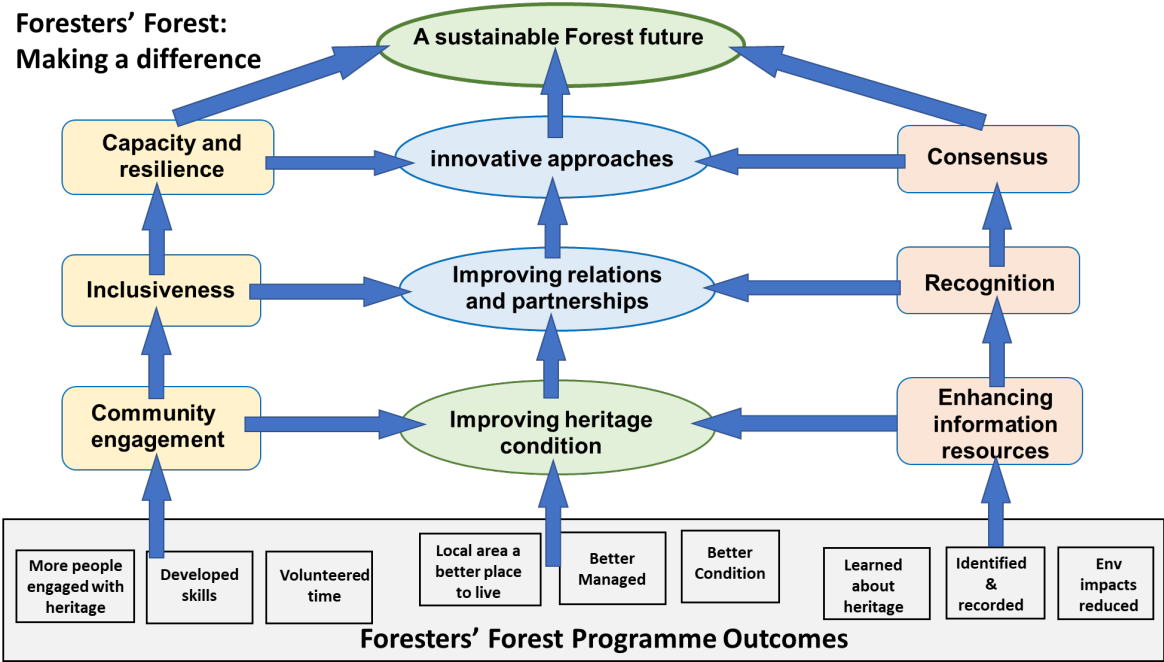
The most significant challenge facing those involved in the FF Programme and projects is deciding what should replace the Foresters' Forest, how it should be constituted, what should it do, and who will lead it. These are questions for the individuals and organisations in the Forest to resolve, they cannot be answered here. What this final section of the evaluation can do, is to identify what has been achieved and make some recommendations on how to build on the successes of the past 7 years.

Drawing on the wider community outcomes described in the previous section, Figure 21 summarises the impact of the FF project outcomes on the wider community and the linkages between them. There are three 'action' columns of action in the diagram:

- on the left-hand side of the diagram, project outcomes have increased the level of community engagement leading to more inclusiveness, and stronger capacity and resilience to address future issues and challenges;
- on the right-hand side, project outcomes have enhanced information resources, which enables altered perception and recognition of issues, leading to consideration on how to act, and agreement on the need for consensus across organisations to be successful;
- in the centre, project outcomes have delivered improved heritage condition, improved relations and partnerships, and innovative solutions to challenges demonstrating a capacity for engaging in innovative processes and approaches within the wider Forest community, an essential requirement for developing a sustainable Forest future.

The three items in the centre of the diagram are not generated purely by project outcomes, they also require input from each side, i.e. the elements must be integrated. The improved heritage condition requires community engagement (e.g. from volunteers) and understanding of the new information resources that inform action. Improved relations and partnerships require inclusiveness in terms of viewpoints and interests within community organisations, and recognition of the new management challenges.

Figure 26. A framework for future development



Finally, implementing innovative approaches requires capacity building within communities so that people have the knowledge, skills, and social capital to be able to adopt new solutions, and a consensus among partner organisations to be successful in moving towards a more sustainable Forest future.

The Foresters' Forest has created the outline, or skeleton, of such an integrated framework that is necessary to move towards a sustainable future. It is not perfect, it is not complete, some aspects are fragile, and some are strong, but this framework is the outcome of the Foresters' Forest – this is the difference the Programme has made over the last seven years. If the beneficial outcomes of the FF programme are not to be lost, there are two outstanding challenges:

1. To decide what kind of a sustainable future is desired.
2. Working out how to maintain the links between the framework elements (and the momentum implied by the arrows) while developing a new structure from the ground up.

## 6.2 Building on the Foresters' Forest foundation

### Programme governance & management

A strength of the Community Stakeholder Group was its independence and ability to put forward for discussion the desires of community interests and groups. It is important to maintain an organisation made up of community stakeholders.

One option is to have two constituent bodies: one with an oversight and strategic role (e.g. considering and agreeing on strategic focus and direction, sourcing funds, recognising the partnerships and relationships), and one operational – made up of representatives of delivery organisations/individuals.

As with the Programme Board and CSG these could have over-lapping interest to encourage communication links, but different responsibilities. Two bodies would also spread the load and enable a wide set of interests to engage.

### Goals and objectives

Set achievable targets over 1 to 3-year periods established within shared and broad, long-term goals.

### Financial management & support

Funding is always difficult and problematic. There are multiple options, but none are easy:

- Bidding for funding, either as an individual organisation or as a partnership. Linking with larger organisations with bidding experience, skills and administrative support.
- Using a key resource – skilled and unskilled volunteers for in-kind match funding
- Membership fees to enable provision of administrative support
- Crowd funding and/or local sponsorship for specific activities/actions
- Over next 10 – 20 years there will be significant government funding going into research projects on the environmental, social, and economic impacts of tree cover expansion (although this will be highly competitive).

Having a broad scope of activity will help – rather than narrow remit (e.g. biodiversity). A broader set of aims will provide scope for interdisciplinary work across the environment, economy, and society which is increasingly recognised as the way forward. Access to administrative support and specialist skills (e.g. contracts) could potentially be delivered by developing links to a partner organisation to host a secretariat for example, for a fixed period of time (other voluntary organisations use this model). An alternative option is a 'support unit' within the organisation to provide advice, review bids, using volunteers in the Forest with relevant skills.

### Communications

- Regular communications are important, both internal and external. External communications require a regular newsletter for the wider community and one or two events per year to bring people together (perhaps one focussed on issues/one celebratory).
- A website regularly updated to describe activities and inform.



- Social media is important but requires constant attention and can be a drain on limited resources.

### Project management & administration

- Funded projects will require oversight to ensure funders requirements are met and activities conducted safely and according to best practice. Guidance can be adopted from existing organisations.
- Reporting procedures will be required and again these can also be adopted from the existing FF Programme or other organisation, perhaps modified to suit the scale of organisation and/or project undertaken.

### Community engagement

- Community engagement is essential and as the FF Programme had shown, there are multiple ways to raise awareness of issues and involve people.
- Raising awareness is a slow process that takes time (a minimum of ten years), but some form of branding helps with recognition.
- Engaging with the younger generation is important: to influence future attitudes and thinking, drawing on energy, ideas, and enthusiasm and for instilling a sense of place.
- Continuing to work with schools would be a valuable activity. Initially this might focus on maintenance, updating, or revising educational resource packs/web resources already created and providing explanatory supporting (requested by teachers) to enhance utilisation; in the longer-term engaging in planned visits and developing and maintaining links with teachers will be important in order to encourage wider utilisation of local heritage resources.

### Volunteering

- Maintaining volunteer interest is essential and will require an organisation with a clear set of goals to attract support.
- The evaluation has identified a high level of demand for continued involvement with volunteering for the kinds of activities delivered through the FF programme, and a clear desire by some to 'take care of the forest'. The social benefits to individuals are also significant, and the work required in managing volunteers should not be underestimated.
- The organisation would benefit from regular communications and opportunities that bring volunteers from different projects together, with time for discussion and socialising.
- The evaluation also noted the potential for volunteer 'burn-out'. Future programmes might benefit from organising volunteer activity around short-term goals (1 – 3 years) that can be celebrated, while keeping a focus on longer term aims. A relatively high turnover of volunteers might be expected for some kinds of activity, requiring a constant stream of new entrants.
- Maintaining strong links with FVAF will be important.

## Moving forward

The more difficult immediate task will be to determine the nature of an organisation created to build on the success of the FF Programme. Deciding whether it should continue to focus on 'heritage' or have a broader remit is a first task.

A second is to decide how it should operate: as a body supporting local organisations to obtain funding to implement local actions, or as an organisation that will try to influence the strategic direction of development.

Whichever approach is selected the organisation will need to look ahead to the future - through a lens that magnifies potential drivers of change and the impacts these might have on the local area. These are likely to include:

- Climate change – there is a need to understand potential impacts on the natural heritage, local economy and social relations.
- UK forest expansion and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (the Net Zero goal) and impacts on natural heritage, the built environment, and people's lives.
- Rising energy and food costs for impacts on employment and commuting, housing, food production.

These factors will influence strategic thinking and direction of any organisation established to support the transition of an area or region to a more sustainable society.

Solving new challenges will require innovative thinking and approaches, a willingness to apply new techniques - and to risk failure. Implementing innovation requires consensus on the nature of the problem and agreement to test new solutions.

Social innovation (new forms of organisation, new ways of doing) is as important as technological innovation. More cooperation between organisations will be required to address the issues identified above. Relationships, partnerships and inclusive community engagement will become more important. How to address these issues is the challenge. The Foresters' Forest Programme has created the structure elements of a framework that will support the communities of the Forest of Dean to find a way forward. The challenge is to work out how to make it happen without losing the capacity, resilience, and social capital that has been created by the Forester's Forest Programme.



**A COLLABORATION BETWEEN**

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