

Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme

Monitoring Report - Executive Summary

The Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme

The 328km² Weald Forest Ridge lies in the north and west of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), in South-East England. It is the highest ridge of the AONB and its landscape character is defined by the remnants of four ancient, medieval hunting forests spread along its length: Ashdown, Broadwater, St Leonard's and Tilgate. 325,000 people live within the Ridge and its eight neighbouring towns: Horsham, Crawley, Haywards Heath, East Grinstead, Crowborough, Uckfield, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge.

Under the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnership Scheme programme, the £2.7million Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme (WFR LPS) commenced delivery in early 2009 and was completed in late 2012. The Scheme aimed to enable its audiences – both within the Ridge and in the eight neighbouring towns – to reconnect with their local landscape; more easily access and enjoy the Ridge; understand its unique natural, cultural and built heritage; take part in caring for it; and leave a legacy for future generations. The High Weald AONB Unit was the Scheme's Lead Partner and the Unit led a broad partnership of delivery organisations and wider stakeholders.

This Monitoring Report details the delivery work undertaken in the three years of the Scheme. This is done at a project, as well as a whole Scheme level and includes stand-alone project reports presented to a pro-forma template. The Monitoring Report should be read in conjunction with its sister Evaluation Report for a full overview of the many successes achieved by the WFR LPS.

What Was Delivered?

31 projects were delivered within the WFR LP Scheme, divided across four operational Programmes. Within the Monitoring Report, delivery of these projects is reported under five themes, rather than the four Programmes, as the themes more accurately reflect the Heritage Lottery Fund's core values of conservation, participation and learning. The five themes are:

- enhancing publicly accessible sites
- understanding and conserving the historic environment
- public celebration and learning
- learning in schools, and
- training and skills.

The 31 projects were delivered by 20 different organisations – known as Delivery Partners – who were responsible for individual project programming, procurement and spend to agreed budgets. The partners ranged from environmental charities – such as the RSPB and Woodland Trust; through public bodies like the Forestry Commission and local authorities; to community organisations. Individual projects varied enormously in financial value: from under £500 to almost £500,000, although financial value was not necessarily a measure of their impact. Four of the projects employed dedicated project staff to undertake delivery – equating to 3.2FTE's.

A fifth, Scheme Management Programme employed 2.8FTE posts within the High Weald AONB Unit. The three posts acted as the Scheme's Core Team, responsible for day-to-day delivery of the WFR LPS including: financial management; overall co-ordination; promotion and communications; fostering partnership working; Scheme branding; and reporting to the HLF. A Partnership Board had an overarching role to steer and advise on the LPS delivery.

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Key Outputs

Strong, centrally co-ordinated project management allowed accurate recording of delivery outputs by each Delivery Partner in their individual projects. The Scheme Management Team collected and collated these outputs, using the national LPS Output Data system developed by consultants for the HLF in 2009 and 2010.

Highlights of the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme include:

- Over 200ha of Biodiversity Action Plan habitat conserved or restored.
- Over 55km of routeways or self-guided trails created or improved.
- Over 14,500 pupils and staff from 89 primary schools undertook learning activities with the Scheme.
- Almost 1,000 volunteers participated in the Scheme, contributing volunteer time valued at around £300,000.
- Over 340 events were staged, with over 18,000 attendees.
- Over 970 trainees and work placements engaged with heritage to enhance their knowledge and skills.

What Does the Future Hold?

Sustainability and legacy were essential elements of the overall design and delivery of the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme. A key part of the Scheme's exit strategy was investing these elements predominantly with the Delivery Partners and their projects. For example, Delivery Partners will maintain any physical site improvements they have implemented until at least 2020, as part of their Partner Agreements within the Scheme.

But legacy has been far more deep-rooted in the Scheme than just these conservation and access site enhancements. Many of the participation and learning outputs provide the actual legacy. There are, for example, archaeological toolkits, resource packs for schools, self-guided walks leaflets, interpretive trails, continuations of guided walks programmes, a stunning LiDAR survey, an i-phone app and a new community education post. Wherever possible, these resources have been made available in appropriate web locations, as well as in hard copy.

But some of the most enduring legacies lie with the people, organisations and communities who have participated in, and benefited from, the Weald Forest Ridge LPS. There has been an enhancement of people's understanding and enjoyment of the archaeological, cultural and environmental heritage of the Weald Forest Ridge, alongside an increased skills base, so that the unique landscape of the Weald Forest Ridge can be appreciated and cared for, now and in the future.