



**FORESTERS'
FOREST**



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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE FORESTERS' FOREST
NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAMME IN THE FOREST OF DEAN **2017 - 2022**

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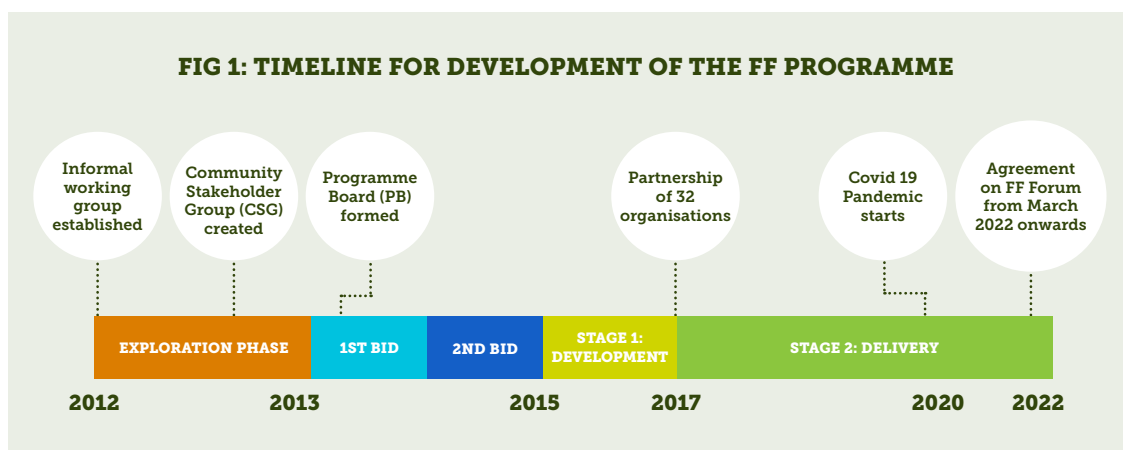
1. FORESTERS' FOREST PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The Foresters' Forest (FF) Programme is delivered across the area of the Hundred of St. Briavels, an area of land totalling 48,327 acres (19,557 hectares) in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire. The Hundred of St. Briavels lies within the Forest of Dean District, which covers 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 FF Programme was developed and implemented through the National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership Programme, made up of 32 organisations. The Partnership evolved over a period of time (Figure 1) following

establishment of an informal working group in 2012 to 'explore the potential for making a landscape partnership bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund' (as it was then). 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 which started in 2015 and a delivery stage that ran across the 2017-22 period.

The Programme was delivered through a Partnership structure (Figure 2) which incorporated a Community Stakeholder Group and a Programme Board, both made up of representatives of the partner



organisations and wider community bodies (e.g. local authorities). The Programme was led by Forestry England, who employed the Programme Delivery team, providing office space in Bank House (Coleford) and support from various other Forestry England staff. Volunteer management support was provided by the Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF).

ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS IN THE LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

(SOURCE: HLF DELIVERY STAGE 2017)

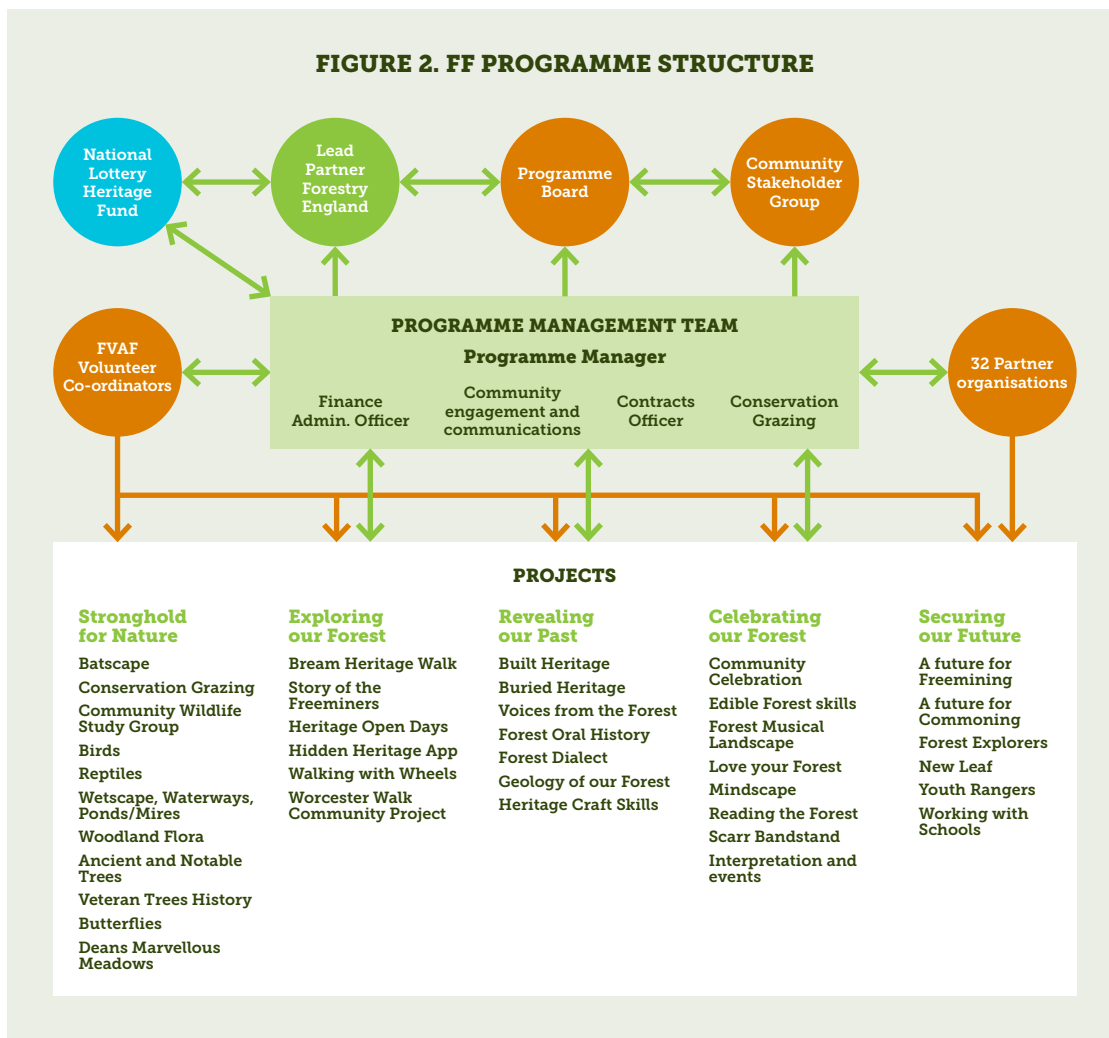
Partner name/organisation
Forestry England (Lead Partner)
Andrew Hoan
Arbour Training: New Leaf
Butterfly Conservation
Coleford Area MCTi Partnership
Commoners Association*
Dean Heritage Centre
Dean Meadows Group
Environment Agency
Forest of Dean Brass Band
Forest of Dean District Council
Forest of Dean 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 National Lottery Heritage Fund funding bid as a Partner but did not engage in programme delivery.



FIGURE 2. FF PROGRAMME STRUCTURE



2. PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE

The total programme budget for the FF 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 and Administration Officer, 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 both the FF team and FVAF coordinators, a part-time Assistant Ecologist based in Forestry England in the final year of programme delivery, and a contribution towards Evaluation costs (CCRI). Project expenditure was spread unevenly across

the five thematic areas, which varied due to the nature and scale of projects, and the type of activities undertaken.

3. EVALUATION

The programme evaluation was carried out by the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) based at the University of Gloucestershire. It 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 evaluation approach has been taken to assess the extent to which the nine NLHF outcomes have been achieved and



4. PROJECT OUTPUTS AND 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 FF 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**

to explore the broader effects on the Forest community. At each stage the evaluation has consisted of three main elements:

- **Analysis of documentary evidence**
- **Interviews with project leaders and other stakeholders**
- **On-line survey of the wider community**

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

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 FF programme had to demonstrate it was contributing

TABLE 2. BREAKDOWN OF FF PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE BY THEMATIC AREA

Thematic area organisation	Budget (with 2021 reallocations)	Proportion of total expenditure (%)
Stronghold for Nature	£754,680	27.40%
Exploring our Forest	£158,705	5.76%
Revealing our Past	£488,953	17.76%
Celebrating our Forest	£301,327	10.94%
Securing our Future	£471,645	17.13%
Total project expenditure	£2,175,310	79% of Total Programme funding
Programme management	£578,561	21% of Total Programme funding
Total Programme funding	£2,753,871	

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 six of the nine outcomes listed above. The extent to which each project met its overall outcomes is indicated in the five tables below summarising the main outputs and outcomes (Tables 3 to 7).

Project outcomes and achievements: A Stronghold for nature

Overall, projects under this theme were highly successful with a majority of projects concentrating 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), for example, directed their efforts towards identifying and recording location and condition of individual trees, providing information for future management, while the Woodland flora project examined ground flora as an indicator for previous and future management.

The projects targeting specific species (Batscape, Birds, Reptiles, 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 focused on improving





land management within the core sustenance zones (i.e. feeding area) of bat roosts, while the Birds and Butterfly projects were both engaged in habitat management to encourage population growth, and 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 re-create heathland habitats (80 ha area) for biodiversity in the Forest. This involved utilising livestock (ponies, highland cattle) for grazing to manage habitat change. The Dean Meadows project concentrated on identifying wildflower meadows and working with landowners to manage them sustainably, while the Wetscape project explored the hydrology of the forest, assessing water quality in streams and ponds, species surveys, and created many new ponds. The findings from Wetscapes increased understanding of surface hydrology and will feed into future forest management planning.

The majority of projects achieved high levels of outcomes for heritage and people although not all projects achieved all of their outcomes. Batscape and Woodland Flora were not able to fully meet

target outcomes as both projects were affected by loss of project leaders with subject expertise mid-way through the programme period. Neither of these could be replaced easily leading to delays and changes in project objectives, and then the negative impacts of Covid-19 resulted in further loss of time and momentum.

The natural heritage was improved for specific species of birds, butterflies, reptiles, and to a lesser extent for bats. The people involved in volunteering learned new skills. All of the projects relied heavily on volunteer input to undertake surveys, collect and record information, and/or undertake manual work for habitat improvement (such as clearing, weeding, planting). The Community Wildlife Study Group trained volunteers in specific survey methods as required across multiple projects, and volunteers were also drawn from the existing Dean Green Team. The Community Wildlife Study Group also ran a series of successful community engagement days in the final year of their project attracting over 300 people, who learned about project activities. The Conservation Grazing project also ran guided walks which attracted a lot of visitors who came to learn about conservation grazing using ponies, cattle and sheep.

Project outcomes and achievements: Exploring our Forest

Projects delivered under the Exploration theme addressed issues of access and sources of information, targeting the wider communities within the forest. 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 projects enabled people to engage with natural and industrial heritage more closely and raised awareness through provision of information. The hidden heritage apps

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES: A STRONGHOLD FOR NATURE

Projects	Stronghold for Nature: Outputs	NLHF Outcomes*
Batscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved resilience of Horseshoe bat colony Improved land management through planting in hedge gaps Better understanding from flight line surveys and roost counts 	Medium
Conservation Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large area of lowland heathland habitat now being managed for wildlife using grazing livestock An increase in knowledge of the benefits of conservation grazing 	High
Community Wildlife Study Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large pool of volunteers trained in wide range of biodiversity survey skills Established a volunteer survey study group with the capacity to continue monitoring species and habitats and pass on skills to new recruits. 	High
Birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restore and improve habitats for birds Valuable ecological data collected and new habitat has been created and existing habitats improved, benefitting other species as well as the targeted bird species. 	High
Reptiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved habitat favourable to reptiles and increased understanding of adder behaviour Volunteers involved in monitoring reptile populations (mainly adder, common lizard, grass snake and slow-worm) 	High
Wetscape, Waterways, Ponds and Mires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction of Blakeney Weir eel pass and establishment of volunteer survey group High level of volunteer time in training and surveying, waterways. Multiple new ponds created, mostly in the Forest but some in Schools. 	High
Woodland Flora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained volunteers to recognise and survey areas for rare plant species Undertook initial surveys. 	Low
Ancient and Notable Trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The whole forest and Hundred of St Briavels has been included in the tree survey and landowners have shown a positive approach to the management of their ancient trees Volunteers have taken part in training survey days and learned about ancient trees 	High
Veteran Trees History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recorded over 500 veteran and notable trees. Better understanding of veteran trees, their location, condition and surroundings. 	High
Butterflies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary habitat improved Key butterfly species in the Forest of Dean have benefitted from the habitat improvements across the sites 	High
Deans Marvellous Meadows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wildflower meadows identified and recorded 19 meadows have been surveyed and recorded and 21 meadow owners provided with advice and management recommendations; Capital work improvements have been undertaken on 12 meadows. 	High

*Note: **Green** = High level of outcomes achieved **Amber** = Medium level of Outcomes achieved **Blue** = Low level of outcomes achieved

(three Apps were produced) provided direct links for people to explore heritage through linking of historic images with the current situation on the ground. The Heritage Open Days supported promotion of FF projects and raised awareness among Forest residents and visitors of the heritage sites and activities available.

The final project under this theme, Worcester Walk Community Project, was led by a local group to improve a local area through voluntary activity, reduce vandalism and make it a more secure and safe place to visit. A pond was created and the area improved through clearing, fencing and planting, as well as some infrastructure improvements such as a bench, picnic table, shed and dog waste bin to create a more user friendly space.

In general projects engaged with small numbers of volunteers over the programme period but were targeting the wider community to increase awareness and engagement with the heritage of the Forest. Evidence collected indicates, for example, that over 800 people benefitted

HERITAGE APP	DOWNLOADS
Hidden Heritage of the Dean App	8,243 (since 2016; Average = 127/month)
Coleford Heritage App	1,548 (since 2018; Average = 34/month)
Cinderford Heritage App	197 (since 2021; Average = 65/month)

directly from utilisation of the Trampers (the figure would have been higher without the Pandemic impacts which effectively stopped all use), and in the case of the Heritage Apps a significant number of downloads onto mobile devices have been made. As of January 2022 the download statistics are as above.

The Hidden Heritage App covers a much wider area of the Forest of Dean than those focused on individual towns, which might account for the higher average monthly download rate.



TABLE 4. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES: EXPLORING OUR FOREST

Projects	Stronghold for Nature: Outputs	NLHF Outcomes*
Bream Heritage Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a 6.5-mile signposted walk around the villages of Bream and Whitecroft and the hamlets of Saunders Green and Brockhollands, highlighting points of interest, including industrial heritage of the area and features such as scowles. 	High
Story of the Freeminers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production of interpretation panels to tell the story of Freemining at Hopewell Colliery. 	High
Heritage Open Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved awareness and understanding of the past through more involvement in open day events The Heritage Open Days event is part of the National Heritage Open Days events occurring every year. A number of FF projects are represented within the schedule of the activities/ events occurring in the Forest 	High
Hidden Heritage App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production of three downloadable free Apps: Hidden Heritage of the Dean – linking numerous mine sites using the Forestry England Family Cycle Trail (previously a railway line) Coleford’s Hidden Heritage –includes Darkhill, Titanic and Scarr Bandstand Cinderford’s Hidden Heritage 	High
Walking with Wheels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of two all-terrain mobility scooters to provide access to the heritage of the Forest. Two trampers available for hire 7 days per week with 6 approved routes allowing users to explore the Forest of Dean. Over 800 people have accessed the forest as a result; over 100 volunteers have been involved with the project 	High
Worcester Walk Community Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraged local people to learn about their heritage 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, and the peace and tranquillity. Created new community organisation (Friends of Worcester Walk) to continue the work into the future 	High
Improving Engagement with Disadvantaged Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small project to enhance local engagement with disadvantaged groups Creating a pilot sensory trail within the Cyril Hart Arboretum (near Speech House), undertaken by FVAF with Forestry England support. 	High

*Note: **Green** = High level of outcomes achieved **Amber** = Medium level of Outcomes achieved **Blue** = Low level of outcomes achieved

Project outcomes and achievements: 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 or 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 20th 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 have completed this work in some areas of the Forest, but much remains to be surveyed 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 an App with 11 walks identifying and describing the local Geological features, provided a series of 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.



TABLE 5. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES: REVEALING OUR PAST

Projects	Revealing our Past: Outputs	NLHF Outcomes*
Built Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved condition of built heritage structures through restoration and conservation work. Trafalgar Colliery - revealed and then conserved the base of the ventilation chimney Removed vegetation and completed small-scale conservation works on structures at Darkhill Ironworks and Titanic Steelworks 	High
Buried Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved identification and understanding of the archaeological remains that survive across the Forest. GIS mapping of archaeological assets across the Forest will underpin monitoring and management of important archaeological remains. Developed a well-trained and motivated group of volunteers who will continue with the LIDAR survey in future years. A school resource pack distributed to all schools within the Forest with teacher training days held to promote use of the pack. 	High
Voices from the Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created a living collection of oral histories Accessible web resources created, including clips; timeline; map; films; Podcast series and a publication 	High
Forest Oral History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved condition of oral histories by digitising 200 oral history recordings and made more accessible to the public, Created a unique social history archive for the Forest of Dean spanning the 20th century. A new resource for DHC, historians and researchers 	High
Forest Dialect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 oral histories digitally improved for sound quality, transcribed and catalogued Volunteers trained in cataloguing for dialect research, transcription skills; social media promotion, writing, communication skills Educational resources produced, social media established and engaged with 23 organisations including local schools 	High
Geology of our Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater public awareness and understanding of the FoD geology from guided walks. Geology App created with 11 walks with detailed explanation of the Forest's Geology and how this has influenced industrial heritage. Geology packs for schools produced. 	High
Heritage Craft Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved accessibility to heritage craft skills for local people through provision of workshops. Volunteers supported delivery of the workshops and free workshop spaces given to people from disadvantaged groups to access these skills. Made key links with other community projects and schools to share skills more widely in the Forest of Dean Series of videos created to illustrate heritage craft skills workshops. 	High

*Note: **Green** = High level of outcomes achieved **Amber** = Medium level of Outcomes achieved **Blue** = Low level of outcomes achieved



Project outcomes and achievements: 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 Forest 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 board-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 and 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 Forestry England estate, which reduced the number and type of workshops that could be delivered and limited achievement of target outcomes.

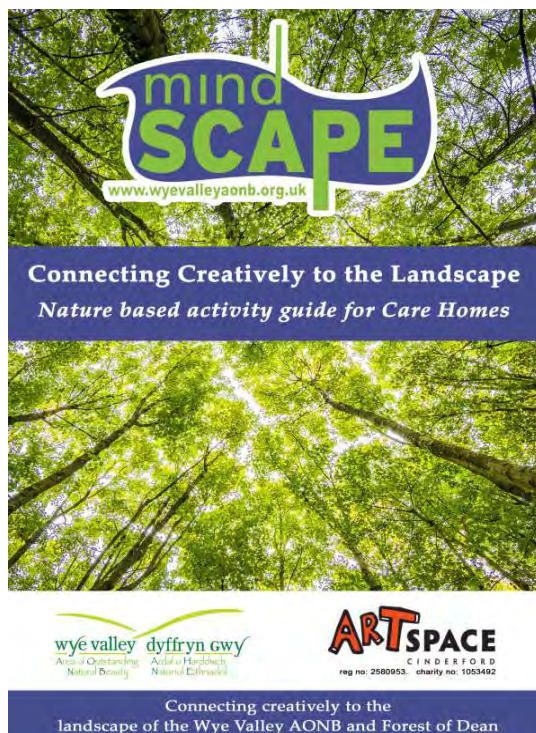




The Love Your Forest project operated as a partnership consisting of the FF programme with Hubbub, Suntory, FoD District Council, Forestry England and FoD/ Wye Valley Tourism. The project undertook a range of activities including: litter picking events, organising a "Trash-converter" van to visit schools, development of a litter picking badge for Scouts and 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'. The project duration was 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.

TABLE 6. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES: CELEBRATING OUR FOREST

Projects	Celebrating our Forest: Outputs	NLHF Outcomes*
Community Celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staged community events and local interest podcasts • Performances of Passing the Baton Play; and an Online photo exhibition and extended docu-drama podcast of the Musket story. • 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. 	High
Edible Forest skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made edible forest skills more accessible and affordable to the people of the Forest of Dean. Free workshop spaces given to disadvantaged groups access to these skills. • Volunteers supported the delivery of workshops. 	Medium
Forest Musical Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised awareness and opportunities for people to learn about the musical heritage of the Forest • Collected and archived musical heritage materials for the Dean Heritage Centre • Delivered 20 concerts at a variety of venues; Involvement in schools, providing tuition and an alternative route into music for young people 	High
Love your Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised awareness of anti-littering and the need for more recycling in the Forest • Artworks relating to the anti-littering and recycling messages created and promoted; Reward Recycle machines installed. • Delivered an ongoing campaign of activities including community volunteer litter picks gathering 1,570 bags of litter since 2017 • Trash converter van made school visits 	High
mindSCAPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Home residents engaged with landscape and nature through a programme of art activities. • Care home Activity Co-Ordinators and care staff have been up-skilled. • 8 Care Homes received 10 sessions each; Activity guides produced and distributed to encourage continuation of activities; and a series of 10 online videos produced 	High
Reading the Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified and enhanced awareness of the literary heritage of the Forest. Made and shared new discoveries about FoD authors and poets; created new public arts works (murals); Published anthology • Web resources developed: teacher resources; trail map; timeline; films; Podcast series, exhibitions, talks, screenings, performances. • Broadcasts, including regional radio series; regional television feature • Worked with schools to develop free resources and lesson plans 	High

*Note: **Green** = High level of outcomes achieved **Amber** = Medium level of Outcomes achieved **Blue** = Low level of outcomes achieved

TABLE 6. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES: CELEBRATING OUR FOREST (CONT.)

Projects	Celebrating our Forest: Outputs	NLHF Outcomes*
Scarr Bandstand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bandstand heritage site restored: now usable by community Tradition of brass band concerts revived High-quality events enjoyed by locals and tourists each summer Community groups now use the Bandstand for their own events 	High
Interpretation and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produced information about FF project activities and raised awareness of local heritage. Blue/green plaques installed to celebrate achievements of Forest residents and interpretation boards erected at key locations Map and leaflet published; Films and Forest timeline produced 	High

Project outcomes and achievements: Securing our Future

The fifth FF 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 (Table 7). 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 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. 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 Freemaners 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, 2022).

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 Freemaners ended up assembling the machinery themselves.

TABLE 7. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES: SECURING OUR FUTURE

Projects	Securing our Future: Outputs	NLHF Outcomes*
A Future for Freemining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced the future for Freemining. Sourced briquette machinery from India and constructed a building. Created a Community Interest Company (CIC) to manage the briquetting machine - income will support training of Freeminers in future. Traditional training supplemented by specialist training e.g. advanced First Aid underground. A memorial to the Waterloo Colliery disaster in 1949 installed at Waterloo screens near Mireystock tunnel. 	High
Maintenance of open space (through support for grazing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance of forest open spaces through grazing animals Support with purchase of water bowser and stock handling equipment Educational opportunity for agricultural students from Hartpury and school children; raised awareness around heritage of commoning sheep in the forest Improved butterfly habitat; flora and fauna diversity within fenced enclosures 	High
Forest Explorers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged families in forest heritage with 1,655 children attending Active volunteers currently engaged with the project 	High
New Leaf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging with disadvantaged groups such as people who are homeless, have addiction issues, mental health problems, suffering from domestic violence. Kensley Sheds has been improved to create a fully working community craft centre – in use 5-7 days week Activities include green wood working; heritage crafts group events; training in traditional woodland management and conservation skills. 	High
Youth Rangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked with young people to develop their understanding of local heritage – provided activities for 14-18 yr group during monthly meetings. 30+ Young people have a better understanding about the heritage of Forest of Dean 	High
Working with Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lydbrook Primary school re-wrote their school curriculum to embrace their local heritage; now being used as a model for other schools. Other local schools have engaged in forest visits as part of their outdoor learning 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 & Natural Heritage Scheme of Works; school curriculum Key Stage 1 and 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. 	High

*Note: **Green** = High level of outcomes achieved **Amber** = Medium level of Outcomes achieved **Blue** = Low level of outcomes achieved



5. 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 over the period April

2017 – December 2021, with an estimated value equivalent to almost £831,227. The equivalent monetary value of volunteering equates to an additional 38% of the value of funding allocated to projects (i.e. 38% of £2.175 million). Without volunteering many of the projects could not have been delivered with the available budget.

The 2021 On-line survey undertaken as part of the evaluation indicated that 13.6% of sample respondents had some experience of volunteering for the FF Programme (an increase from 9.1% of

TABLE 8. NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER HOURS CONTRIBUTED, BY FF PROGRAMME THEMATIC AREA

Thematic Area	Total Volunteer hours	Percentage of Total	Total volunteer Value	Percentage of total value
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%
Total	37,208	100%	£831,227	100%

Source: FF Programme Team, 2021

survey respondents in 2018). In the 2021 survey 85% of volunteers were residents, while in terms of employment the majority were either employed full- or part-time (60%), whilst 29% were retired and 4% unemployed.

Volunteer numbers varied greatly across the 38 projects with highest numbers engaged in Love Your Forest, Buried Heritage, Reptiles, Butterflies, Heritage Open Days, and the Waterways, ponds and mires project. This reflects the variability in project use of volunteers, as well as the stage of development of each project when the survey was undertaken. The most common types of activity undertaken by volunteers were litter picking, doing surveys or data collection, conservation work, and organising events.

People are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons. More than two-thirds of the 2021 On-line survey respondents who had engaged in FF volunteering indicated a desire *'to help protect the natural environment of the Forest'*, and over 40% of the sample indicated that they wanted to *'contribute to the community where I live'*. In addition, almost 70% of the respondents indicated they felt *'It was an opportunity to help conserve the culture and traditions of the Forest'*. Survey respondents who had engaged in FF Programme volunteer work also indicated a range of benefits. Highest scores were assigned for statements relating to *'wanting to look after the Forest'* and *'increased awareness of the*

natural environment of the Forest of Dean'. Respondents also agreed that volunteering improves physical and mental health.

Volunteers taking part in discussion groups (in November 2021) identified a range of benefits from volunteering including strong learning and social elements in terms of developing skills and enabling engagement with both like-minded people and with those from other sectors of society with whom they would not normally engage. For some there are more altruistic motives, such as *'Giving something back to the forest'*, while for others it is the mix of benefits that makes their volunteering experience enjoyable.



"I get to volunteer on something I know nothing about. It inspires me to do more."

"I get a sense of achievement. This year on Worcester Walk we achieved a lot."

"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."

'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'.

(Volunteer Discussion Group Participants, 2021)



6. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: A SUMMARY OF THE FF OUTCOMES

The project outcomes described in Section 4 focus on the extent to which individual projects delivered against the nine National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) outcome criteria. The analysis revealed high levels of outcome attainment in the majority of projects (see summary of outputs and outcomes in Tables 3 – 7). The NLHF outcomes, however, only partially describe the impact of the FF Programme on the Forest of Dean. More significant for local communities are the wider impacts and benefits arising from engagement with FF over the seven years of Programme development and delivery (2015-22).

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, along with exploration of the Legacy plans and project progress reports. The wider outcomes are summarised in the 6 diagrams below (Figures 3 to 8)

and described under the following six broad themes:

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

The focus of this analysis is on how 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.

Making a difference: Consensus and Recognition

Figure 3 summarises the changes arising as a result of enhanced understanding of the significance and importance of the different types of heritage in the Forest. A key outcome has been development of a consensus on biodiversity management arising from partner organisations working together on the same land area to achieve multiple goals (for example, improvements in habitat for butterflies, birds, reptiles, and grazing animals). The consensus on how to address biodiversity

is a positive outcome that will support future management of the Forest.

Consensus also occurs at smaller scales within community groups of interest. Another 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 a group of very independent-minded individuals to purchase a briquetting machine and develop a new Community Interest Company to manage it.

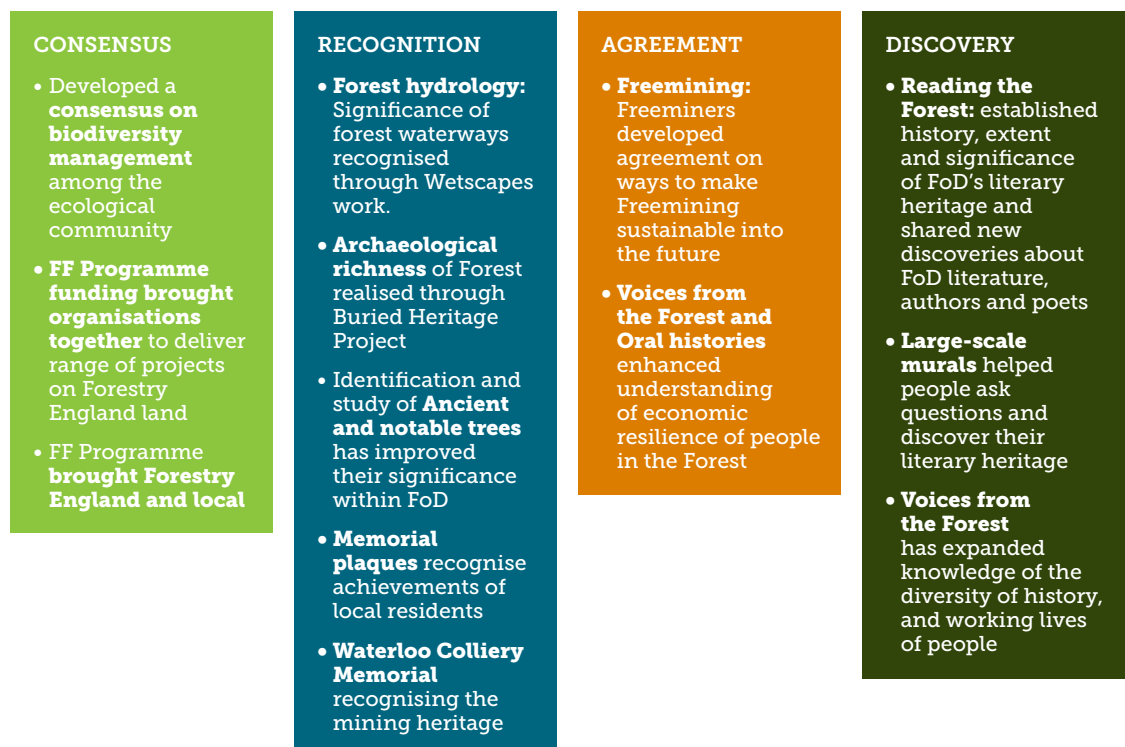
Additional outcomes, which also have potential to improve future management of the Forest of Dean arise from changed perceptions or 'recognition' based on new evidence generated by the Projects. Recognition of the importance of the forest hydrology (the streams and ponds) is one example, arising from research carried out under the Wetscapes, ponds and mires project. The new understanding of Forest hydrology has the potential to influence future tree planting and forest

management that will contribute to protection of aquatic resources in the area.

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) revealed existence of a much richer archaeological resource than was previously thought, with the potential to alter understanding 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 17th century.

Recognition of the ways in which new information can alter understanding and perceptions of an area have the potential to increase awareness of the natural/cultural heritage, making new management and partnership approaches possible. This is a significant outcome for the FF Programme.

FIGURE 3. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: CONSENSUS AND RECOGNITION



Making a difference: Improved Heritage Condition

As described earlier in Section 4 on outputs, there have been considerable improvements in some aspects of heritage condition across the FF area. In terms of natural heritage there have been numerous improvements in condition (Figure 4), including:

- **Conservation grazing and active habitat management has had positive impacts 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**
- **Training local landowners has improved the scope for more wildflower meadows in other parts of the Forest.**

Under the Built Heritage theme, 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 has digitised and catalogued old interviews resulting in better condition of a historical archive for future use, while Voices from the Forest has added additional contemporary material to the archive. In addition, the Musical Landscape project collected and archived materials associated with the musical heritage and the Scarr Bandstand project has enabled increased utilisation of a heritage asset.

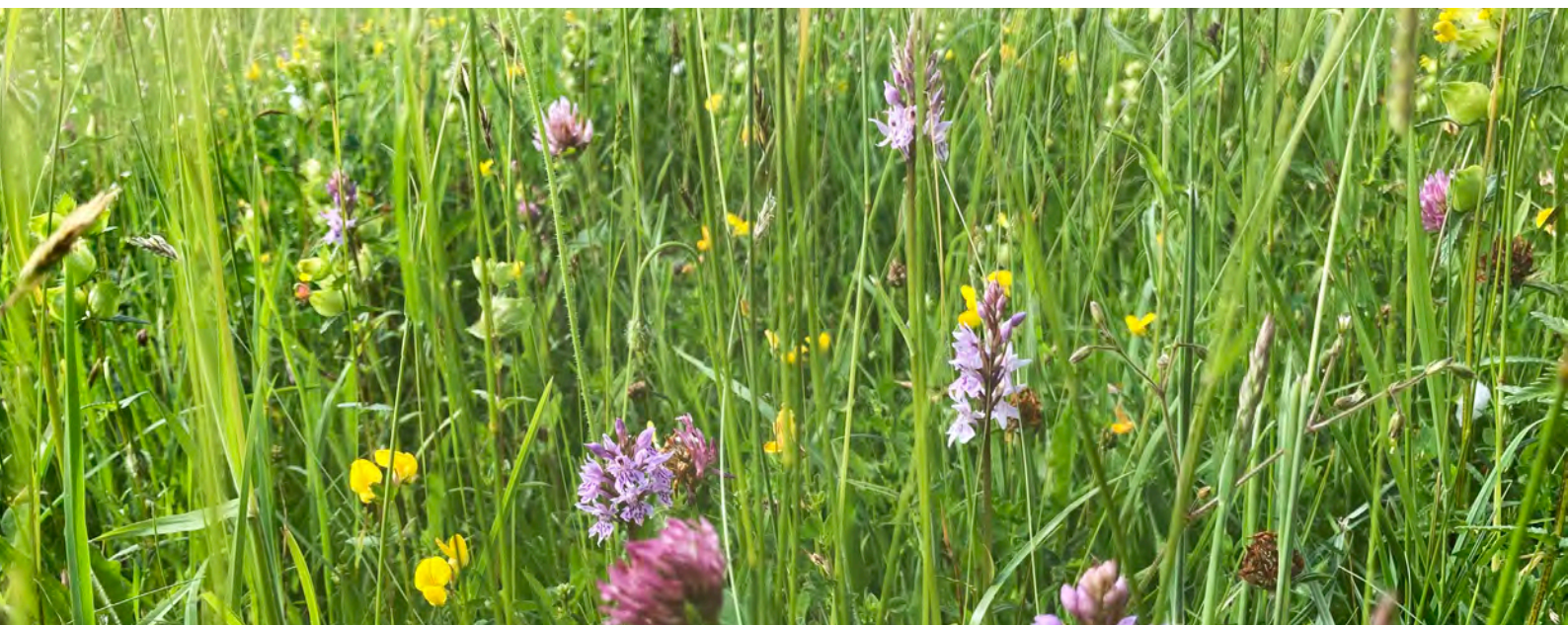


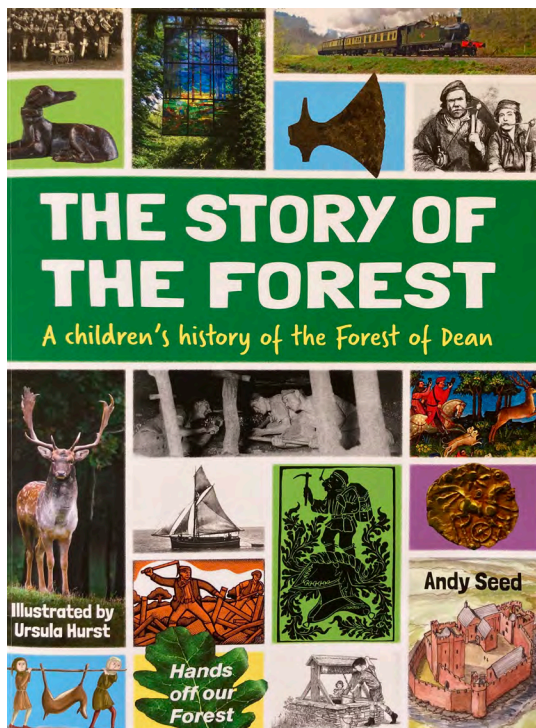
FIGURE 4. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: IMPROVED HERITAGE CONDITION



Making a difference: Information resources

A major focus of effort for many projects under the FF Programme was in identifying and recording information about the current state of the natural,

built, and cultural heritage through survey work. Figure 5 illustrates the range of projects involved in generating information from wildlife and habitat surveys, LIDAR surveys and validation of archaeological sites, aquatic studies, and structural surveys. 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 provide a range of resources to assist schools in adapting their curriculum to encompass a local heritage focus. Other examples include the following:



- **The Cultural Heritage projects focused around recording of local resident's memories (Voices from the Forest) 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**
- **The heritage Apps (Geo Heritage of the Dean, Hidden Heritage of the Dean, Cinderford, Coleford) provide information resources through downloadable Apps 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 and Guide' leaflet and interpretation boards for Conservation Grazing (3 boards), and a Buried Heritage interpretation board at Ruardean Castle).

FIGURE 5. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: ENHANCED INFORMATION RESOURCES





Making a difference: Inclusiveness

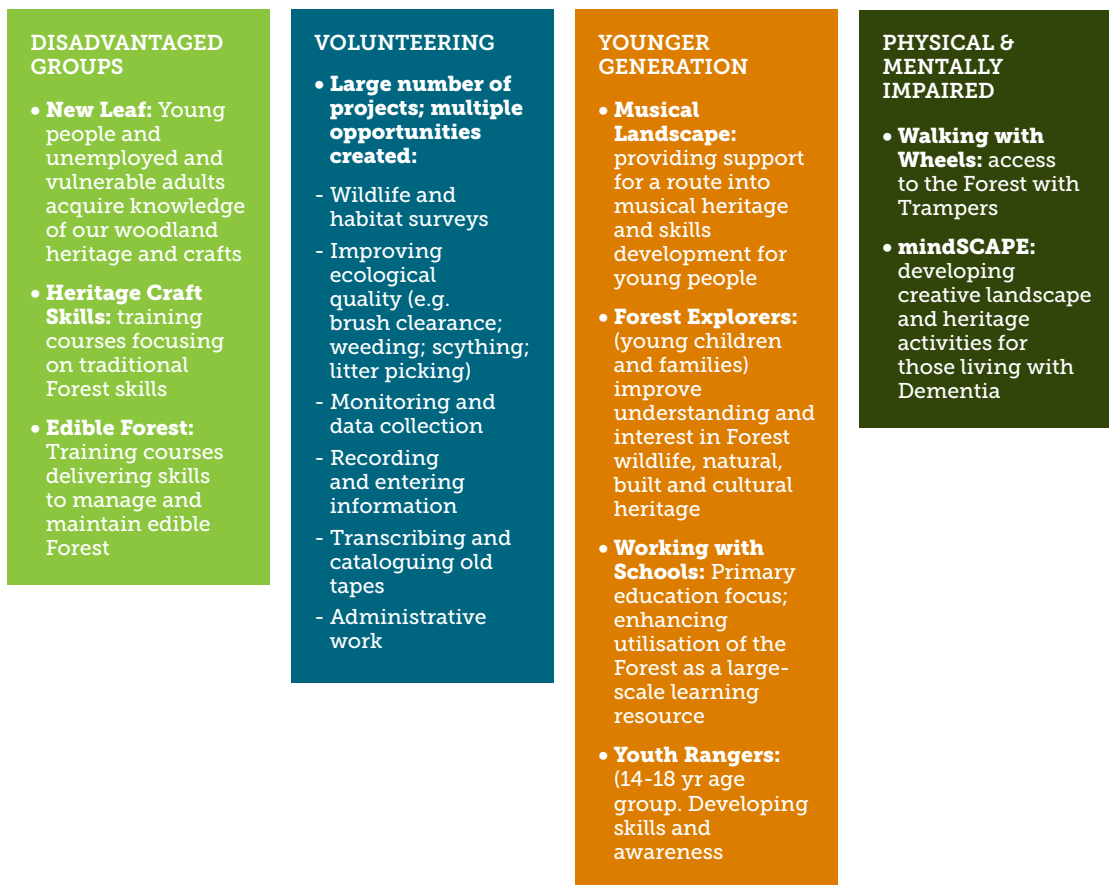
A significant outcome of the FF Programme for the wider community of the area has been its 'inclusiveness', in terms of having a range of projects targeting very different sectors of the population, and through provision of volunteering opportunities (Figure 6).

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.



FIGURE 6. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: INCLUSIVENESS



Making a difference: Community engagement

A significant area of success was the level of community engagement in FF Programme and project activities (Figure 7). 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.





Activities organised with schools were highly successful (e.g. visits to local sites) but the early engagement organised by the FF 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.”

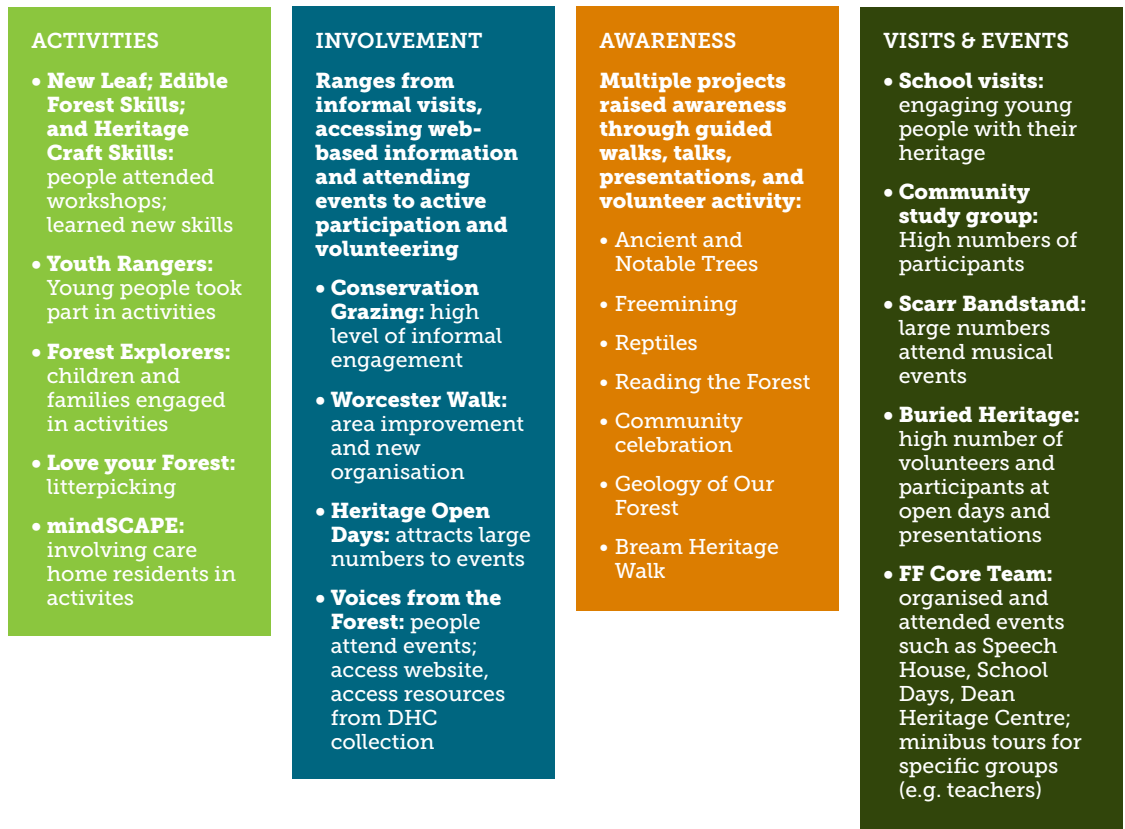
(Project Leader interview, 2022).

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.



FIGURE 7. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Making a difference: Building capacity and resilience

Figure 8 summarises 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 practical experience.

A small number of individuals have been involved in establishing new organisations (such as: the Freemining Community Interest Company; Friends of Worcester Walk Community Group). Project leaders have gained experience of managing volunteers and working in partnership with other organisations. The capacity for organisation developing and management, bidding for funding, and project implementation, is stronger



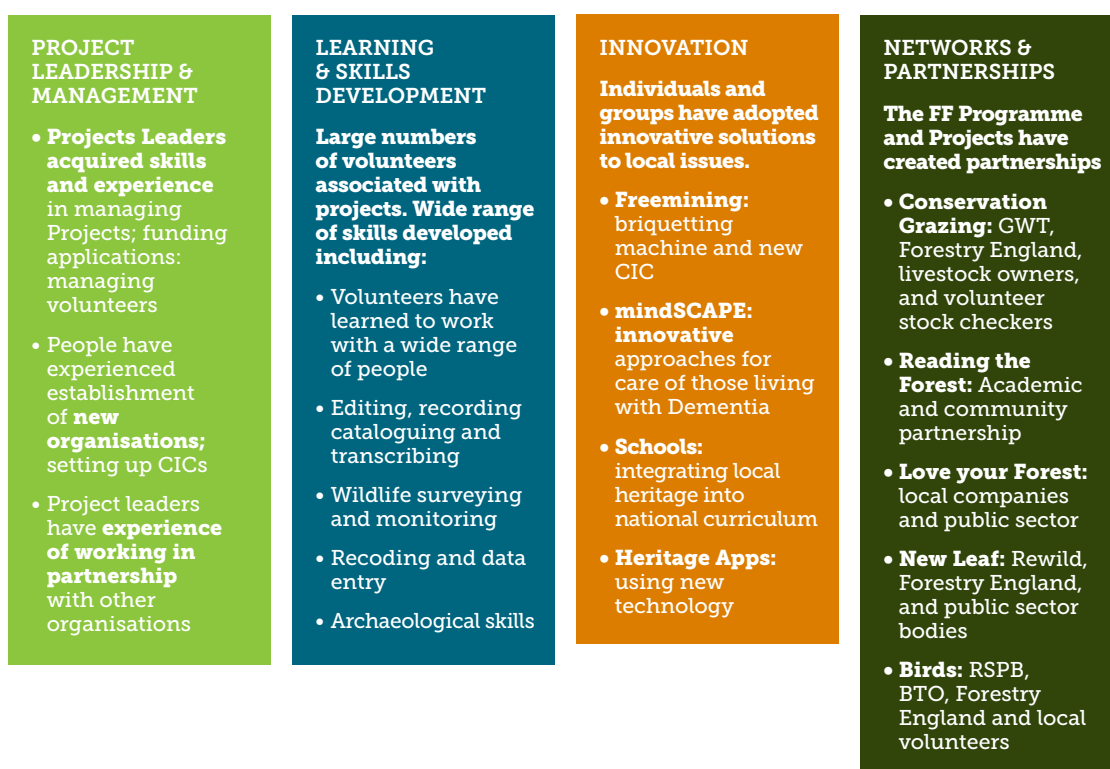


than it was prior to the FF Programme. In addition, a large core of volunteers now exists with a desire to continue involvement in 'looking after the Forest' and many are trained in aspects of surveying/monitoring, data collection and recording, and habitat management.

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

purchased a briquetting plant from abroad that will enhance the financial sustainability of Freemining in the forest, while 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 Schools project promoted opportunities to re-vamp the curriculum to teach primary school children about their local areas.

FIGURE 8. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: BUILDING CAPACITY AND RESILIENCE



Summary of outcomes

- 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 enhanced recognition of the significance of some of the local heritage, have created a large pool of '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 have 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.
- The extensive achievements of the programme would not have been possible without the funding, support and guidance provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership Programme, the comprehensive support of Forestry England, and the dedicated enthusiasm of the FF Programme team.

7. LESSONS LEARNED: WHAT WORKED WELL AND WHY

A number of factors influenced the overall impact and effectiveness of the FF Programme. These factors and their

effects on Programme outcomes are summarised in Table 9 and described in more detail below.

Programme governance

One factor contributing to the overall success of the programme was the involvement of a large number of community organisations that were integrated into the planning, development, and delivery of the programme through representation on the Community Stakeholder Group (CSG) and Programme Board, as well as through project leadership. The high level of involvement combined with the way in which the CSG and Programme Board brought all the interests together was viewed as a major reason for successful programme implementation.

“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 but we 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)

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. Project Leaders, the Programme Board, and CSG members all noted the strength and effectiveness of the overall management:

“For project leaders, the central team are very efficient, and helped people to learn about Forestry England operations and management.”

(Community Stakeholder Group, 2021)

“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 viewed as a strength by the core delivery team, giving access to support systems and people with expertise, although initially some of the Forestry England policies, processes and systems were viewed as challenging. Large numbers of projects complained about the level of paperwork associated with Forestry England permission processes in order to undertake even simple activities at each stage of the programme delivery. Forestry England, 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 from the rigorous level of control, which made projects stronger.

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 also extremely helpful in answering queries between the quarterly meetings, providing advice as needed to facilitate programme delivery.

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. 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 agreed the Programme could not have been delivered without Forestry England support as the programme required a large organisation to support delivery.



“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 close links between Forestry England and the FF Programme were viewed as a two-edged sword. On the one hand being embedded in the 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 was harder to create a separate identity for the FF Programme and created a barrier for some stakeholders preventing engagement.

From the Forestry England perspective there were also costs and benefits of being too closely involved with the FF programme. A key benefit was the ability to ensure the governance structure of

the Programme reflected the desires of the local community and not Forestry England or other organisational goals. Forestry England ensured from the start through design of the governance structure that the FF Programme would be built from the ground up and deliver local community objectives.

Financial management & support

Financial management systems worked well ensuring effective control of projects and enabled the Programme Manager, the CSG and Programme Board to track expenditure across the Programme period and to make adjustments where necessary. Re-allocation of funds was carried out where projects altered direction, made 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.

Communications

Good communications between the FF programme team and stakeholders, Project Leaders, Volunteers, and the wider community are seen as a strong mechanism underlying programme success. Internal communications between the Programme Board, CSG, Managers, Project Leaders and Forestry



England were good, and the Programme Team kept in touch with volunteers 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.

External communications were improved by having a dedicated Communications Officer as part of the core team. Project leaders indicated that active communications were important for “getting the public to know about the FF programme, which was a reason for success”. The FF Programme developed a ‘communications plan’ during the programme period, which avoided the problem of being too reactive to events and trying to constantly respond to developments across 38 projects. Communications with the wider community were not easy. It was difficult to develop awareness of the FF 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 (e.g. RSPB, BTO, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Natural England) and the FF Programme only had a five-year operational time frame.

“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)

Social media became a key aspect of communications and 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. For an average story 200 people might read it but I can increase the reach to 3,000.”

(Communications Officer, 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 challenge 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 projects with limited human resources, and community groups that lacked the relevant skills and experience.



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.

“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)

“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.”

(Project Leader Discussion Group. 2021)

Community engagement

A key feature of FF projects was the mix of objectives which often included improving the condition, management or recording of information about the heritage, along with developing skills and knowledge of people (largely those involved as volunteers) and raising awareness of heritage through wider engagement with the community. Many projects had notable levels of community engagement, particularly those involved with cultural heritage, such as Scarr Bandstand which delivered musical events, and Reading the Forest, which attracted high levels of interest from the wider community and larger audiences than anticipated to events. Buried heritage also engaged with the wider community through use of large numbers of volunteers, provision of open days and school visits, and development of school resources. The FF Core Team also reached out to the wider community through attending ‘Forest Showcase’ days, and ‘Thankyou’ events for volunteers.

A significant number of projects engaged with specific sectors of the community (such as: mindSCAPE; Walking with Wheels; the Schools project) with greater success than anticipated. mindSCAPE, for example, reached beyond the target population of those in care homes to raise

TABLE 9. SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

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

awareness among carers and families of those living with dementia 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.

Involvement of schools

Involving Schools within the FF Programme enabled support for the process of integrating local heritage information into the school curriculum, a process exemplified by Lydbrook School. Benefits were also created by development of resource packs by several projects (e.g. Buried Heritage; Reading the Forest; Geology) as well as support to the local history society to produce the Story of the Forest book. The links created with schools enabled several projects (for example, Buried Heritage, Reptiles, Freemining, Geology) to provide 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. 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)

Volunteering

As noted earlier, 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.”

(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. Without the enthusiasm and input from large numbers of volunteers 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 of 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 proportion of those registered 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.”

(PL discussion Group, 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.”

(PL discussion Group, 2021)

The unexpected: Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 Pandemic and government regulations 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. Voices from the Forest). One positive outcome was a switch from face-to-face meetings and events to greater use of social media to communicate with volunteers and to disseminate findings (for example through creation of podcasts, short videos, and films).



A key impact identified by a number of stakeholders and Project Leaders was the loss of momentum. 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 some FF activities reliant on external partner input suffered from being decreased in priority over the final two years of the programme.

8. LEGACY

A key outcome from the Programme is that 26 out of the initial 38 projects are planning to continue operation into the future. Those projects not continuing are largely those that have completed their objectives. 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 Dean Meadows, Butterflies, Reptiles, Wetscape, and Blakeney Weir Eel Pass.

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'. 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 Kensley Sheds under an 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. The existing materials from the Working with Schools project will be promoted through West Gloucestershire Schools Partnership to all Forest Primary Schools. The Freemining Association will continue its work of maintaining cultural heritage and funding activities through operation of the briquetting machine.

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.

Long-term legacy of the FF Programme

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 up in the local towns, and the Schools project.

Local authority stakeholders interviewed were 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 and suggested that now the programme is ending they will reduce their level of activities and continue to operate at a smaller scale into the future. Stakeholders were aware of the benefits the Programme had created, however, and were keen to ensure they 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.”

(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 FF Programme and would revert to carrying on operations as they had before the programme started. Examples given include Birds, Reptiles, and the Butterfly project. (Forestry England, 2021).

Project Leaders in discussion groups noted 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 referenced similar issues to those highlighted by local authorities: training of younger people, educational 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.

9. THE FUTURE: BUILDING ON THE FORESTERS' FOREST ACHIEVEMENTS

Interviews with stakeholders and discussions with project Leaders revealed a strong concern for the future of the Forest, and the legacy of the FF Programme. There is an acute awareness that the Programme has generated a significant legacy but how to maintain it into the future is shrouded in uncertainty.

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’.

Following discussion and indicative voting for two alternative proposals the Community Stakeholder Group has decided, in the short term, to adopt the proposal for a ‘FF Forum’ hosted by Forestry England (with a community steering group) to ensure that ‘the FF momentum is not lost, which will give more time for a new organisation to evolve’.

It is not the role of this evaluation to comment on proposals for the future. What it has tried to do is highlight the achievements of the past seven years of FF development and delivery and comment

on the nature of the benefits generated, which may serve as a foundation for future action. The challenge for any organisation beyond March 2022 will be how to build on this framework to meet future needs of the Forest. It will require looking through a lens that magnifies the potential drivers of change and the impacts these might have on the local area. These will 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 for carbon emissions by 2050) and impacts on natural heritage, the built environment, and people’s lives.**
- **Rising energy and food costs, and the potential impacts on employment, commuting, housing, food production and local development.**

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 and in the near future more cooperation between organisations will be required to address the issues identified above. Relationships, partnerships and inclusive community engagement will become more significant.

The FF Programme has created the structural elements of a framework that will support the communities of the Forest of Dean in finding a way to move forward. The challenge is to work out how to make it happen without losing the human capacity, resilience, and social capital that has been created and nurtured by the FF Programme.

This publication is a summary presentation of findings from the monitoring and evaluation of the Foresters' Forest programme carried out by the Countryside and Community Research Institute at the University of Gloucestershire, under contract to Forestry England. The full report and appendices can be found on the University of Gloucestershire Research Repository (<https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/>) by searching for "Foresters' Forest".

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