

Enabling Positive Change

Evaluation of the Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme

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Neroche conservation volunteers

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Executive Summary

1.1 Context and aim

The Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme (NLPS) funded by the Heritage Lottery ran from 2006-2011 and consisted of landscape and heritage based activities that sought to maximise the value of the northern part of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Southwest England) for wildlife conservation, access and recreation, learning and skills development. The scheme was led by the Forestry Commission with eleven other partner organisations involved. Landscape Partnership Schemes such as Neroche need to address the conservation of the built and natural heritage. Many schemes represent diverse and complex collections of projects and activities that often sit alongside other existing interventions.

The key elements of the NLPS included:

- **Partnership working and community engagement** to involve relevant organisations and members of local communities in the creation and running of the scheme.
- **'Liberating the landscape'** by creating a more sustainable structure of open space and broadleaved woodland. This involved some forest clearance and the introduction of cattle grazing.
- **Organising a wide range of activities and projects** to involve new and existing users to the area. This included creating long-distance trails, and projects such as Forest School, local history/heritage awareness, volunteering, and activities such as bushcraft and family days.

This evaluation of the NLPS provides a detailed account of how the scheme ran and evidence of the impacts it had on a range of partners, participants and members of the surrounding local communities. In addition, the evaluation draws out key insights and lessons learnt from the scheme's governance structure and processes.

1.2 Evaluation approach

The evidence presented in this evaluation was gathered using three methods:

- **Interviews** with members of the landscape partnership board, the local stakeholders group, the project team and beneficiaries of the scheme. Questions focused on different people's experiences and views of the impacts of the NLPS and how they experienced and perceived the NLPS's governance structures.
- **Focused group discussions** with some of the members of the local stakeholders group and with forestry apprentices to explore impacts and experiences of being involved in the NLPS.

- **Questionnaire** mailed to beneficiaries of the scheme to explore how people perceive the area, how often they visit, what for, and what they know and enjoy about the NLPS activities.

By utilising the above methods we provide an in-depth exploration of the perspectives, opinions and meanings of the various participants, actors and beneficiaries within the NLPS and situate these within the broader context of the landscape and social changes brought about by the scheme.

1.3 Key findings

Creation and design of the scheme

- The Forestry Commission took a bold approach to establish a large landscape partnership scheme with strong community engagement and create a wide range of activities to conserve and enhance the character of the Neroche area.
- A key innovation of the scheme was the early creation of a local stakeholders group to represent community interests.
- The project team provided vision and enthusiasm to develop and run the NLPS while actively involving others.
- Professional support and training- to build knowledge, skills and confidence - were needed for communities to play an active part in planning and delivering services and projects. Public bodies and third sector organisations performed key roles in facilitating this process.

Partnership working

- Expert and local knowledge was combined from the partners, stakeholders and consultations with local communities to develop and produce the NLPS plan of work and activities.
- The local stakeholders group were surprised and pleased to be given a strong role in decision-making within the scheme and to have the casting vote in decision-making on the landscape partnership board.
- In 2010, five members of the local stakeholders group formed the 'Blackdown Hills Trust' to continue their work on supporting landscape and community-related projects to benefit the area. This is an important legacy of the scheme and fits well with the emerging 'Big Society' policy agenda.

Impacts of the scheme

- Opening up the landscape through tree clearance and cattle grazing was an innovation, transforming areas into low intensity mixed wood pasture.
- However, concerns were expressed about the scale of the tree clearance and how the sites looked after felling.
- The wide and diverse range of activities undertaken as part of the NLPS enabled new audiences to be reached and provided some existing users with new experiences.

- Those who took part in the various activities talked about gaining new knowledge about the area, learning new skills and increasing confidence to participate in and enjoy the local landscape.
- Beneficiaries include those who used the NLPS activities to meet new people or to visit with friends and family, and those who enjoy visiting alone to experience the peace and quiet of the area.

Transformations

Our evaluation identified some significant changes with lasting impacts. We refer to these as 'transformations' and identify four key examples:

- **Transformations in the landscape**- the opening up and restoring of several areas within the NLPS benefited wildlife but also affected how some people now relate to and experience the landscape.
- **Transforming work practices** - participating in a holistic project encouraged a broader perspective and inspired some partners to be more innovative and visionary. Participation also served to build knowledge and confidence.
- **Transforming lives** - some individuals, groups and families found a new sense of enjoyment and wellbeing through activities offered or initiated by the NLPS. These gave people new opportunities to connect with family and/or nature and to experience and learn about their natural environment, local history and culture.
- **Transforming small communities to become 'Big Society'** - members of the small rural communities of the NLPS were encouraged and empowered to influence the planning and management of projects and activities in their area. They were able to discover new interests and roles in supporting conservation and community activities, and to take responsibility for their upkeep through professional training or volunteering.

Challenges

- Forest clearance caused concerns and opposition amongst some members of the local community. The speed and scale of the clearances was a particular issue that seemed to surprise people.
- The grazing of cattle was disrupted by an incident involving a formal complaint made by a local resident. This had a considerable impact on the project manager's and project team's time as they dealt with the situation. While temporarily affecting staff morale, it did not seem to cloud the recognition of the scheme's array of positive impacts amongst partners and beneficiaries.
- Despite investing much effort and time into communicating and publicising the scheme, it remained difficult to reach diverse audiences and achieve widespread citizen involvement.
- Some frustration was expressed that the NLPS was coming to an end, with debates about how best to maintain popular activities and new infrastructure, such as footpaths and car parks. Much effort was put into identifying and training individuals

or negotiating with partner organisations to continue certain activities and work streams.

- The Forestry Commission staff had to balance the provision of strong leadership within the NLPS with sharing power with the landscape partnership board and local stakeholders group to successfully deliver the scheme's work programme.
- Capabilities and priorities within some organisations changed during the lifespan of the scheme and are likely to affect the type of follow-on projects and the composition and working arrangements of future partnerships.

1.4 Key conclusions - Insights and lessons learnt

A diverse partnership with a highly capable team to lead the scheme lay at the heart of the NLPS's success. Our research suggests that care taken to **identify synergies** between the work streams of partners and the projects within the scheme **early on** in the development of schemes **will pay dividends later on.**

The early decision to **grant significant influence and power over the design and decision-making to the local stakeholders group increased legitimacy and accountability.** It helped to achieve sensitivity to local context and provided a strong sense of 'acting in the community interest'.

The addition of a dedicated post for a **communication expert** and the development, within the partnership, of a **communication strategy** would have helped target different audiences early on and supported the project team and partnership in their communication and dissemination efforts.

A balance was achieved between **strong and decisive management** informed by a clear vision, and allowing partners and project team members **the freedom to innovate, design and deliver projects** in accordance with their experience and knowledge of local context.

The NLPS is more than a collection of individual projects and activities – the sum total of the scheme's achievements includes the **numerous connections that have been** created between organisations, groups and individuals, and between people and the changing landscape.

Working together and sharing experience, insights and knowledge has created a **learning environment.** Many said they had **learnt practical skills and gained confidence** from their involvement in the NLPS. The successful setting up of a Trust by members of the local stakeholders group to continue the work initiated by the scheme is a powerful illustration of this, an important legacy of the scheme, and an example of the 'Big Society' in action.

2 Introduction

2.1 Landscape Partnership Schemes

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) runs the Landscape Partnerships Programme (LPP) offering grants between £250,000 and £2 million.¹ The LPP is the only HLF grant programme focused on the countryside. It is more complex than other HLF grant programmes as Landscape Partnerships Schemes (LPSs) need to address conservation of both built and natural heritage. The programme contributes significantly to the United Kingdom's commitment to implementation of the European Landscape Convention. By 2010, 35 LPSs had been funded by the LPP (University of London Birkbeck (UoLB), 2010²).

An evaluation of the LPP published in May 2010 (UoLB) identified a lack of baseline data (against which to evaluate the LPSs within the LPP) and limited data collection (beyond data on LPS outputs, e.g. number of activities, people etc.) to support a robust evaluation of the long-term impacts of LPSs. Some more thorough evaluations of individual LPSs have been conducted, such as the evaluation of the Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme (NLPS) presented in this report. Typically, these are commissioned by individual schemes and are not centrally co-ordinated or funded by HLF. As such, there is limited scope for comparison across schemes. In addition, the diversity of contexts and different approaches taken by each LPS further complicates any drawing together of comparisons between schemes.

Evaluations of the impacts of LPSs are recognised as facing particular challenges as many schemes represent diverse and complex collections of projects and activities that often sit alongside other existing interventions:

'The broad interlinked objectives of LPS and the variety of projects within them means that it will often be difficult, if not impossible to separate the impact of HLF funding from wider changes taking place within or affecting a LP area' (UoLB, 2010: 14).

This evaluation of the NLPS shows that it provides one model of a successful HLF funded scheme, bringing together a broad range of partners, actively engaging with local communities and local stakeholders, and learning lessons and adapting as the scheme progressed. Early indications are that the NLPS has created a positive legacy of landscape and social change in the Blackdown Hills area. However, more longitudinal research is needed to assess the longer-term outcomes of the scheme.

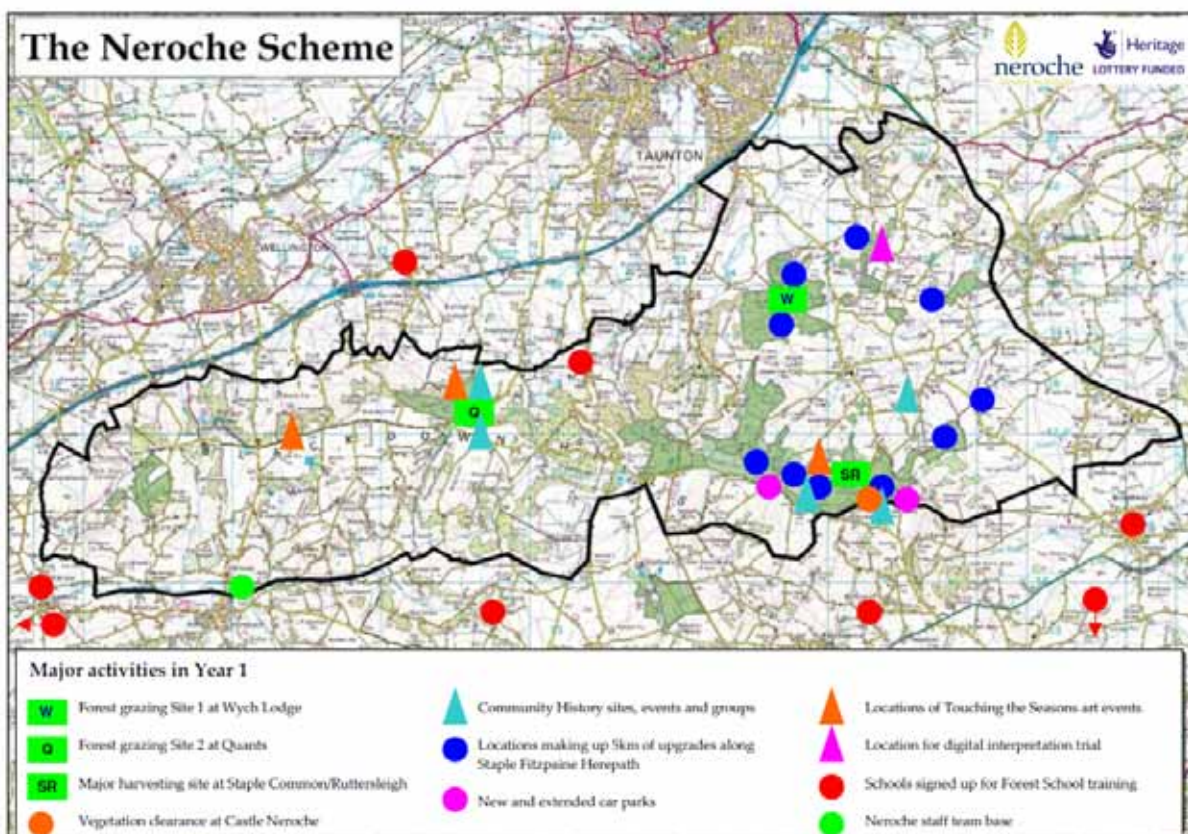
¹ <http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/landscapepartnerships.aspx>

² University of London Birkbeck. 2010. *Evaluation of the Landscape Partnerships Programme*. Centre for European Protected Area Research. Report to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

2.2 The Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme

The Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme (NLPS) consists of landscape and heritage based activities, seeking to maximise the value of the northern part of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for wildlife conservation, access and recreation, learning and skills development. The scheme covers 35 square miles, spanning the border of Somerset and Devon in Southwest England (Figure 2.1). It is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and a partnership of local authorities and agencies, under the HLF's Landscape Partnership programme. The Forestry Commission (Peninsula Forest District) is the lead partner, and the core project team are based with the Blackdown Hills AONB team. The NLPS began in October 2006 and was extended from a three-year to a five-year project (in line with more recent HLF-funded LPSs). The total cost of the scheme was £2,945,000 with a HLF grant of £2,000,000.

Figure 2.1: The NLPS boundary and major areas of activity in Year 1 of the scheme



The key elements of the scheme included:

- **Partnership working and community engagement** to involve relevant organisations and members of local communities in the creation and running of the scheme.
- **'Liberating the landscape'** by creating a more sustainable structure of open space and broadleaved woodland. This involved some forest clearance and the introduction of cattle grazing.
- **Organising a wide range of activities and projects** to involve new and existing users of the area. This included the creation of long-distance trails, and projects such as Forest School, local history, volunteering, and activities such as bushcraft and family days.

Table 2.1 lists the eight programmes that were developed under the NLPS which had 23 associated projects. Appendices 1 and 2 provide more details on the scheme and projects.

Table 2.1: Programmes developed in the NLPS

The eight Neroche programmes
Natural heritage
Built archaeological heritage
Cultural heritage
Physical access
Collective knowledge – arts projects
Opportunity to learn and enjoy
Opportunity to be involved
Perpetuation of skills

One of the defining qualities of Landscape Partnership Schemes (LPS) is that they take a holistic approach to landscape heritage and encompass diverse objectives and different strands of work and activities. This makes them highly relevant endeavours in terms of supporting the positive role of a 'place' in environmental, social and economic terms, but also less easy to define. Different partners and projects within a LPS span a variety of disciplinary and working cultures, and a range of objectives and priorities. The challenge is to design and manage a LPS in a way that takes account of the different perspectives, interests and constraints and to develop, negotiate and achieve suitable processes and outcomes.

The aims of the scheme are to:

- Invest in the natural, built and cultural heritage of the area
- Make the landscape more accessible to everyone
- Improve people's ability to sustain the qualities of the landscape.

The long-term objectives of the NLPS are to 'liberate the landscape' by:

- Creating a more sustainable structure of open space and broadleaved woodland, better prepared for adapting to the pressures of climate change
- Enabling people to be free to explore and understand the landscape more fully
- Building the use of the landscape into local education, as a mainstream part of every local child's education.

2.3 Why evaluate it?

Although the NLPS is not obliged to carry out a formal evaluation under the terms of its funding, the Forestry Commission was keen to maximise learning from the programme to help underpin its legacy and provide useful data and insights for future (landscape) partnership schemes. Documentation and evaluation of the physical impacts of the LPS (such as the ecological enhancements, archaeological findings and infrastructural works) has been carried out by the project team and partners and here we only summarise some of the available data to illustrate the provisions and work of the NLPS. The overarching aim of this evaluation of the scheme was to identify the impacts across a range of actors and beneficiaries and to draw out lessons in terms of the governance structure and processes (looking at the partnership working as well as community involvement and benefits).

By '**actors**' we mean all those who were actively involved in the design, decision-making, management and delivery of the scheme. This group includes the individuals and organisations that were part of the partnership (project team, project board), the local stakeholders group, and individuals who were responsible for specific activities organised or initiated under the NLPS. We also use the term '**beneficiaries**' to refer to those individuals and groups who took part in the various activities and events, or made use of the various facilities delivered as part of the NLPS. This distinction between 'actors' and 'beneficiaries', however, sometimes breaks down. This is because, as our evaluation highlights, many of the scheme's actors have benefited in important ways through their active involvement in management, design and delivery. Similarly, some beneficiaries have become more actively involved and contributed to the delivery of the scheme. We have attempted to indicate these situations clearly in the text.

The specific objectives of this evaluation were to:

1. Develop a narrative that outlines the development and story of the NLPS.
2. Examine the value of the landscape partnership approach - testing whether it achieves 'more than the sum of its parts' - by evaluating:
 - project impacts from beneficiaries' / actors' perspectives;
 - partnership working in terms of partners' experiences and engagement, and the governance structure and processes.
3. Identify the successes and challenges of the NLPS.

2.4 What was evaluated and how?

Our evaluation focused on the development and experiences of the NLPS, evaluating its impacts and the learning by core partners and project actors and beneficiaries. Four specific groups were studied.

Beneficiaries:

1. Project beneficiaries of the LPS activities and work (primarily but not solely members of the public and local communities)

Actors:

2. Members of the landscape partnership board (LPB)
3. Members of the local stakeholders group (LSG)
4. Neroche core project team and project leaders.

This study briefly examined and built on existing published (e.g. NLPS newsletters and periodic reports) and unpublished material (e.g. comments in the 'visitor' book; update reports by project leaders). This evaluation was commissioned in the final year of the scheme and we were unable to use the conventional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approach of establishing a baseline and then re-measuring and comparing outcomes against this baseline. Our data therefore provides a snap-shot with a retrospective perspective. We were specifically interested in peoples' opinions and perceptions and hence the main efforts focused on data collection and analysis, consisting of a survey questionnaire, one-to-one and family group interviews, and focused discussion groups.

A **questionnaire** (see Appendix 3) was designed by Forest Research and mailed out by the NLPS project team to 195 participants logged in the NLPS participant database. The questionnaire was structured to find out how people perceive the area, how often they visit/use the project area and what for, what they know and like about the NLPS activities and projects, what changes in the local infrastructure and landscape they are aware of and what improvements they would like to see. In addition, standard socio-economic data were requested. By mid-December 79 responses had been received which equates to a response rate of 40%. The qualitative and quantitative data were entered into a spreadsheet, and descriptive statistics compiled for some of the numerical data. The qualitative data were checked and key themes identified.

In terms of demographics the age and income distribution of questionnaire respondents is given in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 respectively. The survey respondents were largely middle aged or older, only one respondent was aged 16-24, and one 25-34. Of the respondents 16% visited the area everyday, 4% visited 4-6 times a week, 8% 1-3 times a week, 20% visited 1-3 times a month, and 52% visited less often. One person classed themselves as mixed race, all others as white. The gender split was 43% male and 53%



female³. None of the respondents were registered disabled; however 8% stated that their day-to-day activities were limited a little by a health problem.

Figure 2.2: Age of respondents

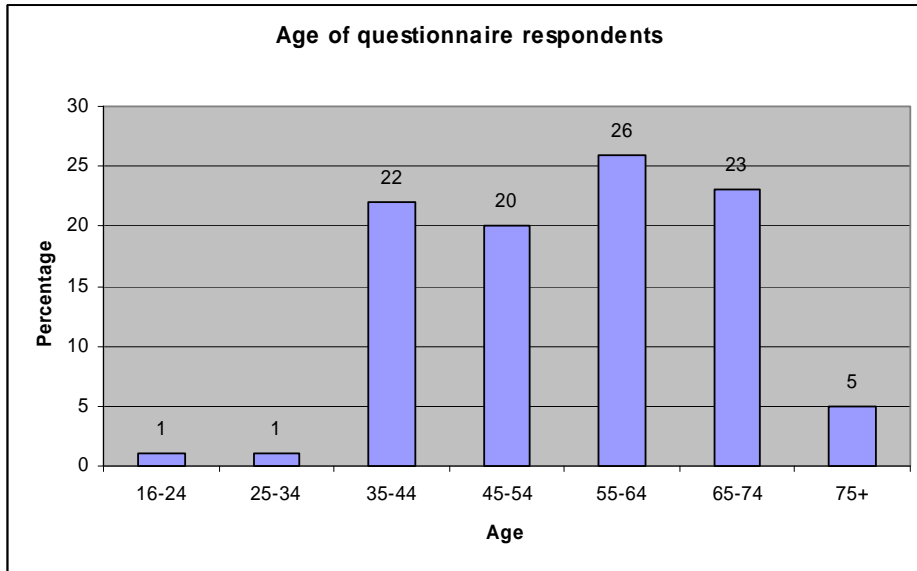
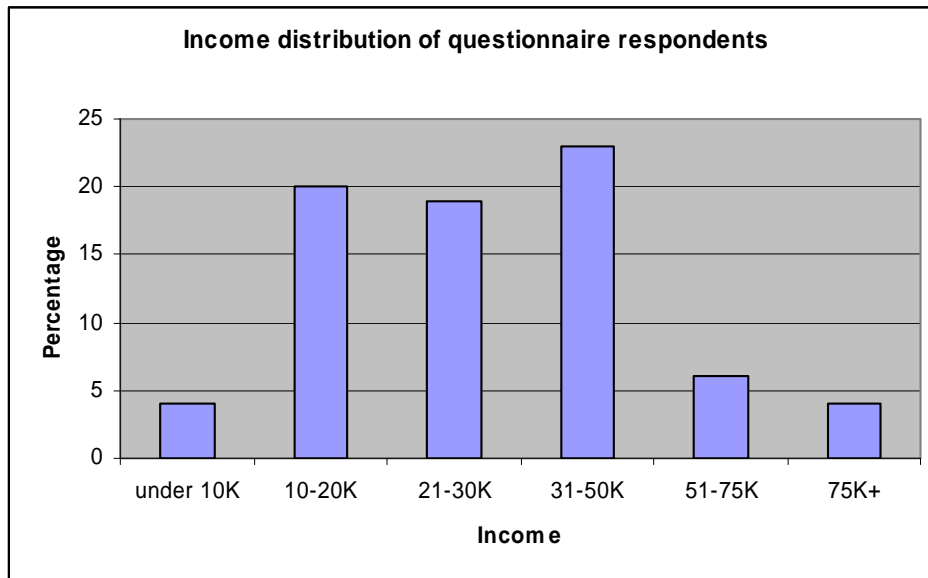


Figure 2.3: Income of respondents



³ Percentages do not always add up to 100 as not everyone answered all the questions in the questionnaire.

A short survey was used to evaluate the forestry/conservation management apprenticeships that were supported by the NLPS. Three apprentices who had finished in 2008 were emailed the survey, two of whom completed and returned it. In addition four apprentices who are currently about half way through their forestry apprenticeship also completed the survey.

One-to-one and small group interviews were carried out with 'actors', namely members of the board (N=10), the core project team (N=7), affiliated project leaders (N=3), the stakeholder group (N=5), and two of the three apprentices who were part of the project from 2007-2008 (N=2). The NLPS team also interviewed selected beneficiaries who had taken part in a range of activities. In total 25 interviews were conducted face-to-face or over the telephone of which 21 were one-to-one, three in groups of two - including two married couples, and a family of four (N= 31). At the time this report was being written, 11 of these interviews (N=17) had been written up in note form with some quotes; hence only these were analysed and informed the results presented in this report (Table 2.2).

Appendix 4 and 5 shows the interview templates used for actors. Questions focused on each actor's specific role in the NLPS, their experience and view of the impacts of the NLPS (for themselves, their organisation and others), how they experienced and perceived the NLPS's governance structures (e.g. the decision-making processes, allocation of decision-making powers and responsibilities, who was involved, and what were the rules of the partnership), and what monitoring and evaluation they were involved in or aware of. For the LSG some additional questions were added to probe specifically into the working and responsibilities of the LSG, their decision-making powers, their role and approach to being 'community representatives'. For the apprentices and associated staff the interview omitted some questions (about the NLPS area and NLPS governance structures) and focused specifically on the content, running and impacts of the apprenticeship scheme and what could be improved.

The interview questions for beneficiaries of NLPS activities (see Appendix 5) asked about their specific experiences and learning, ideas for improvements, and potential future contributions as well as how they felt about the NLPS area and the work done by the scheme more generally.

Two **focused discussion groups** were held, one with the local stakeholders group as part of their scheduled meeting with five of the ten members attending⁴, and a second with the existing group of four forestry apprentices. The Neroche Parish Local History Group (NPLHG) and conservation volunteers were also contacted. However, due to other commitments of the NPLHG contact, there was insufficient time to establish

⁴ The remaining five were later individually interviewed over the phone, see section on **one-to-one and small group interviews**.

enough interest by members for a discussion group. For the Neroche conservation volunteers working outside in the cold and wet weather, there was no suitable shelter available on site to conduct a group interview; it was thus more practical to interview some participants alone or in groups of two.

The focused group discussions followed the thread of questions as in the LSG and apprenticeship interviews, and were used as a more time-efficient way of getting feedback from specific groups. This form of 'interview' allowed participants to contribute as and when they wished and encouraged joint reflection and exchange of thoughts.

Table 2.2: Overview of participants and methods in the evaluation

Method (number)	Number of respondents	Respondents grouped by affiliation / type
Questionnaires (79 + 6)	85	NLPS Participants Apprentices
Interviews (38)	44 (52 total)*	Local Stakeholders Group (5) NLPS Board (10) Project Team and Leaders (10) NLPS Participants (17; 31 total)** <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neroche Conservation Volunteers (3; 5 total)** ▪ Other Volunteers (1; 5 total)** ▪ Local History (2; 5 total)** ▪ Arts Activities (1; 3 total)** ▪ Bushcraft (5; 6 total)** ▪ Forest School (1; 3 total)** ▪ General (1) ▪ Herepath (1) ▪ Cattle Grazing Management (0; 1 total)** ▪ Punkie Night Event (0; 2 total)**⁵
Focused Discussion Groups (2)	9	Local Stakeholders Group Apprentices
Total	138 (146)*	
<p>* The number outside the bracket is the number of respondents that we had notes for at the time of analysing data for this report; the total number is the number of people interviewed. ** The first number in the bracket is the number of respondents that we had notes for at the time of analysing data for this report; the second number is the total number of people interviewed in that category.</p>		

⁵ Numbers may not add up to the total figure as some interviewees participated in more than one NLPS activity. Where couples or small group interviews were carried out, each individual participating in the interview is counted.

2.5 Report structure

The following chapters present the findings of our evaluation and provide a narrative of the development and impacts of the NLPS. Chapter 3 focuses on the planning phase, structure and processes of the NLPS. Chapter 4 looks more closely at partnership working, considering partners' and stakeholders' experiences of the NLPS and its decision-making structures and processes. The scheme's range of (positive and negative) impacts from the perspective of beneficiaries and actors is the focus of chapter 5. Chapter 6 then specifically focuses on challenges that arose during the NLPS, how they were addressed, and what insights or lessons were drawn from those experiences. The NLPS's scope for and approach to monitoring and evaluation is considered in chapter 7. Subsections assess how monitoring and other activities, as well as participation in the NLPS more generally, influenced actors' learning and / or behaviour; and what longer-term changes have been achieved. Chapter 8 concludes the report with a summary of insights and lessons learnt.

3 Creation and Design of the NLPS

KEY FINDINGS

- **The Forestry Commission took a bold approach to create a large landscape partnership scheme with strong community engagement, and create a portfolio of projects to conserve and enhance the character of the Neroche area**
- **A large and diverse range of eleven partner organisations played a variety of important roles within the scheme**
- **A key innovation of the NLPS was the creation (before the bid to HLF) of a local stakeholders group to represent community interests**
- **The local stakeholders group was empowered to decide, with support, which specific projects would be funded through the scheme**
- **The project team provided the vision and enthusiasm to develop and run the NLPS, while actively involving others**

Putting together the bid and developing the structure and programmes of projects and associated activities for the NLPS required the various actors to work outside organisational and individual comfort zones and forged a 'new' approach as described and illustrated in the following sections.

3.1 Embracing a wider landscape perspective

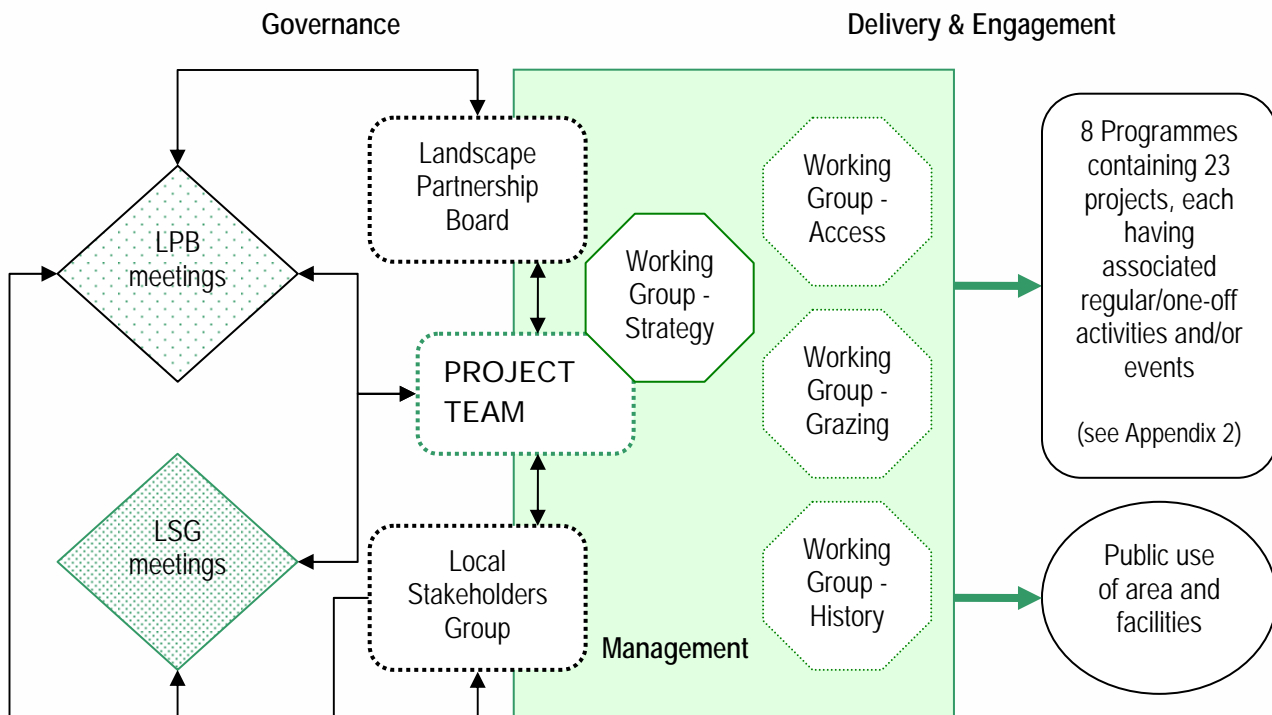
The Forestry Commission (FC) took a bold step in putting together a large landscape partnership project (see Figure 3.1) with a strong community engagement component for a remote rural area. For the FC, the northern part of the Blackdown Hills, referred to as the 'Neroche estate', is one of the most challenging areas in the South West of England from a timber production perspective (boggy, clay-rich agricultural land and some steep scarp slopes were afforested in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s), yet is highly significant in ecological terms, with many biodiversity-rich sites. For example, the NLPS area contains ten Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)⁶ and the Quants site is also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive. By deciding to put together the bid, the FC had to look beyond timber production and habitat management and address all four HLF programme priorities in equal measure.⁷

⁶ Blackdown and Sampford Common; Quants; Ringdown; PriorsPark and Adcombe Wood; Yarty Moor; Ruttersleigh; Thurlbear Wood and Quarrylands; Ashculm Turbary; Barrington Hill Meadow

⁷ These are: (1) conserve and restore built and natural features that create the historic landscape character; (2) increase community participation in local heritage; (3) increase access to and learning about the landscape area and its heritage; (4) increase training opportunities in local heritage skills.

'... the fact that the Forestry Commission as a government organisation, has had the courage to lead a scheme like this is fantastic and I think they deserve real accolades for that because it goes right outside of what a lot of, I guess people within the sector would consider Forestry Commission's role; but to my mind this is what the role of a public sector should be, it's providing leadership, it's being a catalyst but it is involving lots of others and it's going across a much broader remit. So well done the Forestry Commission on that one.' (LPB member)

Figure 3.1: The NLPS structure



Agreeing the boundaries of the NLPS area involved some debate as to how much of Devon and Somerset would be included, proximity to towns, and whether the name 'Neroche' was appropriate.

'Historically we had quite a debate whether it should be even called Neroche. The whole name of Neroche actually comes from a landscape historically further to the east and goes out beyond the Neroche Castle and into those parishes further out there. It's an ancient historical definition meaning 'Royal Hunting Forest'. Quite a debate on boundaries and trying to define the territory and I believe a good compromise was made in the end.' (LPB member)

Descriptions of the area by project partners and local residents often include terms such as 'hidden', 'cut off', 'rural', 'lovely scenery', 'wild and wooded', 'quite inaccessible'; few had any dislikes (noise pollution from the M5 motorway and too much rain were mentioned).

'For me it is an absolute hidden gem, a hidden corner of Somerset that I was completely surprised at. I didn't know it was there. I think it is beautiful. To me it typifies rural England,



actually. It changed my views of a part of the county that I hadn't really given much time to.' (LPB member)

'I think it's really beautiful, it's very unspoilt, there's lots of real secret gems hidden away that you can now find that we didn't know about.' (Project leader)

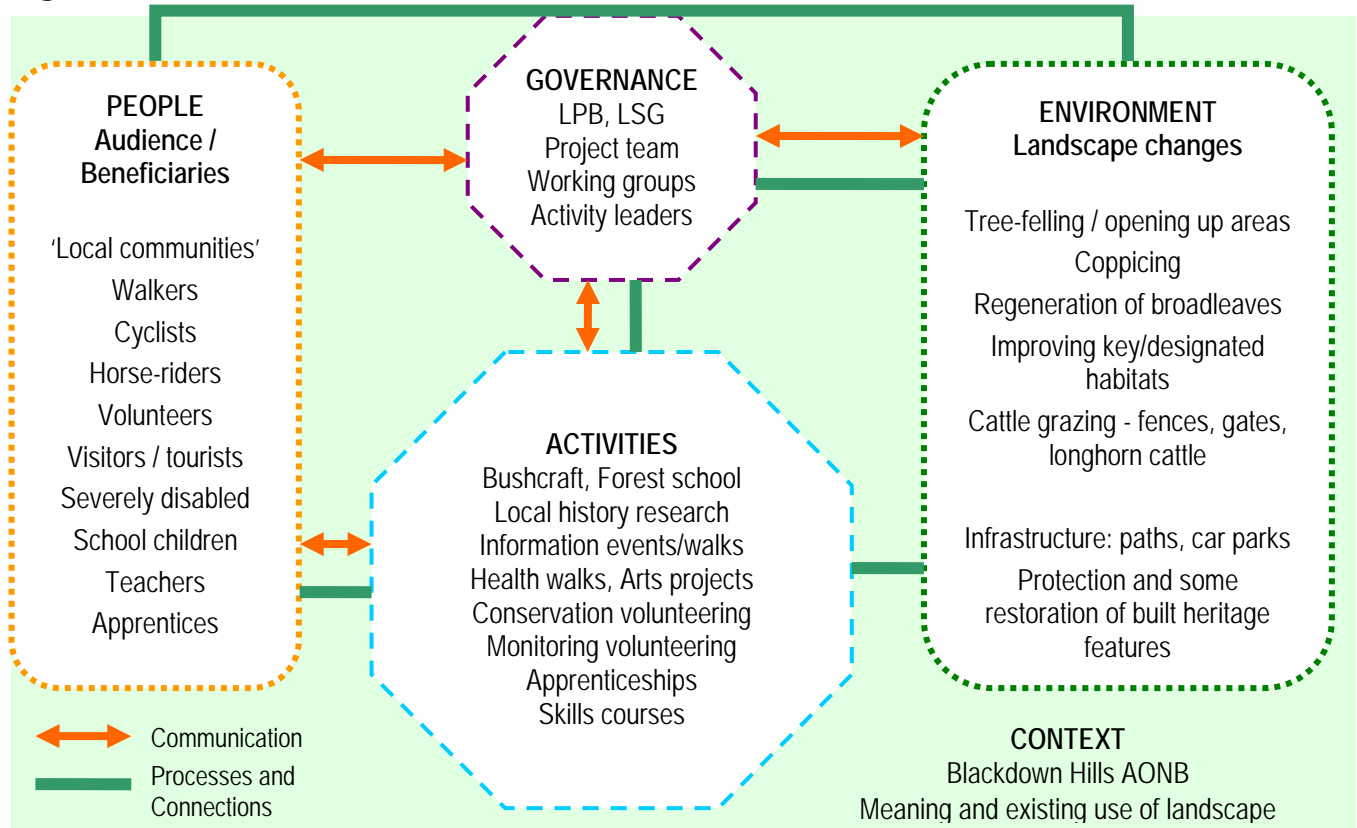
'... the Neroche area, people tend to bypass it on one of the main roads, it's not somewhere that's on a thoroughfare to get to somewhere else really, it's off the beaten track a bit.' (Project leader)

'Vast amounts of woodland (mostly broadleaved especially beech), meadows and wildflowers ...' (Project participant, Survey No 22)

'It is wonderfully untouched which is one of my concerns. Too much urbanisation could spoil it.' (Project participant, Survey No 33)

The challenge was to put together a portfolio of projects that preserved the rural and wooded character of the landscape but opened up parts of it by restoring open habitats, improving access for recreation and providing opportunities for public engagement, skills development and learning (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: The context and content of the NLPS



3.2 A larger than usual partnership board

Preparations for the HLF bid involved contacting a range of public, private and third sector organisations to submit project proposals and secure match-funding, building on existing working relationships as well as establishing new contacts. The composition of the partnership evolved by giving those a seat at the table who provided match-funding (e.g. the range of local authorities, the Blackdown Hills AONB, Natural England, the National Trust) or were key delivery partners (e.g. Butterfly Conservation, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset Art Works). The LPB consisted of representatives from 11 core organisations⁸ and two to three representatives from the LSG. In addition to the core LPB members, several other organisations were also affiliated and contributed to the partnership⁹. This diversity offered a range of professional skills and support.

'What I liked about it was the mixture of the professionals from all sorts of different organisations, public and private sector, people from the community who were equal around the table. There was no hierarchy. It was everybody had a voice and everybody was listened to. In fact, if anything, the community was put first, which I think is right.' (LPB member)

The diversity of organisations and professional backgrounds that representatives brought to the board was also described as potentially providing a challenge (see also section 6) in terms of managing expectations, facilitating critical debate and maintaining input as the following quote illustrates:

'... the trouble with board meetings is, when you have kind of have 20 people sat round a table it's difficult to have a really good conversation about any one topic, so it tends to be a lot more information sharing.' (LPB member)

For several partner organisations the bid was timely as HLF funding would support planned projects. Similarly the timing was right in terms of being able to obtain sufficient match-funding from public bodies to demonstrate the necessary support and viability of the NLPS proposal to HLF. In the current financial climate, as two LPB members observed, partners would not have been able to commit financial and staff resources.

The LPB was the formal governing body of the NLPS; meetings were 'called' by the NLPS project manager and chaired by the regional director of the FC Peninsula District. In the early years of the project meetings were more frequent (about quarterly) than in the latter stages of the scheme (about twice a year). In addition to formal meetings, communication took place by e-mail (often initiated by the NLPS project manager to

⁸ Forestry Commission, Blackdown Hills AONB, Devon County Council, Somerset County Council, Mid Devon District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, , Natural England, The National Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Somerset Art Works.

⁹ South Somerset District Council was a funding partner but did not sit on the Board. Other active non-board partners were Taunton Angling Association, Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership and Burnworthy Outdoor Learning Centre.

update board members of recent developments or to request input/action) and via targeted contact either on the phone, via e-mail or in person as specific issues arose. Some LPB members were also in contact with each other through other projects and work-related duties.

3.3 An empowered local stakeholder group

A major shift occurred in terms of how the public were informed and involved in the new landscape vision. Initially a set of 'public consultations' were run by a contracted company to invite proposals for change (which made local people worried about large or inappropriate change) but allowed little room for discussion of concerns. Very quickly, a much more direct approach to involving members of the public was put together by the FC member of staff in charge of developing the initial NLPS bid. This involved recruiting members of local communities (initially nine, later expanded to eleven) who had experience of representing wider community interests. The process was guided by a set of selection and scoring criteria (see Appendix 6) to attract people from diverse backgrounds and to avoid the dominance of single issue agendas.

'... they had to really show that they were people who were prepared to put the Blackdowns first and not be lobbyists or people who were pushing their own particular interest, at least a couple of people that we turned down were just there to promote their own particular interest.' (LSG group)

'... the people who came forward were used to community work and were able to have confidence enough to voice those views, and those were heard and responded to.' (LSG group member)

The LSG was formed very early on, with clear terms of reference (see Appendix 7), and played a crucial role in the design and prioritisation of the original NLPS bid; in particular through the selection of submitted project proposals that they felt provided the best value for money for the area and local communities. This was felt to have also helped the rest of the partnership and different LPB members to accept their role and remit within the scheme without disagreements over what was funded under the NLPS.

'... we ended up with [...]'¹⁰ far more projects than we had money for and where the local stakeholders group was particularly useful for me was we had a very long evening in the pub where we went through all the proposals that had come in and we ranked them. I got them to put them into an order based on what they thought was best value for money and what they thought the community would feel would achieve the most. But also bearing in mind the priorities and objectives of the lottery funds that we were trying to work towards. [...] Now they[one of the early partners] put forward three really large projects and the feeling of the local stakeholders group was that none of them represented good value for money. [...] for me it was a much easier way of having to whittle down what was an impossible list as opposed to

¹⁰ [...] means some text is missed out (to focus on a key point)
... (in mid text) indicates a pause or change of thought

having a big bun fight with [name of organisation] over it. So effectively it was the voice of the people speaking if you like which is very much what the landscape partnership is all about.' (Project team member)

'... all the partners in the partnership, they all had their different priorities so it was probably pretty difficult for them to come to any consensus about what should be done or what shouldn't be done. I think actually looking back on it, it was probably quite a good way to do it because I've got a feeling we were fairly fair minded about everything.' (LSG group)

The LSG very quickly and easily gained respect and formed good working relationships with each other and had a considerable amount of work and influence over the scheme; LSG members were involved in the selection process for the project manager, amongst others, signalling to the candidates the strength of the already evolved partnership.

'... it was clear at that stage, that there was quite a partnership already there because there must have been a dozen or 15 people who'd given up the day to take part in that interview...' (Project team member)

'We had an input into which candidates we thought were best.' (LSG member)

3.4 A professional and passionate project team

Key to the success of a large project, such as the NLPS, is an experienced and enthusiastic project manager and a capable and supportive project team. The individual commitment of the NLPS project team, their professionalism and skills (including sensitive and reflexive working) were highlighted in many of the interviews with LPB and LSG members, as the following quotes illustrate.

'I have an enormous amount of respect for [name of project manager], I imagine it's been a nightmare job at times and because the project itself, it's not just the forestry, there's been so many other aspects to the project, I think he's managed it very well [...] I admire the fact that he really is open and he has tried his best to come and meet the community [...] He's not somebody who's tried to hide behind things.' (LSG member)

'It [NLPS] was exemplary. [Name of project manager] handled it extremely well. He's had some major challenges to deal with [...] and he's been the right person for the job.' (LPB member)

'... we couldn't have got a better person to do that job [project manager] in my opinion, so it has worked very well.' (FC employee)

'Honestly, it really probably has been one of the best projects I've ever been involved in. [...] I think it's a terrific team.' (Project leader)

The delivery of the projects of the NLPS was led by a core project team comprising a Project Manager, Access & Interpretation Officer, Community History Officer (part-time), Forest Works Supervisor, Forest Schools Officer (part-time), and Administrator (initially

one full-time officer and later as a job share). Two project leaders (the Community History Officer and the Forest Works Supervisor) were based with partner organisations or other offices to provide more specific support and potentially facilitate a transition to continued employment after the NLPS¹¹.

'I've kind of pretty much operated on my own. Obviously I get on with the team and we discuss things [...] I've had a hell of a lot of support and help here where I'm based as well.'
(Project leader)

Similarly, the Forest Schools Officer, Lead Artist and Health Walk Leader were working from home / on location most of the time and while this meant somewhat more 'insular' working, they felt that help was available if needed. This was experienced as suiting their job and way of working, rather than as a problem, and effective communication with other members of the project team was maintained.

'I normally talk to the office two or three times a week [...]. ... just practically from where I live and to get to the places, to go to the Neroche office might put an hour travelling time on, so it's pointless for me to go in. And in the office I have no mobile reception and most of my, all my contacts contact me through my mobile so it's not terribly convenient being in the office because as soon as I leave, I have lots of missed calls and messages.' (Project leader)

'... the partnership as far as I'm concerned has been very supportive of all that I do and I can't thank them enough really. [...] I occasionally go into the office, they're very helpful ...'
(Project leader)

The project office where the Project Manager, Administrator(s) and Access & Interpretation Officer were based was the main contact point for the public and NLPS partners and hub for communication dissemination.

[In response to a question about when and how often people would contact the office]
'... they want to book on events that we're running or to volunteer, help with the volunteer programme, or they just want more information about walks or any of the guides that we've got, or maybe just query "why are you doing what you're doing?"' (Project team member)

'... the most difficult thing is to get people to know what is out there, we always keep a big database of everybody who's been on any events so we have that contact list, we can email and send things out to people. Sometimes you put things in the paper and on websites; Somerset County Gazette is a big one and it goes into, we put posters up in the forest because then you get to the people who actually use the forest, we know where the particular dog walking points are and we know people who go up to Wallace's' farm shop so we can put up posters there and you get to the kind of people who would be interested in being in the forest.'
(Project team member)

'My communication with FC is fine; and with Neroche excellent and ongoing still.' (LPB member)

¹¹ This did not materialise, however, due to some staff on fixed term contracts successfully applying for other employment and/or cuts in spending across the public sector.

Project staff for three further projects were employed by partner organisations and based with them, the NLPS funding part of their time for working at Neroche. These project arrangements are considered in more detail in Section 6.5.



An aerial view of the Neroche area - the Northern part of the Blackdown Hills

4 Partnership Working

KEY FINDINGS

- The partners identified synergies and common delivery goals relevant to the scheme and each organisation's objectives
- Partners provided different levels of funding and in-kind support
- Expert and local knowledge was combined to produce the NLPS plan of work and activities
- The local stakeholders group was surprised at being given such a strong role to play in making important decisions in the NLPS
- Two to three members of the local stakeholders group participated in each landscape partnership board meeting. The board agreed to a clause that the local stakeholders group would have a casting vote, if needed, in decision making
- In 2010, five members of the local stakeholders group formed the Blackdown Hills Trust, an important legacy of the NLPS

Overall, the NLPS structure and working practices were well thought out and executed as introduced in section 3. This section highlights specific elements that have facilitated successful partnership working, whereas section 6 focuses on a few weaker elements of the NLPS and some (unexpected) side-effects that have caused problems or concerns.

4.1 Buy-in and support

Landscape partnership board

The following comments were typical for most members of the LPB.

'I thought it was a good partnership effort, yes.' (LPB member)

'I think the partnership's run very well. I would say more informal contact would be really good.' (LPB member)

The high level of buy-in to the partnership was achieved through identifying synergies of objectives and common delivery goals, as illustrated by the following quote.

'I first got involved when I was invited to a project that pre-dated the Neroche scheme which was the Blackdown Hills Ridge Route [...] eventually, the Forestry Commission were involved in that as well and when the Neroche project seemed to be in the pipeline, we all thought that was the best way of trying to deliver the access improvements that had been identified.' (LPB member)

Membership of the board was relatively stable throughout the preparation phase and NLPS duration. One Local Authority partner experienced an internal shift in priorities which meant that their representative was unable to actively engage for about 18 months, which happened to be the busiest period in terms of delivery of activities and events. Three organisations experienced staff instability and changes and hence the representatives for those organisations changed in 2008. An interesting and common feature of these 'new' representatives was that the function and powers of both the LPB and the LSG was not clear to them (see also section 4.3), whereas all those who had been part of the scheme from the beginning commented that the decision-making structures were clear and that they regarded them as appropriate and working very well.

When asked about the buy-in and support from and communication about the scheme within their own organisations, all commented that their managers and/or relevant colleagues were aware of the NLPS and most felt that they had appropriate support. Partners had communication structures in place to share progress updates, successes and lessons learnt, be it through formal or informal direct communication, features in their organisation's bulletin or newsletter, project reports, or entries on their organisation's website. In the early phase of the NLPS, members of the core project team also went to the different partner organisations to talk to senior staff / councillors about the scheme's objectives and provide updates on current work.

Even partners who had a relatively small stake in the NLPS (e.g. because their primary focus lay outside the NLPS area) were able to commit funding and in-kind support.

'The immediate cost-benefit ratio was not massively apparent but it was realised from the start that it was a scheme that had wider implications the further it went along as it were.' (LPB member)

Most LPB members felt that they had an appropriate amount of time allocated to the NLPS work, even though two members reflected retrospectively that they would have liked to contribute more in terms of their time and/or attending meetings and events as it was a highly relevant, interesting and varied scheme.

'I did have enough time then, it would be a different story now if the project were to start today for example. But certainly I was able to attend all the meetings and any other, [...] with the horse riders one evening for example, that sort of thing, I was able to devote time to that, it's also because I felt it was a very good project as well. [...] I was able to just decide what time I would spend on it and there was no quibbling from managers on that.' (LPB member)

'... it needs plenty of time on our part to partake to the level we need to. And normally for a project of this sort we would have at least a half-time post involved.' (LPB member)

Local stakeholders group

Overall, the LSG was a stable group of people, with two members joining slightly later to give the LSG greater diversity in background and contact with more communities (e.g. one person retired and left the LPB but was able to join the LSG). One member resigned due to other commitments about two thirds of the way through the scheme. LSG members felt that they worked well with each other and that they were listened to and effective at board meetings, as well as receiving excellent support and information from the core project team.

'It's quite interesting and that was something that astonished us all on the stakeholder group that our views were being listened to. That's what kept us there I think and kept our enthusiasm going to realise that people were taking notice'. (LSG member)

The initial bonding of the group formed through the immediate and important decisions made to choose the appropriate set of projects to be funded under the scheme. This intensive phase of work took up a considerable amount of time, but enabled LSG members to appreciate the different backgrounds, knowledge and skills that each could bring to the table.

'We went through it systematically, how important was it for the area and gave our views of what we thought people would consider to be the best.' (LSG member)

'... one of the most amazing things was how did [FC employee] pick nine people who actually, from very different walks of life [...]. But somehow or other we sort of rubbed along...' (LSG member)

LSG member 1: '... there was a very intensive period at the beginning when we had quite regular meetings [...] Once a month because there was all these decisions to be made but since then, certainly since I don't know, since half way through the project I suppose or a quarter, it sort of tailed off really because more and more things had become fixed ...'
LSG member 2: 'Once the money had been spent and fixed, our role changed...'

Over the NLPS duration, the role and input of LSG members changed with the progress and different stages of the scheme. At first, the LSG members were the main decision-makers in terms of which projects got taken forward. Later, when several professionals were hired to form the project team and deliver the NLPS objectives, they effectively 'took over' much of the day-to-day decision making. The LSG members then acted as 'ambassadors' for the scheme amongst their communities, to inform people what was happening and also to guide and help monitor the impacts of the different NLPS projects by feeding local knowledge into the scheme.

'... once the money had been spent and been arranged, we became more like monitors, watching what went on and I certainly belong to a byways sub-group because I was part of the access and interpretation [...] quite a lot of discussions and decisions went on there because

sometimes there were options about how the money was spent, but we became more monitors...' (LSG member)

'... as a landscape partnership project, it's quite unique to have a team as ours, the LSG, right through the project because a lot of times they may be set up in the beginning and then they just disappear and the project just goes on, on its own. But we're still like a thorn in their side niggling away, we won't go away...' (LSG member)

'... one of the phrases we described ourselves as, as 'a critical friend' of the project in as much as we were there to try and represent the local community's view and not necessarily, we wouldn't always rubber stamp things though. [...] as in all of these projects, there's a slight dilemma that the critical friend group goes a bit native and because we get so caught up in the group, in the project and what's going on, there's a slight tendency to maybe be less objective about things.' (LSG member)

Over the years a core group emerged of those who were able to come to all the meetings and who wanted to continue the work beyond the NLPS period. Thus, in 2010 five of the ten LSG members formed a Trust, established as a company with charitable status able to apply for funding and administer grants for projects similar to those under the NLPS. Setting up the Trust took 18 months, entailing much discussion, information seeking and form-filling and demonstrated the serious commitment of the LSG to help look after the landscape and its people in the longer term. During this period, the NLPS project team brought in professional facilitators and expertise in community group legal structures, to guide and help the LSG through the process of deciding whether and how to set themselves up as an independent body.

Project team

Buy-in and support for the NLPS by the project team members was facilitated by a clear vision and targets set in the HLF bid and through strong leadership and project management skills that master-minded the different aspects of the scheme.

[Being asked about what formalities existed between an external partner's organisation and the project]

'I don't know to be honest. [Name of project manager] knows, he's got the big picture about how it works. We just do a little.' (Project team member)

Some project leaders and core staff were locals and already familiar and fond of the area, others lived outside or were new to the area and discovered the beauty and hidden variety of the northern parts of the Blackdowns through their involvement in the scheme. All project members conveyed the incentive and drive to make the project happen by contributing through their own particular job and interests and were totally dedicated to the project aims. When asked about how people found working within the project, two examples of replies were:

'... there was always a great sense that everybody was singing from the same hymn sheet with the way that they wanted the landscape treated.' (Project leader)

'Overall experience, very good indeed. I was very fortunate that we were able to recruit a very good team here so in terms of the staff team, they've been an absolute joy to work with, I've been very lucky in that respect.' (Project team member)

Early involvement in discussions about what would be good for the landscape and its people, and how this could be achieved, were important for 'externally' placed project leaders to buy into the scheme and its specific projects and to enjoy contributing their ideas and skills. When asked about what working as part of the NLPS was like, one of the project leaders replied as follows:

'It was brilliant! One, to be in the project very early obviously made a huge amount of sense [...] we spent a lot of time going to meetings with all the different stakeholders, to just talk about what our different roles would be and how they would work within the proposal to get the funding for it and so it was very good. So it felt very inclusive and obviously we felt very involved with what was a very exciting project.' (Project leader)

Later on the same person further elaborated on the working relationship with the project team and his and their commitment to the NLPS projects.

'I wouldn't necessarily get paid for it which [...] you could also say is a good thing because that just showed the kind of commitment to the project [...] it's like you do it because of the project, because you believe in the project and if there's a good team[...] And I kind of did that, because the team was so good, I would do things like that anyway and I'm sure that was going on across the board.' (Project leader)

Within the core project team, having the space and opportunity to divide tasks to suit individual strengths and interests, helped team members to enjoy work and give more than was formally required by the post, as the following quotes of one team member illustrates.

'... we found our little niches, it's very good that we didn't both want to go down the same route, it's been very good to have a job share in that situation because there's so many different things to do in the office...' (Project team member)

'It's been nice that it's been a very gentle place to work, if you want to take on a project, if you want to do something, it's all there, you can just think "I'll just do this now", "is it all right if I take this up?" and I've been able to take things on board, especially the volunteers have really become my thing and I've extended that once I got hold of them and working with them, now I've extended it to two different projects and found actually quite a little niche with that and I've done quite a lot on the website, too.' (Project team member)

The project team felt supported by the NLPS team members, other colleagues and their organisation, and able to seek advice and help as needed. This was particularly important for planning new work and assessing progress as well as dealing with problems when they arose (see also section 6).

'I felt like I had pretty much enough support and whenever I had questions, there was always somebody that I knew that I could go to and bounce ideas around with.' (Project team member)

[After asking about any problems that occurred during the NLPS]

Interviewer: 'In any of those four occasions, did you need external help or where did you get help from when you needed it?'

Interviewee: 'It was really just a matter of referring up the tree. So there was someone in Bristol who was charged with taking a lead on FOI [Freedom of Information] requests nationally, so advising anyone who's faced with FOI requests on how to deal with ... so that person was there to turn to. It was very useful to be able to go to FC nationally for that support.' (Project team member)

4.2 Respect, trust and innovation

Respect for each other was a key factor highlighted by several members of the LSG, LPB and project team. Respecting others' experience, knowledge and contributions helped maintain good working relationships and people's input and commitment to the NLPS, as the following quotes illustrate.

'... right from the beginning, there was a high level of mutual respect and people agreed to disagree ...' (LSG member)

'... we've worked very closely and I tremendously respect what [name of project manager] tried to do, [the project manager's] in-depth knowledge of the Blackdowns, I would be lost without that.' (LPB member)

Trusting in people's ability to carry out their job -including translating innovative ideas into practice, trying out new ways of working and types of outputs - was building confidence and capacity to do so. One example was the editing of the 'Neroche book'¹² to illustrate the historical and arts-based experiences and legacy of the NLPS - although some viewed this time-consuming venture more critically (see section 6.4). Another example is the introduction of a grazing regime using longhorn cattle to maintain a more open woodland structure where the Forestry Commission effectively moved into new territory as owners and managers of livestock; senior managers trusted the Neroche project team to take this challenge on.

[When asked about contact with the stakeholders]

'... people knew who I was, it was all quite trusting and we did have meetings and we had social get-together, it was like "let's meet the people over a beer" or over a meal or over something, so we could all talk informally as well as formally.' (Project leader)

¹² *Along the Wild Edge – A Journey Through the Northern Blackdown Hills* was published by NLPS in March 2011. ISBN 978-0-85538-803-4.

[Talking about the book that is being produced as one of the key outputs and NLPS legacy]
'... well it's basically she and I have put it together and that's been tremendous because that's incredibly trusting, for [name of person] and I to sit down day after day and actually put this thing together.' (Project leader)

'I mean effectively we've now got 250 hectares of open space that's all being grazed with longhorn cattle; which must be more than 10 times the area that was previously open. [...]if we end up having to manage more open space within our forests, then you're actually moving in towards farming those areas. Because somewhere like Neroche you can't just go over there with a mower and cut it; you're not going to achieve what you want to achieve. So you've got to involve ... you've either got to get farmers in to graze it for you which is what most people do or you've got to think about a way in which we [the Forestry Commission] have an active role in the farming process.' (FC employee)

A further example of innovation within the NLPS was the development of 'digital trail guides' that can be loaned for free. These are handheld computers with the latest global positioning (GPS) technology to provide information on specific locations or sections of the paths and area, including photographs, artwork, music, stories and animation. The GPS positioning of the guides also functions as an accurate location and navigation tool so that visitors can navigate and explore new areas without getting lost. Such features have now become more widespread and newer developments have become fashionable (e.g. 'Apps' on mobile phones).

'I think it's been a really good partnership [...] for things like for example the technology that's been developed, the handheld digital trail guides [...] fantastic, real innovations, so I think there's been lots of real positive outcomes from the Neroche project.' (Project board member)



Members of the local stakeholders group trying out the digital trail guide

4.3 Decision-making powers and responsibility

While many considered the decision-making structures and allocation as clear, appropriate and working well, some LSG and LPB members expressed surprise as to who influenced and shaped the NLPS.

'... it was an extraordinary procedure because like [name of one of the LSG members] said, we had tremendous control over the spending at that early period and that's something that I never expected, that an LSG would have any power to do, one thinks of a stakeholders' group that is going to be sitting there and telling, we always thought, to be honest with you, that the Forestry Commission would just do what they wanted anyway.' (LSG member)

'... actually I was surprised how much say we had. I think I can honestly say that we played quite a large part in shaping the project, we didn't create it, we didn't put new ideas in but we actually shaped what went into the bid...' (LSG member)

'And the partnership board, which is what I sit on, I feel almost we haven't had much influence. [...] the power seems to have lain with the steering group [LSG] and not with the board. That's been my feeling but I don't know, perhaps that was the governance structure that Heritage Lottery Fund wanted the scheme to have.' (LPB member)

As stated earlier, some concern was expressed by three people who had joined the LPB at a later stage (unaware of the conceptual development and actual 'rules' developed for this LPS; see e.g. Appendix 7). While the LPB was the formal governing body, approving and supporting the different NLPS projects, the actual decision-making over the day-to-day running of the projects was the responsibility of the project manager supported by the core team and individual project leaders, with the LSG given ultimate responsibility to select the projects to be funded under the NLPS.

'It was very biased towards the community and I think in a way, I know what it is, if you have community people on a board where you've got organisations, it doesn't work well because they're not ... perhaps the organisations are more vociferous and more power and they don't feel they've got..., you lessen their empowerment that they've got.' (LPB member)

'The other thing I felt very strongly right from the beginning is that the project team are professionals and we can give them advice and that, but we're not professionals, that we're advisors and supporters but the buck stops with them.' (LSG member)

Traditionally, organisational representatives are used to overseeing and influencing projects and making management decisions. In this case, the structure was much more devolved to the local community. At each LPB meeting, two to three LSG members were in attendance to represent the interests of local communities. The FC employee who initially put the bid together also provided for the fact that the imbalance of three LSG members versus 11 or more organisational representatives should not stifle the communities' voice and a clause was accepted by the LPB that the three LSG members

would have a casting vote in decision-making processes. In practice, the LSG never had recourse to use their casting vote.

'... if you've got 15 funding partners and 3 local stakeholders, then it's always going to be the funding partners that decide on what happens. The value of the local community view is going to be easily ... when push comes to shove it's going to be easily ignored. But if they knew that they had to get the support of the local stakeholders if they didn't carry the vote, I don't know whether it changed the dynamics of the meeting or not really because we never had to put it to the vote; but everyone signed up for that, that was the rules of engagement with the board.' (Project team member)

'If there had been a 50/50 vote amongst the partners, it's possible the stakeholder group people could have had the casting ...' (LSG member)

4.4 Local context

For any landscape project, knowing the area and its people is crucial. Any proposed vision of change needs to be sensitive to the area's past and present, the interests and expectations of local people, as well as the wider environment and associated wildlife. The motivation, vision and drive for change may be influenced by experiences and knowledge from elsewhere but needs to be tailored to the specific locational, socio-cultural and environmental context. For this LPS, a combination of expert and local knowledge was combined to produce the NLPS plan of work and activities. The largest influence came from those who had lived and worked in the area; several had grown up in the area and/or returned to it during their working life. For those relatively new to the area, as was the case for some project leaders, being able to access local resources and knowledge proved critical.

'... local staff, the ranger on site [...] lives slap bang in the middle of the area, so he's got a history of local contacts and knows the local area like the back of his hand, so his input's been invaluable.' (Project team member)

The LSG consisted predominantly of older and retired people, bringing with them a long and wide range of experiences and contacts, and a high level of familiarity with parts of the landscape and its inhabitants. Another interesting and relevant aspect of involving retired people was not only the amount of time that they could dedicate to the NLPS but also the courage to speak their mind.

'One of the few times I've been to the partnership boards, because I'm retired, [...] if I feel that I want to say something, I haven't got any political agendas, I'm not trying to keep someone in Taunton Deane happy or anything like that so I just say what I honestly think and I think that's quite a good thing really.' (LSG member)

In terms of 'representation' of the local communities and interests, one could argue that the LSG did not directly involve many of the wider population (e.g. people under 40, unemployed, 'newcomers'). Unable to accommodate an overly large group, a suitable

compromise was to choose people who were used to thinking about wider community interests. This could be through their profession (e.g. parish councillors, teacher), their hobbies and interests (e.g. walkers, horse-riders) or their social situation (e.g. being parents / grandparents; contact with friends and neighbours). All LSG members consciously thought of their position as 'representing the wider community' and making wise decisions regarding the available money.

'Yes, you were always thinking it's public money basically so we should be spending it wisely...'(LSG member)

'I think we all had this sort of overall view that it was for the benefit of the people and the Blackdowns, so it was a fairly altruistic goal which was shared.' (LSG member)

One LSG member mentioned that, in her experience, local residents would see action being taken by the NLPS based on comments that they made to LSG members who passed on those comments to the project manager. Thus, locals experienced their views being considered and action taken. One specific example is that of the forest management plan, which was taken by LSG members to their neighbours and friends for discussion and comments; another was an alteration to the amount and type of felling carried out in one particular area.

'... an example of how well the local stakeholders group have worked, when the forest design plan was being consulted on [...] they took responsibility divided the area up, they took copies of the plans in the consultation phase and actually went round to neighbours, knocked on doors, discussed the plans with people, came back with feedback and as a result I think there was a bit of reluctance but effectively we did change the management plan for the Castle Neroche area. So they did directly impact on that forest design plan and to me that's consultation working at its best.' (FC employee)

'... one of the last sites that we did which was in the scheme and in the forest design plan, it was agreed to be another grazing unit but only following further consultation with the local community and it was decided [...] that the habitat gains that were going to be realised weren't as great and as significant as its value as a mixed woodland and recreational facility. So we back-tracked on the clearance side and decided to continue managing it for forest services and to maintain the access there.' (Project leader)

'... rather than doing felling and clearance, we just carried out a thinning and an opening up of corridors so we kind of delivered in that sense as well, listened to what was being said to us and reacted and responded to it. [...]we did more hand felling and winching into the processing racks. And again, [...] that was responding to a direct concern from people who have enjoyed that area for a long time and were concerned about the bluebells and the walks that were there, going through and it's quite satisfying to know now that we did that. It was only a subtle change really, it probably wasn't the most efficient way to do it but we covered that in the negotiation with the contractor for selling the parcel. And I would say it definitely paid dividends and in terms of an end result, 12 months down the line now the site has recovered and I haven't had any negative feedback on it, so that's good.' (Project leader)

4.5 Flexibility

The above quotations illustrate one important aspect of the NLPS, namely that the project team and the wider partnership were flexible in how the project objectives could be achieved. They were thus able to adapt and revise plans as necessary. Luckily, the project team in turn also found the funders to be flexible in terms of their distribution of funding between different sub-projects (i.e. putting more money into those projects that went well and received most interest) and in terms of the schedule of delivery (i.e. accepting the longer time span needed in some cases, and accommodating delays or changes where projects faced complications).

'... it has to be the most flexible and exciting grant and initiative we are involved in and what has been great for me has been the sort of acceptance by the lottery that things do change. [Name of project leader] produced this brilliant master plan for the Stage 2 bid which detailed every last penny but in reality it doesn't work out quite like that. And so we have made two applications now to vary the amounts of money between program heads and quite significant sums, but in both occasions it wasn't a problem, it was just done. That level of flexibility for managing a project for me has been really refreshing as opposed to being shoehorned into "well you said you were going to do this four years ago so why haven't you done it" type of mentality.' (FC employee)



'Touching the Seasons' sculpture event

5 Impacts of the NLPS

KEY FINDINGS

- **The scale of the tree clearance within the NLPS was welcomed by those aware of the biodiversity benefits but shocked some who had got used to the tree cover or were not prepared for the 'scarred' visual impact**
- **The project team and local stakeholders group had to spend much time explaining and discussing concerns with members of the local communities negatively affected by tree-felling**
- **Opening up the landscape and the creation and improvement of footpaths has enabled greater accessibility for new and existing users**
- **The use of English longhorn cattle was innovative in transforming areas that were forest covered into low intensity mixed wood pasture**
- **The range and variety of provisions under the scheme enabled new audiences to be reached and provided existing users with new experiences**
- **Beneficiaries of the activities talked about gaining new knowledge, skills and confidence, as well as meeting new people and being able to use the landscape with family and friends**

Figure 3.2 and Appendices 1 and 2 outline the key activities and landscape changes that took place through the NLPS, showing a wide range of work and activities. In this section we explore the impacts of the NLPS from the perspectives of the different actors involved, such as the project team, the LSG, LPB, project and activity leaders, and members of the public (beneficiaries) who attended events and activities. Appendix 8 provides details of the key physical outputs of the NLPS at October 2010 (i.e. after four years) in terms of infrastructure change and activities undertaken.

5.1 Landscape meaning

Respondents were asked what they thought about the Neroche area; if they closed their eyes, what came to mind? We were interested in whether people would talk about the physical, historical/cultural or social landscape. People talked primarily about the physical and cultural landscape using terms such as 'remote', 'hidden', 'gem', 'beautiful', 'mystical', 'unspoilt', 'wild and wooded', 'a place you need to discover', 'viewsapes and trees', 'unspoilt beauty' and 'unkempt' (see also section 3.1). The hidden nature of the area was something people generally valued. Beneficiaries felt that to uncover the area required some time and effort but this would be a rewarding experience.

'I like the fact it is quite difficult to know it all, it's a sort of complicated bit of landscape, I love the old trees, I am not such a big views person I prefer the sculpted hills. It's beautiful.'
(Member of public)

Some of the LSG and local respondents expressed tensions between wanting to develop a successful NLPS by enabling more people to access and know about the area on the one hand, and on the other *not* wanting large numbers of people accessing the area and making it too 'touristy' and spoiling the qualities of quietness and remoteness.

Whilst respondents did not often discuss directly how the general meanings they associated with the landscape had changed or been influenced by the project, their perceptions were expressed during discussions of specific changes to the physical landscape (see section 5.2), i.e. through tree felling, cattle grazing and the vistas created by opening up the landscape. People talked about how opening up the landscape has made it both physically and visually more accessible.

'... it was just one big dark forest really before, now it's opened up, got different glades in there and different plants, it's completely different to what it was.' (LSG member)

Greater accessibility has also provided new users with the opportunity to explore and experience the area through new or improved paths and organised activities they could join. Existing users, while appreciating that the area was not particularly well known, were aware of the importance of other people having the opportunity to get to know the area.

'A hidden gem, worth exploring more. Worth persuading more people to explore it' (Member of public)

5.2 Changing the landscape

Respondents all talked about changes made to the physical landscape through the NLPS activities; this included changes to habitats (e.g. through felling trees), introduction of species (e.g. the longhorn cattle) as well as infrastructure changes such as new car parks and footpaths (e.g. the Staple Fitzpaine All Ability Trail and Herepath).

Forest clearance

Changes to the physical environment can lead to different ways of viewing and experiencing an area that can be both positive and negative. For example, tree felling was undertaken at the beginning of the project as part of open habitat restoration, to improve biodiversity, conservation and access. Sections of the existing conifer plantations were cleared to allow more open space and rough grazing was introduced with English longhorn cattle to maintain the open and mixed habitats. The size (250 hectares), scale and speed of tree felling (which was fast-tracked as the project was originally designed to last three years) and the visual impact on the landscape led to

concerns and some strong opposition from a few (five to six vociferous) local people. These concerns had to be dealt with by the project team and the LSG who spent time explaining why the work was undertaken and how the landscape would look two to three years after felling.

'... there was a lot of anxiety about the project in my locality, these are people who are my neighbours and the people I know who live in the villages and we had the.... What was very important was that when I was aware of this, the project did respond and [people in the project team], I know met several of these people and we also had a meeting around my kitchen table about it, where people were very angry about the effect that the clear felling had had on what they knew as a very, fairly densely treed area or areas.' (LSG member)



English longhorn cattle grazing to maintain a balance between wooded and more open habitats

Such a strong physical and visual change to the landscape led people to describe what they saw in very emotive language likening the 'devastation' (as some saw it) left after tree felling to the World War 1 trenches, the Somme and the aftermath of bombs being detonated. Wind, gales and wet weather after the felling also made the area look worse. Even those who supported the objectives of the felling felt that the areas cleared looked

terrible at first. However, they realised that this would not last and tried to communicate this to other members of the local community. Some local respondents observed the short-term dramatic visual impact but felt that the felling was being done for a long-term positive reason.

'I've sent them back to those locations and three years later it's transformed, by opening up the forest, they suddenly realise all those things that have been hidden there, plants and other things, are suddenly being released so it's just a matter of persuading people to think about it in terms of time and change over a period of time, and improve things.' (LSG member)

The project team realised that the large areas felled had a significant impact on people and commented that without the time constraints of the NLPS and the need to create large enough areas to sustain cattle-grazing, felling would have been spread over a longer timescale (see also section 6).

Opening up the landscape

Tree clearance was obviously an important component of opening up the Neroche landscape. For some this removal of a monoculture of conifer trees was welcomed and seen as a very positive aspect of the NLPS. Respondents also talked about the views of the surrounding area that were gained from the clearance of trees and how this helped improve accessibility (see section 5.1 above).

'LPS has opened up areas that previously appeared less accessible; it has opened up views. It has reconnected people with their landscape; has been a catalyst for local people to feel they are genuinely looking after their piece of England.' (LPB member)

The NLPS focused on restoring habitats in certain areas and local residents did not necessarily see (all of) the landscape changes. Those who liked walking, horse-riding or participated in organised activities tended to observe more of the changes. For example, one of the interviewees said that he had not noticed a significant difference in the landscape as a visitor other than via car parking and improvements in access routes. However, he had noticed changes in those areas where he had worked as a volunteer: the opening up of the woodland, coppicing, felling and butterfly conservation; he has also seen the longhorn cattle grazing in the woodland.

Conservation was a key issue people raised when talking about opening up the landscape, which they associated with increases in species and habitat diversity by providing new opportunities for species that prefer more open habitats.

'It takes time to get the species back but it's a great achievement of what has been done. You don't get instantaneous results but things are progressing in the right direction.' (LPB member)

'I think the work that's been done on longhorns and extensive grazing is very cutting edge in terms of conservation work.' (LPB member)

Access creation and improvement: the people's path

The creation of the 13.5 mile circular Staple Fitzpaine Herepath¹³ was a key component of the project and has led to improved access and accessibility. Respondents talked about physical access improvements and how well the path was made (in an area known to be wet and boggy), as the quotes below illustrate. This path is seen by many respondents as an important legacy of the overall project. An easy access one-kilometre trail has also been created providing opportunities for those with mobility problems and families with children in buggies. The improved and newly created paths are popular with walkers, dog walkers, families and horse riders.

'... certainly the improvements that have been made to the network in that area have been fantastic and hopefully we shouldn't have to revisit that in the short term future [in terms of maintenance].' (LPB member)

'I love what you've done on access, I think it's absolutely tremendous and I've been up to the all ability trail... That has been so important to the people of Wellington and Taunton because there wasn't anything like it and a fabulous asset to the AONB.' (LPB member)

'... improved access to the countryside is a huge asset for the area both for the locals and tourists alike whether walking, riding or cycling.' (Member of public)



Herepath walkers.



.... and riders

Automatic counters are installed at two locations on the Staple Fitzpaine Herepath to provide data on the daily and seasonal use by horse riders and walkers (Table 5.1). Data collected over two years indicates that the path is particularly popular with horse riders and heaviest use occurs during spring and summer.

¹³ Herepath is an Anglo Saxon word meaning army road; the routes were often superior and safer routes and therefore heavily used by ordinary travellers and traders. The project adopted the term in the latter sense, meaning 'people's path'.

Table 5.1: Path use counter data from September 2008 to November 2010

	Staple Fitzpaine Herepath: Middleroom	Staple Fitzpaine: Wychwood
Average bridleway users per month	97	188
Average footpaths users per month	338	717

As well as improving physical access to the area respondents talked about perceptual access. Some people knew there was physical access, but psychological barriers such as not knowing the area well and not feeling comfortable were key issues that prevented them from actually visiting. The improved physical access and signage provided a focal point and the organised activities helped some people to overcome these barriers. General publicity, a website and interpretation has also raised awareness of the area for people who live locally as well as those from further away.

'... it gives people great accessibility to the countryside and for new generations who have lost touch with the countryside they now have the opportunity to embrace it. For those local visitors they have the possibility now to learn more about the history of the landscape that is on their doorstep.' (Member of public)

Improvements to visual access were also mentioned by some respondents. For example, the area of forest cut to make way for the creation of the footpaths has opened up the landscape visually and provided views for locals and visitors across to areas such as the Quantocks.

The NLPS also succeeded in signposting to people that the public forests are available as a resource for people to use and enjoy. Communication about the NLPS and publicity on the associated events and activities helped people discover this resource.

'FC did not have a very good local public relations profile in the area before we started, so we were starting pretty much from scratch. I think FC was seen as being a bit of a remote public authority sort of organisation, that didn't make a great deal of its woods and we've had to try and bring that perception around and make us seem a bit more welcoming to the general public.' (Project team member)

'I found in my area, until four or five years ago, you didn't go into the forest because it was regarded as Forestry Commission land, it wasn't that accessible [...] and just a few dog walkers went in there and then it was all opened up and people didn't realise it was being opened up to the general public, and anybody could go in there until people started going in there and then come back and said "we went in there for a couple of hours, a good walk around" and it's gradually filtering through to the wider area.' (LSG member)

Cattle grazing

English longhorn cattle were introduced as part of the process of transforming areas from conifer plantation to low intensity mixed woodland pasture. The cattle were purchased by FC with lottery funding. The objective was to provide more diverse habitats for wildlife (including a number of threatened butterfly species), while creating a farming arrangement with a local farmer, with the potential to become economically self-sustaining in the long term. This was seen by a member of the LPB as '*cutting edge in terms of conservation work*'. As section 4.2 suggests this was one of the innovations of the NLPS.

'The area was much richer in wildlife then and particularly butterflies. The project is bringing back the open rough grazing habitat that many butterfly species rely on.' (LPB member)

Some people were nervous about having cattle roaming freely, especially when it affected areas that they liked for walking. There was also some concern about fencing off areas that had not been fenced in the past and some members of the local community found it a difficult concept. The decision to fence one area was reversed after discussions with local people.

'I am anxious about the longhorn cattle – they look very scary' (Member of the public)

'There was a lot of fear of having longhorns in the forest, they look at the horns and they look so fierce. One area the locals did not want fenced in and the longhorns put in, they wanted to walk freely through the trees as they always had done in the past. They were worried about dogs, so we spent time talking to people and [name of the project manager] put up signs saying how docile they were. But as it is because they're in such a huge area you go down there and never see them, so it turned out to not be so much a problem as people thought.' (Project team member)

Unfortunately, an issue arose with the cattle that had a large impact on this aspect of the scheme and on the FC as the lead organisation (see section 6.2).

5.3 Community engagement

Community engagement was an important component of the NLPS. The scheme deliberately put engagement at the heart of its work and set this in motion from the early days, building capacity within the local community and providing a sense of empowerment. One member of the LPB, who had been involved in other partnership projects, singled out the NLPS for its community involvement from the beginning of the scheme. This engagement took place through several channels such as the LSG, public meetings, talks, and activities targeted at particular groups. New opportunities were created and training provided, such as helping teachers and teaching assistants to qualify as Forest School leaders, supporting local history groups, providing training in field archaeology, and running several volunteer groups and events (focused on butterfly

and plant identification and monitoring, hands-on conservation work, and trail inspection).

'First the project has brought communities together, has achieved a real sense of community spirit and involvement that may have been there but Neroche was the vehicle to put a bit of life back into it. Sitting on the board meetings I found that the local community was at the heart of the project.' (LPB member)



Butterfly volunteer training

The creation and involvement of the LSG (outlined in sections 3.3 and 4.1) and its decision-making power within the scheme, as well as the formation of the Blackdown Hills Trust provides a legacy of the emphasis placed on strong community engagement within the NLPS. Members of the LSG expressed surprise at how much decision making power they were given (see section 4.3).

However, attempts to engage and empower communities often encounter problems and complications. For example, the extent to which local community members want to get involved and stay involved, have the time, and want to take on the responsibility of making decisions or running and/or participating in activities is often difficult to predict

at the outset. Similarly, necessary changes in decision making responsibility as projects evolve can cause actors to question the significance of their involvement (see section 6).

'... in the early days, by default because there were less people around, we had quite a major role and then of course as the project team came on board, a lot of that was taken up obviously by the employed staff and then we tended to scatter ourselves around sub-groups that we maybe had a special interest in, so that went on ... I tended to feel, not surprisingly as the project moved on, the role of the stakeholder group became less acute and in a sense, at some stages I think we felt a bit left out of the decision making loop, having been so involved in the first place but maybe that was appropriate.' (LSG member)

5.4 Skills for the future

Apprenticeships

Interviews and survey responses of past and current apprentices¹⁴ who have been supported by the NLPS showed the highly positive impact on their professional life. Furthermore, apprentices talked about benefits in terms of gaining confidence in decision-making, realising the importance of team-working, and improving communication and people skills.

Interviewee 1: 'It is the kind of job you need to be working in a team really, if anything does go wrong, you're stuffed.'

Interviewee 2: 'Can bounce off each other as well can't you, you can just work through anything, help each other out.'

Positive impacts highlighted by respondents included 'gaining qualifications / certificates', 'hands-on experience', and being trusted to carry out advanced tasks after a few months. All apprentices very much enjoyed working in the forest environment and all wished to continue working in the forestry/outdoor/environmental sector.

Interviewer: 'What would you say you have gained from this apprenticeship, from your career point of view?'

Interviewee 3: 'We've already got quite a lot of NVTC qualifications, a brush cutter, chipper, there's quite a few we've done, we're doing aerial rescue at the end of this month [...].'

Interviewer: 'Based on your experience so far, what would you say is the most important thing to you about this apprenticeship scheme?'

Interviewee 1: 'Just the hands-on experience, without a doubt.'

Interviewee 3: 'The qualifications at the end of it really.'

¹⁴ The project committed to three apprentices who all completed their apprenticeship in 2008; two of the three apprentices responded to the invitation to participate in this evaluation. Of the more recently recruited five apprentices, one had to leave early on and was replaced; another left in October 2010, but the remaining four all participated in the evaluation research and are expected to finish their apprenticeship end of 2011.

Three suggestions for improving the apprenticeship were offered by respondents: (1) having a supervisor experienced in the range of basic and more advanced practical skills¹⁵; (2) providing better progression on the career path¹⁶; and (3) having more regularly spaced college days to maintain the momentum of that part of the training.

Staff working with the apprentices also provided very positive feedback and welcomed the opportunity to improve the skills of (young) people. The interest in the apprenticeships was high, with 155 applications received for the five posts advertised in the autumn of 2009.

Forest School

Forest School has proved popular with children and teachers alike and was seen by LSG and LPB members as highly valuable and a key NLPS achievement. Over four years, 38 teachers have undertaken training at advanced Level 3, and 16 at assistant Level 2. The training of teachers as Forest School leaders provides them with the skills to deliver and run Forest School activities in their own schools. The impact for one primary school has been significant, with pupils being involved in Forest School twice a week and with every child in the school taking part at some point in the year. Finding access to suitable areas to run Forest School has also been important and this, along with trained leaders, provides a legacy for this activity to continue after the NLPS has ended.

'... we wanted to come back to the beginning and get it into the curriculum at the start, so we had in the future less people who had been excluded from school. But that meant changing people's perception as to how forest school could be used. So I spent a lot of time talking to people about what forest school is and changing that perception from it just being for people with challenging behaviour, to it actually being something that could be used for everybody. [...] now, I've got a list of people waiting who would like to do it' (Project leader)

'... they get to learn outside the classroom, although they don't think they are learning, they think they're playing. It's really good for boys especially and for children with special needs especially working with ASD difficulties and ADHD. They need to be learning kinaesthetically. They need to be in a big outdoor environment, not sitting down quiet.' (Special Needs Teacher)

'... the last board meeting we had a quick meeting in the hall and then went out into the woods and the woods were full of children, this was a result of the Forest School and this is what I think is so wonderful is that the project's bringing people in. I'd rather walk with other people and share it and hear these children sharing it, and there were children there having a taster day and their teachers were having training.' (LPB member)

¹⁵ The supervisor for the initial scheme came from a more academic background and was still settling into the applied work; later another supervisor took over and that worked much better for apprentices.

¹⁶ The specific issue raised was to be offered a timed contract after the apprenticeship to further consolidate skills rather than having to immediately compete with internal and external candidates for advertised posts.

One of the teachers felt that Forest School not only helped children to learn outdoors but also provided them with the freedom to think about and gain a greater understanding of risk.

'[Forest School] gives them back the chance to decide what the risk is and whether it's safe to take it' (Teacher)

Biological monitoring and general volunteering

Vegetation and invertebrate monitoring has been carried out within the scheme to assess progress in the restoration of habitats following the clearance of conifer forests. Major botanical monitoring was carried out by Somerset Environmental Records Centre, and butterfly and moth recording by Butterfly Conservation staff, contractors and volunteers. A group of 12 volunteers were trained by NLPS staff in botanical surveying techniques, and assigned areas of the forest to record annually over an extended period. The work is highlighting an increase in botanical diversity and in vegetation that supports butterflies, together with some promising evidence of recovery in some butterfly species populations.

A mid-week Neroche Conservation Volunteers group was set up to carry out practical conservation tasks, such as scrub clearance. This has become a highly successful and energetic group, and there are plans to increase the frequency of tasks from monthly to fortnightly. One participant with a disability described her enjoyment of volunteering, how it helped her to get out and meet new people, as well giving her a chance to contribute to the protection of the local area.

'Just the feeling of trying to help the environment you know and conservation. It's something I always wanted to do but never had the time to.' (Neroche Conservation Volunteer)

An important aspect of monitoring and volunteering activities is seeing changes that take place over time, developing new skills, getting to know different places within the Neroche area and having access to people with specialist knowledge.

'And the thing they enjoy mostly is working on a project, they can see the changes they're making straightaway and they're not doing the same little thing month after month, but doing little different bits, they're finding out about different areas, about different woodlands they maybe would never have been to before and they've got specialists on site, we've had Somerset Wildlife Trust, butterfly people and also people from the Forestry Commission and they've had people there that they can pick their brains and ask them about stuff.' (Project team member)

'We are going to see how the whole area is developing from a muddy quagmire to a new open forest. I find it terribly interesting and I'm looking forward to the years ahead to be honest, I hope I have enough time. What is important to me is proving that although there was devastation at one time, nature is regenerating and you can see it all coming up. In five years' time it will look quite different.' (LSG member, also involved in vegetation monitoring)



Wildflower survey training

5.5 Variety of activities, audiences and experiences

The variety of the scheme and its activities

Appendix 2 and Figure 3.2 show the variety of organised, structured and led activities within the overall NLPS from arts, heritage, local history, nature talks and events, to Forest School, apprenticeships and volunteering. This variety has provided a diverse range of opportunities for people to get involved depending on their particular tastes and interests. The project manager suggests that this variety of activities has evolved over the life of the project:

'I think as it's turned out, we've done something that has been relevant to most of those audiences but as I say, we didn't necessarily set out with a plan to do so, it just happened really.'

Table 5.2: Responses to the questionnaire

Theme	What have you enjoyed about the activity/activities? (respondent's comments)	Types of activity participants were undertaking
Landscape aesthetics and atmosphere	Unspoilt beauty Beautiful, historic, views Attractive scenery, landscape Seeing flowers, butterflies Good mix of open and woodland Thrilled to spend some time observing the cattle Seasonal sights and sounds	Family visits Walking
Challenge and reward	Mental challenge Rewarding worthwhile work Freedom of the area Evening (Punkie Night) was wonderfully atmospheric Not something we would have done without knowledgeable and experienced guides Inspired my children and friends to enjoy rough camping and foraging Gave me opportunity to try an activity I have been interested in for a long time	Carrying out a parish survey Walking Punkie ¹⁷ Night Bushcraft Fungi foray Dawn chorus walk and breakfast
Enjoyment	Fresh air Peace and quiet Exercise Events have always been a great deal of fun	Walking Fungi foray Bird watching Geo-caching
Socialising with friends, family, meeting new people	Take my extended family Meeting like minded people Working as part of a team Able to make friends with the rest of the group Togetherness – working for joint interest and purpose. Spending time with my sons outside	Walking Butterfly conservation working party Bushcraft day Family days
Facilities, e.g. good trails	Excellent surface of Herepath Work done on trails has been fantastic Ease of walking on well maintained trails The Herepath is wonderful	Walking Riding
Learning from talks or getting involved	Guided walks informative and help my understanding Interesting and informative Increased my knowledge of plants Discovering more about the area Involvement of children in school activities Learning new skills	Dawn chorus walk Volunteer plant survey work Walking Forest School Bushcraft

From the respondents to the questionnaire, 28% indicated that they were aware of 8-10 different projects or activities that were organised by the NLPS, 54% of 5-7, and 13% of

¹⁷ A lantern procession took place through the woods to a fire and four large decorated lanterns on Punkie Night with music and songs. Children made their own lanterns at school with help from an artist.

3-4. Only two respondents stated that they did not know of any activities that had taken place as part of the NLPS. Respondents were most likely to know about the Herepath and least likely to know about the health walks for disadvantaged groups. The variety of activities, along with physical changes to the landscape has enabled new audiences to be reached through the NLPS.

Many interviewees from the LSG and LPB talked about the NLPS as a holistic project, bringing together a wide range of different elements, activities and people, reconnecting people to the landscape and bringing together public, private and charitable organisations to work towards a common goal.

'I think the huge amount it's managed to achieve within the period right the way across the landscape [...] it's left some very lasting differences [...] the huge clearance of areas of conifer and re-creation of habitat, fantastic. The Herepath system, access system really fantastic, the garnering and involving the community effort which is most difficult to keep going I think and is so essential, absolutely brilliant'. (LPB member)

Providing opportunities and new experiences

Table 5.2 summarises what members of the public reported that they enjoyed about the activities they got involved in. These have been grouped into broader themes and illustrate the wide range of ways in which people have benefited from the NLPS.

Questionnaire respondents were asked to give their reasons for visiting the area and/or participating in the NLPS activities. The answers highlight that people were keen to see wildlife, learn about the environment, get to know the area and have fun as well as be active and relax (Figure 5.1).

Respondents were also asked to think about the area and landscape and agree or disagree with a number of statements. Figure 5.2 shows that respondents regarded the area as an important place for wildlife, good for learning about the environment, providing the area with a sense of identity, and a place to exercise, keep fit, relax and de-stress. The majority of activities people were involved in included (in order of popularity) walking followed by getting involved in various organised events such as the bushcraft days, art days, dawn chorus walks, along with visits with family and friends, getting involved in monitoring and volunteer work.

It is interesting to note from Figures 5.1 and 5.2 the high value given to wildlife and learning more about the environment. There were fairly low percentages of people stating that socialising was important. This potentially links to the meanings people associated with the Neroche landscape such as 'peace', 'quiet', 'unspoilt' and that many people wanted to enjoy this alone rather than with others. However, for some respondents a key element of their enjoyment was undertaking an activity with family, friends or meeting new people, often through an organised activity.

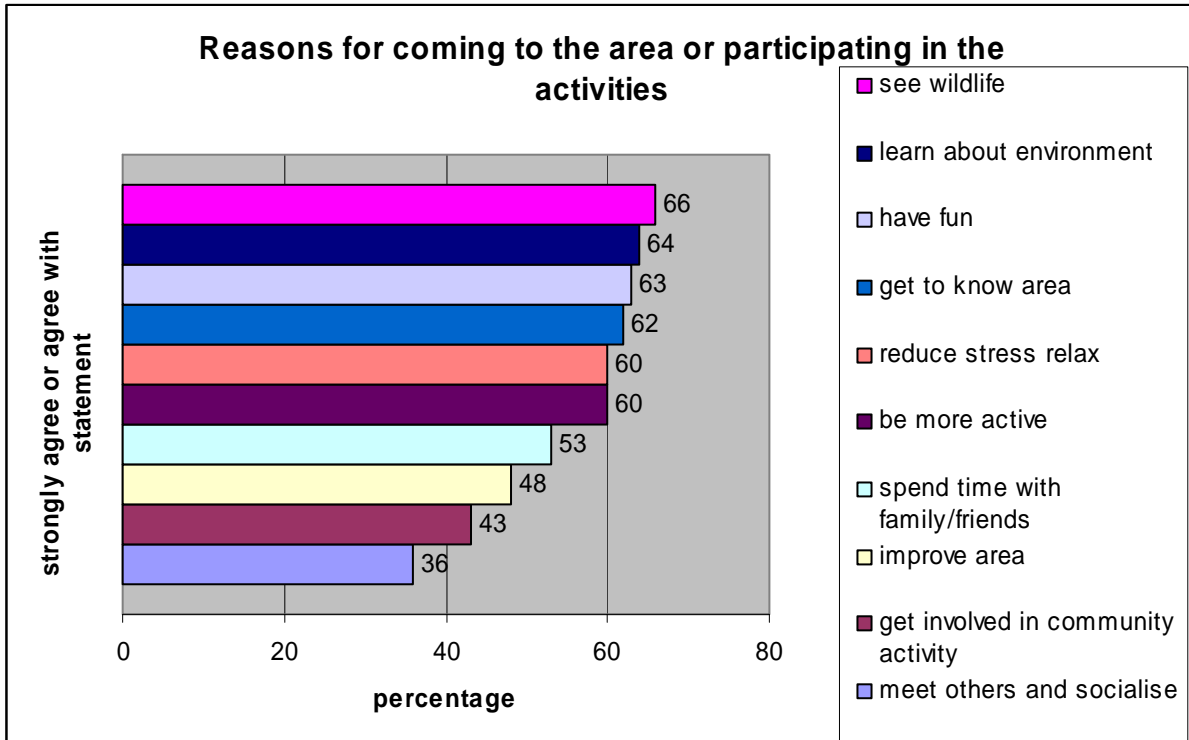


Figure 5.1: Reasons for coming to the area

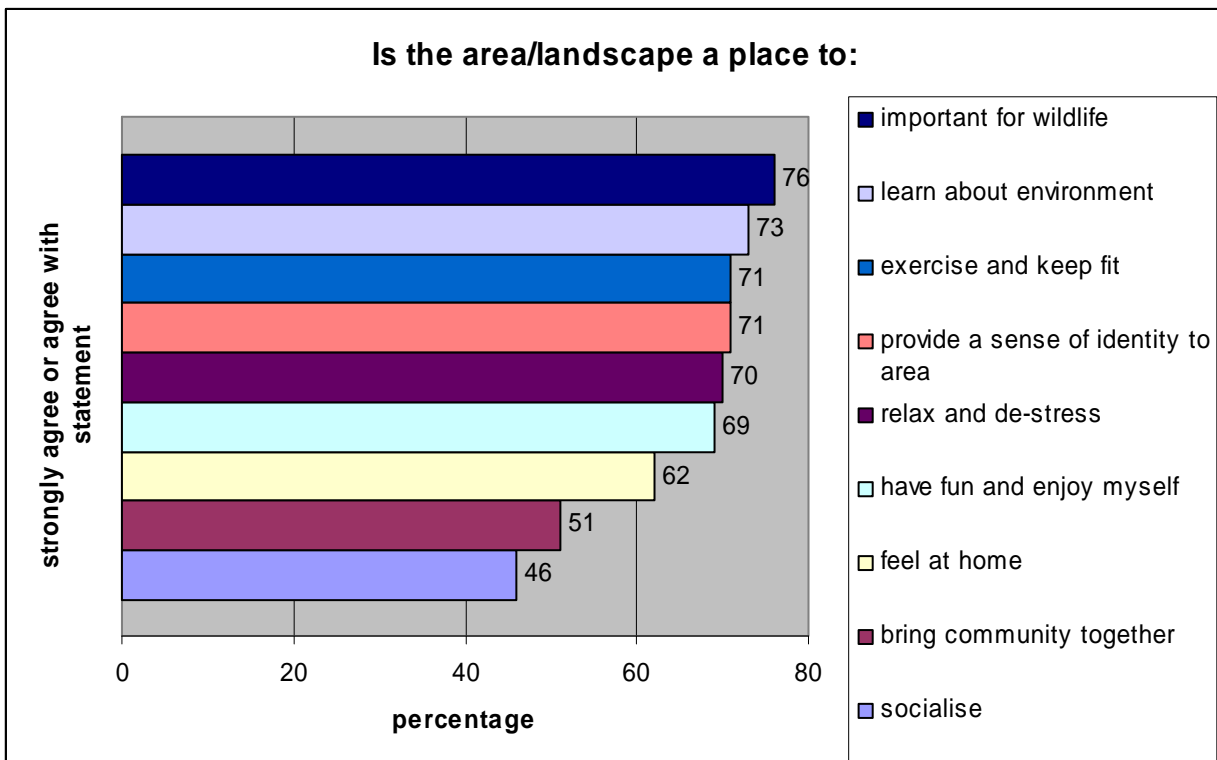


Figure 5.2: The area/landscape as a place for a variety of activities

Respondents from the LSG, LPB, project team and the wider public talked about new experiences that they, and other people, had gained from involvement in the NLPS. For example, some people visited the Neroche forests and used the paths for the first time; some participated in a new activity, such as bushcraft or hands-on nature conservation work; others learnt new skills and knowledge by getting involved in vegetation monitoring training and volunteering. A new local history group¹⁸ was developed within the project which was assisted by a community history officer. One member of the LSG who, with her family, had got involved in testing the digital trail guides found that it facilitated *'an exploratory journey of a place I've lived in all my life'*. Members of the public talked about how participating in one activity often led on to them joining in other events or visiting the area more often. Several LSG members got involved in sub-group project activities and volunteering in addition to their input into decision-making to shape and guide the NLPS. Activities such as volunteering also provided respondents who enjoyed the area with the opportunity to make a contribution to the NLPS.

'It must have been this spring, we started volunteering, loved it.' (Member of public)

'We felt as we are using the Herepath, we should give something back.' (Member of public)

'I think it is working really well that bushcraft becomes a stepping stone for people to go on and do other things.' (Member of public)

Community arts and interpretation projects were undertaken in several parishes and artists were commissioned to develop and create work related to the Blackdowns landscape. Specific sub-projects, such as 'telling the seasons' and 'touching the seasons', used storytelling, music and sculpture to engage people's imaginations and creativity. For one artist, involvement in the NLPS was exciting and the value placed on art in the project was seen as important. For another, it was a chance to work with others.

'for me that was really the biggest thing [...] was the fact that they [the NLPS] took the art seriously [...] They listened, they took it seriously and they expanded on it' (Artist working on NLPS)

'... it was a big eye opener for me. It was very good to see how professionals work in that way because I'm used to working on my own' (Placement artist)

Survey participants were asked about whether any further improvements were needed. Responses largely related to more information about the trees and the local area, concerns about ongoing maintenance of the footpaths, the desire to see other footpaths improved and concerns about parking.

¹⁸ The local history group covers the parish of Neroche which is five small villages of about 220 houses.



Enjoying 'bushcraft' activities

Reaching new audiences

Punkie Night (an old Somerset tradition), Forest School, bushcraft, art events, and family days have reached children and families from the local rural communities, but have also attracted people from nearby urban centres such as Taunton and Wellington. Bushcraft, in particular, proved very popular, particularly because the events allowed families to spend time together having fun.

'It's brought people into the AONB for a different reason [... the NLPS] run different events and actually far more events [...] with different events like Punkie Night, you've brought people that otherwise wouldn't have come [...] it's been very good at bringing in new audiences.' (LPB member)

'The family bushcraft days were great for the family and for the children. However, it gives the opportunity for the grown-ups to have their moment, to have fun too.' (Member of public)

'Thank you for creating an opportunity for children and adults to play with knives and fires! An amazing chance to spend calm family time outside, enjoying all the elements and resources. Will definitely come back for more.' (Visitor book comment)

'I'm 32 years old and this day made me feel 10 years old again. I could spend a whole weekend here. The staff were informative and approachable. Thank you to them all – great family day.' (Visitor book comment)

Regular health walks in the forested countryside were organised for people with severe behavioural, mental and physical health issues. Working with Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership, this project recruited participants through residential homes. The easy access, all ability trail provides opportunities for people with special needs as well as for the elderly and others with mobility problems.

'It's amazing what being in that environment does for people as far as their self-awareness, their self-confidence, their sense of achievement, their general health and wellbeing [...]people

who have lost weight and they feel better about themselves for having lost the weight and sometimes having a little bit of background on the history of somewhere... (Project leader)

5.6 Liberating people

The strap line for the NLPS is 'liberating the landscape'. Analysis of interviews, focus group discussions and the questionnaire, however, suggest that there has also been liberation for certain groups of people and individuals through their involvement in the NLPS. From building confidence, bringing people together, to providing new experiences and learning opportunities, enabling people to discover new places and use paths suitable for all year round use, the NLPS has opened up a wide range of opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in new ways with the Blackdown Hills landscape. The NLPS has both connected people to the landscape who had not previously engaged with the area, and has re-connected existing users to it by enhancing their experience and use. For example, Forest School leaders and helpers gained confidence and experience to run Forest School sessions themselves (see section 5.4), providing a different learning environment for school children in the area to explore.

The health walks project leader from Somerset Activity and Sports Partnerships has developed walks in partnership with NLPS and has been able to benefit from the improvements in access created by the scheme to bring specific groups of people into the countryside who otherwise would not have had the opportunity (e.g. those with carers living in urban areas).

'... just to get one of my clients to help another one by taking their hand if they're getting over a stile or taking their hand while they're walking over a bridge or something like that. That little thing that seems irrelevant to anybody else is a huge thing for the people that I work with, it's huge. So to build that kind of camaraderie between people that don't communicate with other people is huge.' (Project Leader)

Also for the general public, and especially families with young children, the Herepaths, car park and interpretation has given them more confidence to visit and use the area. One respondent who got involved in the bushcraft events and completed advanced training in bushcraft in the Neroche area has now been asked by the project team to be a leader on bushcraft days run by the NLPS. The respondent stated the training had given him more self-confidence, as well as new skills. Those who got involved in the green woodworking days also learnt about traditional crafts.

'Wood smoke + coffee + plain chocolate biscuits + ash + splitting hazel + cleaving + double handed saw + froe lever + mallet + tent peg + blank + pole lathe + good company + wind + rain + sun = a bloody good day' (Visitor book comment)

A common theme among respondents was how the NLPS provided them with opportunities to get to know the Neroche area better, both physically and in terms of the history of the area, or discover new places they had not been to before.

'... it gives people great accessibility to the countryside and for new generations who have lost touch with the countryside they now have the opportunity to embrace it. For those local visitors they have the possibility now to learn more about the history of the landscape that is on their doorstep.' (Member of public)



Forest School participants and project leader



Health walk participants with project leader

6 Challenges: Dealing and Coping with Issues that Arise

KEY FINDINGS

- **Large scale tree-felling caused concern amongst the local community about the scale and speed of change and this was a difficult issue for the project team and local stakeholders group to deal with**
- **The innovation of using longhorn cattle was disrupted by an incident which was seized upon by a local resident; dealing with this took up a considerable amount of the project team's time and effort**
- **Effective communication is crucial to large scale schemes and the NLPS highlights the difficulty of achieving the right balance between what is desirable and what is possible**
- **There is a danger that a few negative voices and instances have a proportionally much larger impact on perceptions, publicity and staff resources than positive feedback and achievements**
- **Large-scale landscape partnership schemes need sufficient time to allow buy-in and support for implementing a work programme and to be able to manage the environment's and communities' adaptation to changes. A five-year scheme duration appears to be a suitable minimum**
- **The Forestry Commission had to balance the provision of strong leadership for the NLPS whilst also sharing power with the landscape partnership board and the local stakeholders group**

Any large scheme such as the NLPS will encounter a range of challenges as it introduces changes to an existing landscape, involves groups of people in making decisions and provides opportunities for communities to participate in a range of activities. This section outlines the key challenges that were reported by the project team, LPB, LSG and (directly or indirectly) members of the public.

6.1 Landscape change

Section 5.2 highlights that for some the large scale removal of conifers was a negative experience. Even those who agreed with the objectives for tree clearance admitted that the visual effects could be stark. Understanding the many ways in which local communities might experience and respond to large landscape scale change such as this is difficult. For the FC it is routine practice to remove trees and thin woods as part of

managing the public forest estate across Britain. However, communities can often assume that the forest has always been there, or they simply get used to it being there.

'... of course no-one likes change and particularly in areas that you've known as a woodland, people believe it's been like this forever, it hasn't, it was in the 50s, just after the war there were hardly any trees in this area at all. But people don't know that and they know it as they've seen it for the last 10/15/20 years. [...] more work needs to be done on explaining to the community and then working with them and clearing up some of the sites ...' (LSG member)

Change can be unsettling because it impacts on existing familiarity and use and/or because residents and visitors are unclear about underlying reasons, or because there is a lack of trust in the organisation triggering or managing the change. Whilst the FC is familiar with these kinds of issues, handling each situation requires local insight and sensitivity, and potentially going beyond an organisation's statutory or standard consultation and information practices.

'We've certainly had plenty of negative feedback on issues surrounding the habitat restoration work in the forest, when we were clearing the trees in the first place, a lot of voices raised in anger sometimes about the scale of the removal of trees. So in those cases we were necessarily very open to those criticisms and we had to put a lot of effort into the diplomacy of trying to deal with that. [...] there were a group of perhaps four or five or six local residents who were particularly aggrieved by what was happening at that time and who made contact with me, but did so in a positive fashion [...] we had some round the table discussions with some of them, to try and listen to their concerns [...], put across our point of view and see what scope there was for allaying some of their concerns.' (Project team member)

Members of the LSG who lived in the areas where the tree clearances took place sometimes found themselves in the position of having to explain to their neighbours why the tree-felling was happening in this location and the short time span for tree removal. While they did this very well, it can be difficult and take time to do this. Several of the LSG members observed that some of the people who complained about the forest clearance initially, later on said that it looked good (e.g. when realising the range of positive impacts on the habitats a couple of years later).

'I live in one of the areas where as a local stakeholder, you try to go out and speak to your community and explain [...] there was a lot of anxiety about the project in my locality, these are people who are my neighbours and the people I know who live in the villages [...]. I don't think any of them had really understood just how awful it would look and neither had I candidly. It was hard at times to feel I was defending the project, when I had a lot of sympathy with what the local people were saying.' (LSG member)

Sections 3.1 and 5.1 outline some of the meanings people associated with the Neroche landscape and the paradox of on the one hand making the area more accessible and attractive to locals and visitors, yet on the other hand not overdeveloping the recreational aspects and thereby destroying what is particularly valued about this area

and the Blackdowns (it being 'quiet', 'rural' and 'hidden'). Members of the project team and LPB were aware of this, but it was particularly members of the LSG who wanted to get the balance right between local economic and recreational development opportunities and the conservation of the area.

'And the other thing for me came out of all this was this interesting paradox, that if you were conserving the landscape, you don't want people on it but if you're actually trying to liberate it and you're trying to make it more accessible, of course you do want people in and they don't actually sit very comfortably together because one really rather infringes on the other one.' (LSG member)

6.2 Innovation under stress

One innovative aspect of the NLPS was to introduce longhorn cattle to the forest to create a network of open habitats in order to benefit butterflies and other wildlife. Since the forest can only support grazing in the summer months, an overwintering arrangement for the cattle was required, and for this a woodchip-based corral was built using Lottery funding. Corrals of this design are fairly new to the UK, but in theory provide a cost-effective, welfare-friendly approach to overwintering hardy breeds of livestock. The corral was completed in 2008 and stocked successfully in the winter of 2008/09. However in the extreme cold of the winter of 2009/10 the surface of the corral froze, impeding the drainage of slurry, and the herd had to be moved off the corral back to the grazier's farm.

'... traditional cattle breeds like the longhorns actually prefer to be outdoors than indoors for the winter. In the first year it [the corral] worked brilliantly and we had the BBC come and film it and all sorts of articles on it and everyone was very excited. Last winter the corral actually froze in that extreme weather and froze for quite a period of the time ...' (Project team member)

There was a delay in moving the cattle off the corral during the cold period, while indoor barn space was freed up. As a result there were some cattle fatalities on the corral during this short period. Unknown to the NLPS or the farmer, a local resident took photographs and video footage of the cattle at this time, and these were sent anonymously to Trading Standards, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but not to FC. A second individual then used this material to mount a campaign against the project and demand prosecution, ostensibly on the grounds of animal welfare, taking their complaint to FC nationally, to the HLF and to other partners. Concern over the potential impact of this pressure on the farmer's business led to the contract between FC and the farmer being ended in 2010. No prosecutions were brought and the matter was not taken further by Trading Standards or any other parties. As a result of this unexpected change, FC had to over-winter the cattle away from the area in the winter of 2010/11 and the NLPS team is now making plans for new grazing and herd management arrangements from



2011 onwards. This episode placed a severe strain on all concerned, had considerable financial implications for FC, and risked detracting from the reputation of the NLPS in wider circles.

'... that's been a very salutary experience in terms of partly realising just how much damage one individual can do. If someone out there decides they want to really try and scupper what you're doing, there's a great deal of effects that they can have [...]. 'We've re-grouped a little bit now so things are improving but it takes a while to get over something like that and the practical consequences obviously are still there, in that we've had to change the way we do the grazing project and the financial consequences are still things that we're trying to deal with.' (Project team member)

Many in the LPB and LSG were disappointed that this problem arose and felt that the complaints had been out of proportion to the actual issue.

'I think it's a huge shame that that has recently encountered problems which I think has been way out of proportion to the concerns that were obviously brought about the cattle and so on; I think that's been hugely destructive and a great shame because to me the value of the work still stands and shouldn't suffer, as a result of a particular issue which can be managed'. (LPB member)

6.3 Communication

Communication by and within partnership schemes such as this is crucially important and covers every aspect from publicising that such a scheme will take place, encouraging people to become involved, and communication between the project team as well as with the LPB, the LSG and the wider community. Respondents were aware of the importance of this and the difficulties in terms of the time needed and getting a balance between what might be desirable and what is achievable.

'I think we probably could have done with more liaison with Neroche staff in between board meetings; and obviously, it takes two to communicate, but I think that would have been a lot better rather than just turn up at board meetings, which it was a little bit like, and then just get on with what we're doing.' (LPB member)

'I think the big problem with communication is there's plenty of information [referring to different outlets such as local newspapers, parish magazines, NLPS website] all this information but people don't look at it.' (LSG member)

'That's been an ongoing question for the whole of the time we've been together really, the publicity, [project manager's name] has been very concerned about publicity all the way through and "what more can we do?" [...] People just don't read, they don't take things in and then you get the sort of Chinese whispers, they get the wrong side of something and they get to the stage where they don't really look for the reality of the problem. So I think that's one of the things we've had to face quite a bit, so you get this very negative thing really when they should be looking to the positive element.' (LSG member)

'... if you run a project like this [...] the PR side of things is a long and difficult process sometimes and obviously you occasionally get instances where you're dealing with individuals who are particularly difficult, that we've had recent experience of and that's one thing that sometimes you feel like you're bashing your head against a brick wall because you've got a few people who are positive, but a lot of people who are either uninterested or rather negative and it's sometimes quite hard to find the energy to go on pushing at those attitudes. That's what we've succeeded in doing, but nevertheless it's quite draining at times.' (Project team member)

One member of the LPB felt that a dedicated communication officer and a specific communication strategy would have been beneficial to the scheme; as communications is a specialist activity. It is difficult for the project team to communicate a large complex scheme such as this to a wide audience and to keep up a profile in the local and regional media. However, several LPB members felt that communication was very good within the NLPS.

'I think you struggle to get out the stories of the whole project, the project as a whole [...] There needs to be a whole communication strategy because we were making big changes to the landscape, it was a very big project [...] Communication is a difficult thing, then you realise you haven't communicated enough; and it is a specialist role.' (LPB member)



Archaeological dig

6.4 Time and resources

Time was seen as a particularly important issue in terms of managing landscape change and encouraging and facilitating individual and community engagement; e.g. having the time to communicate and make landscape changes without causing undue alarm. The Lottery funded the NLPS for three years and agreed to extend it later to five years, which reflects the recognition of the need to provide adequate time for change to take place. Now all LPSs tend to be funded over a five-year period.

'...three years is too short a time to deliver landscape scale initiatives. We'd like to have the same duration as the new applicants have now (5 years) and in effect HLF have now granted us that'. (FC employee)

'I think it's one of the things that projects like this sometimes don't realise that you only really begin to get that sort of payback in terms of public support, in terms of attitudes and support of people coming along to events that you organise, you only get that if you put in the real donkey work for a long time....' (Project team member)

Concern over time and resource allocation was raised in a couple of interviews in relation to the production of a book about the Neroche area, its heritage and many of the arts- and interpretation-based activities that were part of the NLPS (see also section 4.2). The original plan was to produce two written outputs, a 'pamphlet' or 'brochure' on the arts activities in Neroche and another on the historical findings and activities. These later merged to become one book co-edited by the arts and the community history project leaders. One member of the LSG and one member of the LPB observed that this book had grown rather large. A particular concern was the fact that due to one of the project leaders spending so much time writing the book, she was unable to dedicate much time to community-based historical and archaeological activities - just when interest had been created and people were keen to do more.

'I've spent the last year writing a book about the project, so I haven't really been doing that much out in the community, I haven't been involved in the community. [...] I have been to a couple of events and done talks and things but I've been very focused on coordinating the contributions for this book.' (Project leader)

The LPB member felt that the issue should have been more explicitly debated in the board meetings, to weigh up the pros and cons of time and resource allocation and debate what would be of most use for the local communities (i.e. a big 'coffee table book' or more hands-on activities and knowledge-sharing).

'[...] it was going to be a little sort of, quite a nice brochure on the heritage and the Neroche area and it's got bigger and bigger and has become a millstone I think around [name of project leader]'s neck before she left, for the last 18 months almost, and instead of going out and doing more community work [...] you'd have been better spending more time doing communications at the very beginning [...]. I think perhaps it could have been guided a bit and whether the steering[local stakeholders] group decided they wanted this huge great book.'

I think as a partner I would have said "hold on, what's its audience? Is it really needed? Are there better things we could do with the officer's time while we've got that money?" And I would have liked the opportunity to discuss that a bit more.' (LPB member)

A different way of dealing with the workload could have been to bring in an experienced editor to support the two project leaders in their endeavour.

'[...] I know this one's a double edged sword because one of the legacy projects is going to be this really splendid book, but it has grown a bit like topsy. I don't think in the early days it was envisaged it would be quite so extensive as it's become. So you can look at it in two ways but I certainly do regret that we haven't had more of her time and her expertise and enthusiasm because she's been a brilliant appointment. [...] If you're going to take on such a big project as a book like this, bring in an editor who is not the single person like [name of the project leader] is, all the history legacy lies with her but had the project brought in an experienced editor, used to working with history projects, that might have been ... who [name of project leader] fed into obviously and hugely influenced, but wasn't necessarily doing all the ground work herself.' (LSG member)

A small number of respondents expressed frustration that the NLPS was coming to an end when engagement and awareness of the scheme was good and they felt there was more to do. Some also raised issues about who would be able to take on the running of activities, and the maintenance of the Herepath trails and other footpaths. While the project manager and whole partnership worked hard to find ways through organisations and individuals to continue with activities and projects that the NLPS started, in practice - unless further funding is secured - some will stop (e.g. health walks for those with severe disabilities). Activities such as bushcraft and other nature activity events could continue if participants are prepared to pay a fee that covers the actual running costs (a considerably higher amount than was charged under the NLPS). There was thus a concern about the availability of resources beyond the scheme end (September 2011) and in terms of the continuation and maintenance of the Herepath trails, and whether the necessary work and repair jobs could be carried out as part of the routine / core work programme of either the FC or local councils.

'I just don't have any staff or resource to do that, we've cut right back to the minimum here and just doing the basic statutory work; that [the maintenance of the Herepath trails] would be an enhancement job if you like. In Somerset we've got a very long rights of way network and we struggle to maintain the existing rights of way, without the additional ones as well.' (LPB member)

Time and resource issues also arose in terms of recruiting and keeping NLPS staff and project leaders, which is discussed in section 6.5.

6.5 Good in theory - difficult in practice

A mixture of employment arrangements was used in terms of kind and duration of contract and main location / affiliation of employee to reflect different needs and opportunities within the scheme and its partner organisations. However, differences in organisational structures, priorities and skills can pose challenges in bringing together a large scale scheme and delivering its programme of projects and activities.

Reflecting the initial HLF grant period, employment arrangements for the project team were for a fixed time period of up to three years. As far as project-related contracts go, three years is a substantial period of time, and one can expect to attract good staff. In two instances however, staff left before their contract came to an end because they had secured longer-term employment elsewhere. While this is not uncommon it affected the scheme. For example, once the person in charge of developing rights of ways had left, the NLPS lost some momentum in developing the Herepath trail network. A compromise was for two of the partner organisations to take on some of the project tasks as part of their day-to-day work remit.

'... the circular route at the other end is struggling I think to happen and it needs someone pushing it along all the time.' (Project team)

'... it loses a bit of momentum when you haven't got a specific dedicated officer.' (LPB member)

Another approach to attracting and keeping good staff was to place them with partner organisations to provide the necessary technical support as well as those organisations to potentially be able to 'take over' the post and continue employment after the lifespan of the scheme. This unfortunately did not work out in practice largely due to cut-backs in government spending.

'So as part of the argument for the sustainability for the project was if we stuck some of these people in organisations that had a life beyond the Neroche project and they did a good job, then the chances are they would be taken on. Now in reality that hasn't happened [...]. [... name of project officer], she has been great, [name of partner organisation] are literally shedding about a third of their staff and if the money was there I've no doubt that [name of partner organisation] would take her on but it's been made quite clear that they can't. [...]. And she's now got another job.' (Project team member)

Another employment arrangement involved buying in staff-time from a partner organisation, in cases where the NLPS could not afford a full-time post and a partner organisation was already active in the particular area of planned work. In two instances NLPS projects encountered problems due to lack of clarity and direction over what was expected and feasible, compounded by staff changes and issues with line management arrangements and differences in expectations.

'... for two projects we decided to, rather than directly contract a member of staff or employ a member of staff, we decided to deliver the project via one of our partners [...]so we had a contract with them saying "you will offer us two days a week of X person's time and during those two days a week they will manage [a specific NLPS project]. Looked all right on paper, didn't really work in practice. [...] It was just never satisfactory as a way of working; we never felt we got sufficient concerted attention from those members of staff.' (Project team member)

The manager of that partner organisation (who was an LPB member) also recognised these problems and found the arrangement difficult to manage.

'... [the employee] changed twice during the project and that's caused significant problems, both for delivery of our part of the Neroche project but also for communications with Neroche staff, that's caused me a problem. [...] lack of clarity, lack of direction on those particular projects.' (LPB member)

Not knowing a partner organisation, their staff and current priorities beforehand can thus introduce risks for the delivery of any project, but can also be considered a necessary step in extending one's network and potential cooperation in an area.

'We didn't [know the organisation very well] and the Chief Executive has changed in the duration of the project and they have certainly had some difficulties there. I'm not sure how high a priority Neroche has been for them really. I think they have got a lot of other things they are trying to do. I think they were keen to be involved and to be seen to have been involved but I don't think it was on their top ten list of priorities really.' (Project team member)

A further variation of getting project work carried out was for the partner organisation to receive the allocated funding and manage the project. In most cases this worked well, but in one situation the partner organisation did not have the required expertise to adequately cost the envisaged work. There were also problems caused by clashes in organisational priorities and understandings of what was a priority and feasible as part of the NLPS.

'It turned out that the [name of partner organisation] were not really suitably geared up or competent to manage that project themselves, they hadn't costed it properly etc. So it got to the point where we had to effectively take over the project ourselves and I had to bring in [type of contractor] to oversee a lot of the work. There was a falling out basically between us and the [name of partner organisation] because they, partly they felt it had all been taken out of their hands and partly the money that they had costed for the project didn't go far enough, in terms of doing what they wanted done, so they got very annoyed that the project didn't deliver as much.' (Project team member)

6.6 Sustaining interest and providing support

While buy-in and support for the NLPS overall was very good (see section 4.1), NLPS members observed some aspects of the LPB as not having worked as well as expected. This related to the status or position of those who attended the board meetings and the

frequency and level of attendance at meetings in the latter stages of the NLPS. In several instances, partner organisations sent junior staff to LPB meetings who acted more as observers rather than contributors/supporters.

'The downside was many of the partner organisations, if those [LPB] meetings, if the aim had been to make decisions at them, for example county council or whoever it would be, would often send somebody too junior who didn't have the decision-making ability, so in the early days that was a bit frustrating.' (LSG member)

A few respondents suggested one or more of the following reasons for the reduced board meeting attendance later on in the scheme:

1. there was less of a perceived need to attend meetings or partners could not see how they could contribute themselves, because the scheme was perceived as going well and being effectively managed;
2. those not attending were 'marginal' partners, e.g. Councils that had little of their land in the Neroche scheme area;
3. those not attending had a varied and busy work schedule or change in their organisation's focus of work that limited what they could actually contribute.

Another problem the LPB faced was that the meetings comprised a large number of people and the agenda for the meetings tended to be strategic focusing on scheme and spending updates rather than a discussion and detailed planning of the 23 associated projects. The forum for specific expert knowledge input into the different projects was thus not at board meeting level but with the working groups (see Figure 3.1), each having about six people including members of the LPB, LSG and project team.

6.7 Taking the lead - sharing power

Partnership working involves on-going judgements to find the appropriate amount and time for providing leadership and to balance this with a sensitivity and ability to share power and responsibility for delivery. For many NLPS partners and projects that balance seems to have been appropriate if not exemplary. However, some interviews also elicited a few ambiguities or more critical situations within the NLPS.

One of these was the FC taking on and continuing strong leadership in the NLPS. Section 3.1 shows the admiration and praise attributed to the FC for taking on this landscape project. Yet four board members also pointed to some difficult aspects, such as how the NLPS sits within the Blackdowns AONB, and whether its focus and activities became too localised at the expense of activities within the wider area.

'... I persuaded them [the five core LSG members] that the trust needs to cover the whole of the Blackdowns [...] the Neroche could split the AONB because it's created this area where you've had a lot of money put into it and then almost you've got the rich cousin and the Cinderella part of the area, which hasn't had so much money.' (LPB member)

Three of these four board members also reflected on the relationship between the FC and the AONB office. They felt that ideally the scheme could have been led or should be continued by the AONB as it most closely matched the AONB's formal remit, if they had had the capacity (it did not have that capacity at the time when the FC put together the proposal). However well FC did in putting the project together, obtaining the funding and delivering the objectives, it potentially could have shared out the tasks and responsibilities even further. Also, at the end of this large scheme it may be appropriate to 'let go' as project leader.

'The project was led by the [Forestry] Commission but it was within the AONB and at times it felt like the AONB was not embedded into the project; so with regard to certain elements of the project I didn't quite know where the roles started and finished. [...] Going forward what I would want to see is the AONB either take the lead or having a greater involvement in it.' (LPB member)

'... it should have been shared more amongst the partners rather than partners just almost coming in occasionally, though not even at advisory but being reported to on what's going on.' (LPB member)

The core project team recognised this and seemed to see their role as continuing some facilitation of local capacity and resources until other organisations and people are able to take on or develop new projects (see also section 7.2). This type of approach also seems to fit within the concept of the Big Society.

'...[name of colleague] and I had quite a good session the other day just thinking through how we could get away from a reliance on project officers, you know, needing staff because obviously we are constrained at the moment with staff and how there is a way we could empower the community more. We have talked about bursaries for individuals, [...] we have been able to identify some key people in the community who have a real interest and a passion in local history; but they don't necessarily have the expertise and knowledge. Well, they would be ideal candidates for some sort of bursary and some sort of training with the remit that they then went onto lead local history groups and so on. So effectively getting a project officer or a series of project officers without actually having to employ someone. We are also looking at contracting in [name of project leader] perhaps to do some work for us on a contractual arrangement rather than on an employment basis, so I think there are ways around it but it does actually all fit with the big society sort of idea of reducing the size of the public sector and enabling communities and other bodies to do the roles that otherwise would be done by us.' (Project team member)

7 Evaluation and Transformation

KEY FINDINGS

- **A weakness of the monitoring and evaluation of the NLPS was that no baseline data was collected, as this was not a requirement for the HLF**
- **Therefore the approach for the NLPS to monitoring and evaluation was a pragmatic one with data gathered that was 'fit for purpose' for the HLF, with an evaluation commissioned from Forest Research**
- **Learning was an important component of the NLPS for the project team, the local stakeholders group, the landscape partnership board, project leaders and some of the beneficiaries of the scheme**
- **Transformations have occurred through the NLPS including:**
 - **Changing the landscape and how people relate to it**
 - **Partnership and collaborative working helped to encourage and enable development of new knowledge and different approaches**
 - **Providing individuals, groups and families with new opportunities to get involved and engage with the landscape helped to build confidence and knowledge**

This chapter summarises and discusses what kind of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) took place during the NLPS as well as identifying reflections and learning by actors and beneficiaries reported during this evaluation. We first consider the role and status of M&E within the NLPS and then discuss impacts and outcomes in terms of learning by and transformations in individual lives, communities and work practices.

7.1 Monitoring and evaluation

Opportunities and limitations for M&E

Scheme monitoring and evaluation ideally is an integrated and important component that spans the whole duration from conception of the scheme to its end, and even beyond. However, rarely are enough resources (staff, time, finances) allowed or available to embed M&E in this way. As indicated in section 2.2, the NLPS is typical of many other projects and schemes in that explicit M&E activities formed a small part of the scheme (as little was formally required and funded under the HLF grant) and some evaluation took place towards the end of the NLPS (commissioned by the Forestry Commission).

[In response to whether there has been any monitoring and evaluation]

'Not really. We'll probably check on the counters and we'll probably do a once a year inspection of it all, just to make sure it's all sort of safe and usable but other than that, no we

tend not to do[...] when the project officer was in post, there were some workshops with local businesses to assess impact, the longer term impact of that. But again, when the project officer left, that all fell by the wayside because people just don't have time; that was kind of additional to the access side of it, for example. So no, there wouldn't be any evaluation long term I don't think, apart from just monitoring numbers.' (LPB)

'The classic trap is to bolt something on at the end and this has tended to happen in this one, but I think it was ... I think it was one of the bigger projects that the Forestry Commission had taken on like this to start with and hopefully they'll have learned that lesson.' (LSG member)

'... the Lottery's requirements have been really fairly minimal in terms of reporting. We obviously have to report against the targets that we set ourselves in our original proposals [...] and it's simply a matter of showing the Lottery that we've achieved those things. We've actually gone beyond those targets in lots of respects but the Lottery [...] isn't interested in knowing about that and most of the close monitoring of the scheme from the Lottery's point of view is financial. [...] they've never asked us for more detailed feedback in terms of change in audience perceptions and I suppose part of the lack of that requirement from them, has probably contributed to the fact that we haven't chosen to do so.' (Project team member)

'... I think the weakness [...] what could be improved about the landscape partnership scheme, I think they should insist that say 10% of the money or 5% of the money is spent on monitoring and evaluation. The emphasis on monitoring and evaluation is entirely down to the applicant.' (Project team member)

The weakness in M&E has more recently been picked up by the HLF and it has commissioned work to help it develop a national framework for monitoring 'hard' and 'soft' impacts of landscape partnership schemes.

'...when we first got our approval, HLF itself was not very clear about how it should actually monitor projects going forward [...] in just the last year, HLF commissioned Birkbeck College, [...] to try and put together a framework for national monitoring of the outputs of landscape partnership scheme taking into account the qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of LP schemes. That is yet to deliver so there's not an agreed framework yet. I think probably by the time we get to the end of our scheme, they'll have something in place.' (Project team member)

The objective of monitoring is to gather evidence of change compared to a baseline (at project start). A weakness of the NLPS was that there was no baseline; suitable data was not available at the time or would have been difficult to obtain, and the task of defining a baseline for the scheme proposal was not part of HLF funded scheme.

'... perhaps more stuff at the outset about what are we going to collect, what are our success measures, all that stuff would have been very good.' (LPB member)

'I always explain to people that it's to do with butterflies because that was the only baseline survey we had for the whole project, was the butterfly population and explaining that opening out is improving their habitat or increasing their habitat so ... and I found a lot of people reacting to that, "oh that's interesting".' (LSG member)

[In response to being asked about a more concerted/holistic M&E approach for the NLPS]
'No. I suppose it's something that I regret to an extent. When we originally put the bid to the Lottery, we were obliged to do an audience development plan [...] which was supposed to look at a range of audiences that we would be trying to reach through the project, but that never included a proper baseline assessment of opinion or attitudes and I suppose it would have been difficult to do that at the time because you'd have been asking people about something that didn't exist. But it means that I'm not in a position to say 50% more people are aware of the forest than was the case when we started because I don't have that baseline to build on.'
(Project team member)

What exactly is to be monitored will depend on a scheme's objectives and specific targets. Different indicators, measures and techniques will affect when data can be collected as well as the result. Good monitoring often requires expert input and professional skills.

'That's more of a collaborative input because a lot of the grazing areas were [...] very near to some areas that had previously been managed by Butterfly Conservation volunteers and are still managed by them; so they're quite key in advising in whether it's being under-grazed or over-grazed, from their specialist experience and they do monitoring for butterfly populations, so they're a key ally to that.' (Project team member)

'Butterflies are notoriously fickle; weather can make a huge difference in terms of whether a year is a good year or a bad year but we have had species recorded on the cleared areas that haven't been recorded there before. So all the indications are that the cattle are doing a good job and we are achieving the objectives that we set out to achieve.' (Project team member)

Within the NLPS M&E efforts were often under the control of specific project leaders which was usually fed back to the project office. In addition, the project manager kept a tab on progress by using a traffic light system for the 23 projects within the scheme.

'The monitoring of how things are going has been done much more broadly on a red, amber, green basis which, I don't blame [name of project manager], I think that's absolutely the way to go but the detail's been pretty much between staff.' (LPB member)

'Internal' and 'external' M&E

Evaluation can be done internally by the team and externally by a 'third party' or 'neutral observer'. Both approaches are valuable. 'Participatory' or 'internal' evaluation is useful in that one sees or hears the 'data' and being aware of it (ideally early on) it can enable the project team to take this information into account in consequent work. In the interviews, several of the project team reported situations indicating those skills and reflexive and adaptive working practices.

'Not formally but I suppose communication with local stakeholders and the community and that's an informal way of monitoring it from that perspective.' (Project team member)

'... we had a comments book and a sit-round-the-fire discussion at the end, so those comments are recorded. [...] It's just something we normally do [...].' (Project leader)

'... I'm the one on the ground out there doing it so I can see[...] when people are on quite a buzz or just need generally jolly along or just, sometimes they just want to be quiet and get on with it, or sometimes they just need that little bit of encouragement.' (Project leader)

However, it may be difficult to get the range of data and an overview of perspectives as part of one's ordinary work from on-the-job M&E.

'We publicise the fact that we are here, people can write to us and phone us. But it is more that sort of passively making yourself available rather than us going out and trying to gather that sort of feedback actively. And it's not something I've ever felt that I've had the resource really to do properly, though it is a constant frustration that you don't really know what the spread of opinion is, it only ever tends to be bits of information that you get back.' (Project team member)

An 'external' evaluation by someone not connected to the scheme can enhance feedback by taking a wider approach and looking at the situation from a fresh perspective. It can sometimes be easier for participants or beneficiaries to provide feedback to a third party (especially when there have been problems), or for that third party to be able to make connections and elicit overarching issues.

'I suppose actually that should have been probably more ongoing than it has been because it's a bit late at the end, it would have been good to evaluate as it went along by an objective outsider, there's no point in evaluating yourself, or there is, but in terms of evaluating how a project's run.' (LSG member)

Awareness and support for M&E

Most LPB and LSG members were aware of some or even the wider range of M&E that was carried out as part of the NLPS, either by project leaders, partner organisations, community volunteers or through contractors. One LSG member reported not being aware of any M&E taking place (he was unable to attend any of the LPB meetings as they were held during his working day and, due to personal and work commitments, recently resigned from the LSG). Those involved in putting the bid together and managing the scheme were keen to get some M&E into the programme of work, as the following quote illustrates.

'I felt it was important we did some. So we had a budget we went to SERC [Somerset Environmental Records Centre] because we felt one of the key things we wanted to monitor was the spread of species from the core areas into the new cleared areas. So we did some [...] work [...] looking at some key species and mapping the spread of those species. [Name of project manager] has now set up a volunteer surveying group who are continuing with that work, so he's trained some volunteers in plant identification and he's got a group of people that go round and regularly record on that. Butterfly Conservation have done annual butterfly recording and moths in the area pretty much since the project started and they've also got volunteers involved in that. I think they are the main elements and obviously we're now through this [evaluation study] we're looking at some of the social side of things and trying to capture some of those people who can be more involved in how that has changed their views and attitudes.' (Project team member)



Storytelling

Many LPB members answered the question about what M&E had taken place predominantly from their own area of expertise. The core project team (project bid developer, project manager, admin staff) and some members of the LSG and LPB showed an understanding of the range of data and information that was collected. Impressions of the amount of data collected varied significantly between different NLPS members. Comments included 'not on a large scale', 'collected the basics' and 'good'.

[Talking about the M&E done for two of the NLPS projects the interviewee was involved in] 'Not on a large scale, no, we've also run [name of activity] events and I've been involved in doing the evaluation at the end of those, but no. [...] so it's something we ought to address actually, doing some of that evaluation of the entire project rather than just the training bit. (Project leader)

[For a previous work assignment] 'I was being monitored and I had to write reports. Once it became part of the Neroche scheme, it didn't quite happen like that, although I did in fact keep very close tabs on what I was doing, [...] I was self-monitoring anyway and also all the projects, we'd have meetings just to see where we were with everything.' (Project leader)

'We've collected the basics but there's not really been any evaluation of how successful things have been or how things could be improved in the future... (LPB member)

'[Name of project manager] is always very thorough in what he does [...] to me there hasn't been "oh gosh they haven't monitored enough", you've got counters on the access, you've done the monitoring of the biodiversity and the monitoring of the butterflies in those areas, you've done forest schools, there's the number of children coming in, the people involved, so the monitoring has been good.' (LPB member)

One LPB member interpreted the question about M&E solely in terms of 'feedback' received, and reported that his own organisation had not gone out to seek any feedback on the project they were leading. Their approach was to organise meetings for the public to talk about their work and for attendees to ask questions and voice their opinions and concerns. Another form of feedback was letters received from the public (usually complaints) which also provided useful insights into the impacts and perceptions of work carried out (not just for the NLPS but any of his organisation's projects).

Overall, the approach by the NLPS to M&E was a pragmatic one and the amount and type of data gathered was 'fit for purpose' in terms of the HLF grant even though some improvements could be made (e.g. better baseline data and a more structured approach). From the project manager's perspective it was partly a matter of spending money to meet the scheme objectives, especially prioritising reaching out to (potential) visitors / landscape users as well as working with and empowering local people.

'We could choose to do a more concerted survey of opinion now, I suppose I'm not quite convinced how useful that would be, it would probably help to guide us in looking at where the difficulties are and where there are sort of people that we still need to convince, but it's a bit of a difficult balance to weigh up whether it's worth spending a lot of money on something like that or whether we should spend that money on just continuing to put our message across in the best way that we can. So yes, our data is patchy but it pretty much serves the purposes I need it for, but we could have done it in a more structured fashion.' (Project team member)

Use and impact of M&E

The working practices of Neroche staff have been influenced by managing NLPS projects on the ground, observing the projects' impacts on people and the environment, as well as receiving 'sought' (e.g. asking people how they found the event they attended) and 'ad hoc' feedback (e.g. enquiries and complaints). However, there is limited evidence of how much formal M&E activities have informed changes. From the interviews, the following reasons emerged. First, some of the routinely collected data (e.g. visitor/participant numbers) has primarily been used to report against targets to the funding body rather than being more widely shared and analysed amongst the project team and partners.

Interviewer: 'The numbers that you gathered about ... the number of people doing things, was that so that you could report to the Heritage Lottery Fund?'

Interviewee: 'Yes, all that was kept for that reason, so we could prove we'd been out there, what we've done and we've got signed sheets for everything we've done, so that has been quite useful, we've got some numerical data to look at.' (Project team member)

Second, some data gathering has taken time to set up and be ready for analysis and sharing. For example, gathering data on changes in species is weather-dependent and a long-term endeavour which requires repeated sampling through the seasons and over years; it also needs skilled staff (partners were limited to what they could routinely survey, sometimes contractors were hired) or trained volunteers which again takes time, because interested and suitable people from the community had to come forward and learn to reliably identify a set of flora/fauna. Furthermore, some evaluation relies on being able to compare data from Neroche with other national sites, which again creates dependency and possible delays. Some data sequences have only become ready for analysis towards the end of the scheme (e.g. report on trends in butterflies in the Neroche area).

'There are an awful lot of sites to monitor in the whole county [...] and with the poor summers we had [2008 and 2009] there were relatively few good monitoring days and so they [the volunteers and staff] are torn where to go [...] So having the capacity to deal with all the work presented to us... it is good to have such an open door and so many opportunities but to catch up and to play our part fully was quite a struggle. And of course the new volunteers are only now coming on stream; they don't appear from day one of the project.' (LPB member)

Third, some staff, especially those working part-time, offered popular services to the community¹⁹ and had so much work to organise that they had no time to develop more in-depth M&E beyond providing the basic data on attendance and activities.

'All we did was we'd have forms, people wrote down their names and contact details so we knew the numbers of people, [...] with talks and walks, people had to phone beforehand and book a place and give their contact details and with Play Street we just kept a day by day paper record where people signed in. So that's how obviously we got hold of the numbers of people that [...] have attended but all that data's just gone straight through to [name of colleague], I've never processed it in any way or examined it.' (Project leader)

Fourth, M&E can be perceived as, or become, a layer of time-consuming 'bureaucracy'²⁰, something the NLPS actually avoided.

'... we didn't get laden with bureaucracy, we were able to get on with the work - which particularly for artists, we hate all that stuff.' (Project leader)

Assessments of and monitoring data on changes in biodiversity and improvements in habitats (as part of species conservation work) directly influenced management decisions on grazing practices and other habitat management techniques; similarly feedback obtained at the end of family and other community events were taken on board to shape future activities.

¹⁹ For example, Forest School training for teachers and establishing sessions for school children; local history expertise and cultural activities; health walks for people with severe disabilities.

²⁰ Good M&E should never be a form-ticking exercise but always be designed and implemented to directly benefit the staff and their work by encouraging reflexive and adaptive management.



'As the foraging available in the wider grazing units has been different every year, it's not always possible to rely on what's worked the year before in the current year we are in. So this year [2010] we kept the butterfly glades closed to the cattle until later in June and we then wanted to have a short period of light grazing. Unfortunately, with the drought conditions the best grass was by then in the butterfly glades; whereas the cattle had been fairly nonchalant about having had access in previous years, they were wandering in and out in small numbers, it was the 'sweet shop syndrome' this year ...' (LPB member)

Interviewer: 'And what sort of changes did you decide, based on the comments?'

Interviewee: 'They were all fairly positive comments; we changed it so they got to work within their family groups, whereas before they were all, they could choose what they wanted to do and some of them split up as far as the family groups they arrived in; but after that we looked at giving them the opportunity to be able to work in their family groups, to build on their family relations as well.' (Project leader)

Several of the interviews with project leaders and core team staff showed that they 'naturally' reflected on performance and work practices and responded to feedback (see also sections 3.4 and 4.4).

'I think the lessons that I've learned, but I have had the opportunity to rectify that, I would probably front-end load the information provision in terms of on-site signage and provision of information through the parish councils or something like that. But I did that through the local stakeholders group and more latterly, providing information signs on site before a site went live.' (Project leader)

For most staff relatively few problems arose during the course of their work, and these were seen as challenges to be addressed and worked through, rather than problems. One part-time project leader took a less reflexive and highly pragmatic view in terms of accepting that she would not get it right for everyone.

'... the terrain and public perception were probably the most challenging and are things that have provided me with the most, I don't like to say difficult, I like to say challenge because it implies that you can work through it rather than it being a problem that's immovable, you know.' (Project leader)

Interviewer: '... people are sometimes awkward or difficult or give you hassle ...'

Interviewee: 'That happens [...] You just have to get on with it and if people don't like it, they don't like it ... c'est la vie really [...] I work part-time you see so I haven't got time to dwell on things too much, there's too much to be doing anyway.' (Project leader)

7.2 Learning and transformation

Shaping and being part of a large, varied and ambitious scheme provided many of the actors and beneficiaries with opportunities for learning, as indicated in sections 5 and 6. In this section we focus on the learning experiences that improve partnership working, aid capacity building and (potentially) lead to more pronounced changes or transformations.

Learning from partners and participating

Having a strong vision and taking the lead in translating ideas and insights into practice was considered important (see also section 3.1). An LPB member concluded from his experience of the NLPS that *'if the basics of an idea is right, a successful programme can emerge'* and that the NLPS showed that *'when people with a vision come together what can be done'*. NLPS core staff also learnt to appreciate their own organisational potential and commitment which in turn improved what they could contribute and achieve.

'I think the great thing about FC [Forestry Commission] in my experience, having come from the outside, is that it is an organisation that does get on and do what it talks about and the scale of change that we've carried out within the forest as part of the Neroche scheme, I don't think there's many public bodies that would have just got on with it as readily and practically as FC was prepared to. [...] I have a lot of dealings with other conservation organisations and I see a lot of organisations that talk the talk, but don't necessarily put it into practice quite as much.' (Project team member)

Participating in a scheme that took a more holistic and community-oriented approach required working outside the usual comfort zone; this was seen to be inspirational and the way forward for some project partner organisations, as illustrated in the following two quotations from an interview with one of the LPB members.

'I think also that we should have built into the project a lot more community involvement, particularly with people from Wellington. That's an area that we now have to work hard on.'

'Next time round, if it happened again or a learning point for another project, we would want to commit more time into it, be more actively involved outside of our own property. [...] it's about us being more proactively involved in these issues, and that's a change of culture for us as an organisation, working outside our boundaries.'

Several project partners drew from the scheme that good partnership working and landscape-level projects need time - in terms of scheme duration; input from core staff, partners and volunteers; and engaging the public (see also section 6.4). Another important ingredient for a partnership of this kind was the commitment of senior staff who are able to take a strategic view and have the mandate and confidence to make decisions (see also section 6.6). Bearing in mind different organisational structures and objectives, several LPB members observed that it was important to get involved early on, at a level the organisation was capable of and which overlapped with their official remit and existing priorities (see also sections 6.5 and 6.6).

'If you want a project to last, you actually have to work with the grain of the community. And it takes a long time. And it probably takes quite a bit of money as well. So if you want to make a lasting impression, you've actually got to do it in quite a holistic way; and it is probably quite an expensive process to actually do that. The thing I've seen from it, if you want to do something significant, there is no point to kind of rushing into it, you've got to build it up slowly and make sure that the local community are happy with it and then kind of move it forward and take the community with you.' (LPB member)

'I probably would have liked the [reference to partner organisation] be more integrated into the scheme, rather than just be perceived as a project deliverer, to try and integrate the organisation in terms of what they're doing.' (LPB member)

'I think that we should have been more involved, that we weren't very good in working in a partnership, I think, at the beginning. I would have liked to have been more closely involved as a stronger partner ...' (LPB member)

One project partner observed how the NLPS was a huge beneficial learning experience for their organisation, but that their role felt more like a client rather than a partner. Similarly, in terms of learning and changes for the future another LPB member commented:

'Perhaps work more in partnership at the decision-making level.' (LPB member)

The NLPS benefited from drawing on the expertise of partners - partly in order not to upset those already active and leading in the field. However, for three projects sharing out the work and responsibilities meant also that the working relationships and communication were not as close as if the posts had been placed or managed in-house. All three partners involved in these arrangements learnt lessons for future projects, as the following quotes illustrate.

'...we did what we thought was the right thing to do, working with the existing structures and neither [name of colleague] or I had ever done any work with [professional / type of project] so we sort of thought it would be useful to have people that understood the way it worked. Having now had the experience of it I think I know roughly what sort of things you would put in a contract, in a tender for [that post / project] and really the creative side you leave to the [that post], you know; you give them some direction of the sorts of things you would like them to do and overall aims but you don't tell them how to do it, that's what they are specialist in as it were. So I think yes if we were taking on [type of professional] for the next phase then we wouldn't do it through a middleman we would just take on a resident [type of professional] ourselves.' (Project team member)

'We would now run the project from within the core of the organisation rather than outsourcing a coordinator at local level. We have been putting that into action over the past couple of years and find this a much more effective way of working. [...] I think the communication is key and we just found that it works better if it is more embedded within the organisation.' (LPB member)

'the [name of project] was grossly underestimated in terms of the amount of capacity that we bid for, so we ended up with two days a week equivalent of [organisation's name] advice time [...] it's just too bitty, it's very difficult to manage that within a broader work plan of any organisation. [...] I don't feel that work had the strategic direction it needed at the beginning within the partnership [...] in being ill defined and not getting that strategic leadership it needed, hasn't done as well as it could have done, I think we've missed a trick there.' (LPB member)

Drawing lessons from managing such a partnership and its associated projects, highlighted the importance of clear communication and being open about and discussing expectations, agreeing appropriate objectives and targets and, as one LPB member put it, *'pinning that down to outputs and outcomes'*.

'In terms of the governance issues, in terms of project working with partner organisations, yes we would do things differently. I think I would want to make sure that expectations of working with partner organisations were much more clearly set out, in terms of how much time you expect from the member of staff, what the outputs are, what qualities are you're expecting, so again about communication and clarity at the beginning.' (Project team member)

Capacity building

Capacity building took place in terms of gaining new skills and building confidence within the project team, the LPB, the LSG and project beneficiaries (e.g. volunteers and apprentices). The often mutually supportive and complimentary working within the NLPS and the range of situations the NLPS encountered sustained participants' interests and support. It also helped some partners to develop new interests and skills as well as build their confidence.

'I think that if you get locals who are committed to a project, how long they sustain their support, i.e. those of us who were in from 2004 onwards and we're still here and a group of them are still going forward, I think that's a very positive thing.' (LSG member)

'It does feel that it [the Neroche LPS] has changed it[area] for the good, but also for the longer term as well. It hasn't just been 'we're going to do something around Castle Neroche itself and once that's done everyone moves away like a circus tent. But it did feel that the project made an attempt to get into the community and build up some capacity within the community, which obviously is a difficult thing to do. But I do feel that this has happened.' (LPB member)

'I've just found out more about where I live and seeing as I was a fairly new resident, I feel very much part of it now and by working in the landscape, you discover so much, different people who are maybe just down the road and you didn't know about, different communities that are just there and I can work with people much better than perhaps I thought I could.' (Project team member)

'I've learnt that working with a community can be hard work but that it can be really rewarding. I would never have imagined ... the people who have been involved in the project from the community have been fantastic and they're commitment has been amazing really. [...] when you look at the people who are and who have been positively involved in the project, they've given a huge amount for free, for nothing, and embraced it.' (Project team member)

A couple of LPB members identified an important learning outcome for themselves which was the valuable experience and insights into how to put together a bid for future funding. Many partners also mentioned that they appreciated and learnt from the project manager's efficient and effective project management style.



'... if we ever did something like that in the future, I would hope I could call on [name of FC staff / project team member] and get advice from him so it was good from that point of view. [...] I've just learned from the whole partnership bid, some of the things you should do when putting a bid together, the do's and don'ts and also how to monitor things and perhaps also look at the wider aspects rather than just be specific on an access thing, I think it's important if you can deliver joint benefits, more benefits than just a specific scheme like access.' (LPB member)

'[Neroche LPS] provides a good realistic model for schemes in other areas.' (LPB member)

The NLPS provided opportunities for engagement and facilitation to help members of the public to take on more prominent roles as community representatives. Even though LSG members generally had some experience in engaging in and representing community voices, the NLPS added a new level of 'power', engagement and responsibility to their previous experiences. It thus created the opportunity for direct and 'representative' community involvement, facilitated the processes and supported the outcomes; this in turn built trust between the LSG and partnership. The visionary ability, professional experience and skills of the bid developer, and later the project manager, were instrumental in this.

'... there were no staff directly employed apart from [name of FC employee] who seemed to be steering it [the LSG] through and presumably he went off back to the Forestry [Commission] and to the other groups that were going to be partners, took it forward there but we were quite influential in those early days in giving our opinions as to which projects we supported and which ones we didn't.' (LSG member)

Beneficiaries involved in vegetation, butterfly monitoring and other volunteering have learnt about species identification, surveying and sampling methods, while those participating in coppicing and greenwood working courses have learnt traditional skills that have become rare in the area. Children involved in Forest School and the teachers who have been trained as leaders acquired new skills; similarly apprentices acquired a wide range of forestry and conservation management skills and experience. Both Forest School teachers and apprentices gained nationally recognised qualifications that are not only beneficial for their careers but in terms of (actually or potentially) providing valuable 'services' to the community in their (future) employment.

'The children really enjoyed making the lanterns and we appreciated the fact that they were made with withies which, of course, are a local product and the children found out about that. So it really was drawing the local industry, community, into the school and making the children aware of it.' (Primary School Head Teacher)

'I did everything took photos, filled in the forms, plotted the maps, fell about 2 or 3 times, some parts of the forest are difficult to penetrate, and spoke to the landowners.' (Volunteer involved in Ancient Tree survey)

With regard to capacity building within local communities and community empowerment

- what might be feasible and realistic in terms of taking a greater 'Big Society' approach
- the NLPS highlighted vital ingredients as well as limitations.

Interviewee: 'It's very easy to kill people's enthusiasm by pushing things onto them too quickly. [...] a lot of community activity is driven by a few impassioned and energetic people and it's a huge trick for one person or a small group of people to spread that enthusiasm into a wider group for them to be able to operate without those individuals being present.'

Interviewer: 'But I guess that's what you're still trying to work on and continuously try and encourage?'

Interviewee: 'Yes, I think we've at least realised that's what we should be trying to achieve and for example with the local stakeholders group and the Trust, you're still talking about investing in a small number of people who in turn would pass that onto others, but I think that's probably the only way you can do it, you have to find a way of identifying who the real movers and shakers may be within a community, invest in them, rather than just spreading it across everyone and hoping that everyone, in some sort of idealistic way, suddenly mucks in because it tends not to work like that.' (Project team member)

Transformations

Some learning and changes are more powerful than others in that they last and affect the future, and the way an experience (such as participating in the NLPS) influences one's thinking and behaviour. Those changes can transform landscapes, working practices, individuals or families, and communities. The evaluation of the NLPS elicited evidence that some fundamental changes did occur and this section focuses briefly on four key areas.

Landscape transformation

The opening up of part of the Neroche landscape and restoration of a mosaic of more open habitats transformed it visually as well as allowing a much richer variety of flora and fauna to re-colonise and flourish. Thus the ecological conditions and biodiversity are set to improve significantly.

'work has been more focused on actually achieving ... or getting SSSIs into improving conditions and get appropriate management on them. [...] It takes time to get the species back but it's a great achievement what has been done. You don't get instantaneous results but things are progressing in the right direction.' (LPB member)

'It's done some wonderful, very major clearance work which has changed the landscape and any change is difficult for a community and I suspect particularly for the community of the Blackdowns, but I think that was done very, very well, I think it's very inspiring. Another aspect of the landscape scale project which for me has been brilliant, particularly from a [name of partner organisation] perspective because our comfort zone is wildlife work, it has cut right the way across a number of different types of landscapes and aspects of the landscape, which go way beyond the biodiversity aspect.' (LPB member)

Introducing woodland pasture was regarded as a unique feature and achievement and contributed to restoring this area to a 'working landscape' with seasonal management activities and becoming 'more alive' as described by one actor in terms of cattle being introduced, more wildlife returning and flora coming out of dormancy. The environmental and ecological changes thus also impacted on landscape meaning, land use and recreational benefits.

Being transformed by partnership working in a holistic scheme

The NLPS acted as an interface for people with different backgrounds and interests. The project team and LPB included a wide range of professional disciplines. Several actors commented that the mix of people and projects encouraged them to engage in a new way, such as gaining inspiration, looking at the wider picture, taking on board new knowledge and different perspectives. Thus being part of the NLPS significantly influenced some actors' work practices and boosted their visionary capacity and confidence as the following quotes and several in the above sections of this chapter illustrate.

'A broader outlook and I think a braver outlook, definitely. [...] inspiration, the kind of wider, the broader approach, I think that's a very good benefit.' (LPB member)

'... other partnership things I'm involved in, I will often quote the Neroche, how that's a good example of a good project to get involved in and actually delivered' (LPB member)

Transformations in individual and family lives

Several of the NLPS projects which were targeted at the public introduced new dimensions and a sense of discovery of what families and individuals can do in the Neroche area, and in the natural environment more generally. Participating in bushcraft activities, health walks or family events (e.g. nature detective games drawing on arts and using trust- and team-building exercises) for some was transformative in that they found a new sense of enjoyment, spending quality time with family members and/or developing a deeper sense of confidence and enjoyment and improving their wellbeing. Even though this snapshot evaluation has little recorded evidence of this, experiences of project leaders seem to confirm the potential of more fundamental and lasting benefits that beneficiaries have gained from participating in the NLPS (e.g. training and becoming a regular volunteer; child's interest in mushrooms as a new hobby after attending an event).

'I go into their school and they're an observer whilst I run six sessions normally, if there was more time it would have been more sessions, with a group with them but them as an observer, not as a leader. So they get to shadow me doing it first and during that process, we work out how far away, can we walk to the nearest woodlands or is it more appropriate to set it up, be planting trees and set up somewhere in their school grounds and so by the time I've finished doing those sessions, it's a fairly easy transition, it's all set up for them to take over and start running it themselves – and it gives them the confidence as well to be able to do it.' (Project leader)



Punkie Night

'... the Punkie Night got a lot of people into the woods; a lot of people I know now who don't walk, who do walk now' (LSG member)

'I'm the sort of person that likes to push the boundaries a little bit for these people, I think they're cocooned sometimes and because they have these problems [people with severe physical and/or mental health issues or behavioural problems], they're kept to the ... "oh no, couldn't possibly walk over a muddy field", "well have you ever tried?"[...] I open those doors and allow them to experience it. Sometimes they find it difficult, other times they hop, skip and jump through it. I think they should be given the opportunity to experience it.[...] it's a challenge to them and then when they have succeeded in something, they feel their own sense of achievement. Bearing in mind the people that I work with, just to be able to get over a stile was a huge, huge thing to overcome initially. Now they get over the stiles without any problems at all.' (Project leader)

One member of the public summed it up as *'giving people opportunities that they otherwise wouldn't have'*.

Small communities - 'Big Society'

The current coalition government's 'Big Society' concept²¹ is about more effective participation of citizens in the decision-making, design and delivery of services and activities that matter to communities. The NLPS was conceived and developed several years before this term was coined, but actually built a similar line of thinking into the fundamental core of the scheme, and in the way its legacy has been discussed and developed over the past two years.

'... half the stuff Mr. Cameron actually wants to see delivered some of the things he talks about, what we've been working on and we're currently working on as we go forward is very much about reducing the size of the public sector involvement at Neroche and maximizing the role of the community and voluntary third sector, and giving them a stake in the forest basically.' (Project team member)

Several outcomes and the governance structure of the NLPS fit well with key aspirations of 'Big Society' thinking. For example, the governance structure of the NLPS required collaboration between different sectors (public, private and third sector) and the community. The LSG had more actual decision-making power and influence over the remit and delivery of the NLPS than is usually common for such schemes. Also, the LSG were able to act as key or initial contacts for the two-way communication between project team and the communities of the Neroche area. LSG members took ordinary FC forest planning consultation to a new level of engaged discussion and input and thus, unusually, effected several substantial changes. The biggest achievement, however, is that towards the end of the NLPS five LSG members set up a Trust - a limited company with charitable status - to be able to continue some of the work and act as a conduit for attracting funding and new projects once the NLPS comes to a formal end.

'... possibly the first thing that we are going to be looking at with the company is how they get involved in not only receiving funds but distributing funds for community activities and possibly using grazing in the forest as well' (Project team member)

In addition to this newly formed Trust, there are also now larger numbers of volunteers supporting the monitoring and delivery of conservation and biodiversity benefits.

²¹ Cabinet Office (2010) 'Building the Big Society',
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/building-big-society_0.pdf

8 Insights and Lessons Learnt

The aim of this evaluation was to identify the impacts of the NLPS on actors and beneficiaries and draw lessons in terms of the governance structures and processes that facilitated the scheme's largely positive outcomes. As stated in the introduction, the Forestry Commission was keen to maximise learning from the evaluation to help underpin the scheme's legacy and provide useful data and insights for future schemes. In this chapter we summarise the ingredients or factors of success for the NLPS which have emerged from our research, and which we believe offer useful examples of good practice that can inform the design and management of similar (landscape) partnership schemes.

8.1 A strong partnership

A strong partnership lies at the heart of the NLPS's success. The FC played a significant role in leading this partnership and was largely responsible for facilitating and maintaining effective working relationships to deliver the various projects within the scheme. However, undoubtedly such a wide and diverse range of positive outcomes could not have been achieved without the high levels of buy-in, support and commitment exhibited by the partners.

There are two key factors of success in terms of effective partnership working that emerge from our evaluation:

- Considerable effort was made during the early stages of the scheme to identify synergies between the proposed projects within the scheme and the current work streams of individual or groups of partners. This meant that most partners found it easy to justify the allocation of staff time and other forms of support to the scheme. It also enhanced the motivation to achieve positive outcomes because they saw the work they did within the scheme as complementary to the current objectives and delivery goals of their organisation(s). Our research suggests that care taken to **identify such synergies early on in the process will pay dividends later on**.
- The working relations within the partnership were characterised by a **high level of mutual respect** for one another's experience, knowledge and contributions. This and a degree of flexibility in the budget and management of the NLPS helped significantly to maintain good working relationships between partners and proved to be a key factor in sustaining individual's input and commitment to the NLPS.

Overall, there were few challenges or weaknesses within the partnership, but where they occurred, participants usually had a clear idea of how this could be improved next time.

- Regarding some externally placed, particularly part-time staff, insufficient discussion of different expectations and capacity, combined with a **lack of clarity** of priorities or work programme strategy led to some projects delivering less than expected or delivering outcomes late.
- People who joined the landscape partnership board half-way through the scheme seemed unclear about the **division of powers and responsibilities** between the board and the local stakeholders group. They were thus more critical of the arrangements and would have liked the partnership to:
 - work more closely and have more face-to-face meetings
 - have more discussion and decision-making opportunities at board meetings
 - share out tasks more throughout the scheme duration (rather than the project team trying to deliver too much).
- The focus of the NLPS was perceived by some as focusing on too small an area (Neroche rather than Blackdowns) and too much on Somerset (smaller area and few projects/activities in Devon). Some partners had a relatively small role and input and while this was not criticised as such it was expressed as a **'missed opportunity'** to involve those areas and people.

8.2 Legitimacy and accountability

A key strength of the NLPS was the increased legitimacy and accountability borne out of the early decision to grant significant levels of influence and power over design and decision-making to the local stakeholders group. Accepting that the local stakeholders group was an imperfect representation of the local community (see section 3.3), making project selection their responsibility effectively transformed the NLPS into a scheme that was chosen by, and delivered for the community. Furthermore, the local stakeholders group's influence over and scrutiny of decision-making effectively set the tone for the lifespan of the scheme and ensured that the careful consideration of community needs and aspirations exerted a disciplining influence over many aspects of the scheme. However, the legitimising function of the local stakeholders group was more than just an ideological achievement of the NLPS; it also had some important practical consequences that affected delivery:

- The influence of the LSG was instrumental in achieving the **sensitivity to local context** exhibited by many of the projects within the scheme, and which was identified by many interviewees as a key indicator of its success.
- Because decisions made or approved by the LSG were interpreted as having a strong community mandate, and because of the positive and supportive relationship between the LSG and the project team, project management was effectively reinforced by a strong sense of **acting 'in the community interest'**. This contributed significantly to

the confidence and conviction of management decision-making and helped considerably with the management of problems and contentious issues.

8.3 Holding on and letting go

The success of the NLPS can be attributed in no small measure to the careful management of the scheme. Considerable sensitivity was shown in striking a balance between strong and decisive management informed by a clear vision, and allowing partners and project team members the freedom to innovate and to design and deliver projects and activities in a way that their experience and knowledge of local context dictated. Our research shows that this balance was achieved through a responsive, reflective, open, frank, facilitating, and enabling management style that was well suited to such a diverse and complex scheme.

Some key examples where the careful judgement of when to 'hold on' and when to 'let go' produced an effective management style:

- Working through a partnership at the landscape scale requires a means of being able to embrace complexity and deliver a multi-faceted scheme. As many respondents pointed out, there was an over-arching **master plan** that put each project and associated activities into the overall structure, borne out of a clear vision of what outcomes and outputs were expected. The project manager and his team successfully nurtured and sustained this vision and were able to **support partners and project leaders to translate it into practice**.
- Some of the actions under the scheme proved contentious and led to some local opposition (e.g. tree felling and over-wintering of cattle). **Opposition and controversial issues required a sensitive but swift and united response from the management team** backed up by the FC and the wider partnership. These difficult encounters also led to **learning in terms of 'letting go sooner'** (if a single vociferous complainant keeps demanding attention) **and 'holding on for longer'** in terms of supporting some partners who have misjudged the need for resources and their own capacity.
- Senior management within the FC **devolved control** over the design of projects and actions to partners and the project team, thereby communicating a sense of trust in people's ability to carry out their job, and encouraging the translation of innovative ideas into practice. This was a significant factor in ending up with the right choice of projects and activities and the successful tailoring of project design and delivery to meet local needs and aspirations because it gave project staff the confidence and independence needed to work creatively. Ultimately though, the responsibility for successful management and delivery lay with the project manager (and team and

organisation) - a challenge that was successfully handled based on his previous experience, excellent communication skills and open and reflexive management style.

8.4 More than the sum of its parts

It is clear from our research that the NLPS is much more than just a collection of disparate and unconnected projects and activities – the sum total of the scheme's achievements should take into account the numerous connections that have been created or strengthened between organisations, groups and individuals, and between people and the changing landscape. There is a very real sense in which the NLPS has contributed to the growth of professional networks (e.g. landscape planning and service delivery; environmental conservation; Forest School), community and place in the Blackdown Hills AONB.

Our research highlights that levels of 'connectivity' varied across different dimensions of the scheme. Perhaps this is more a reflection, however, not of poor performance or management, but of the fact that connections sometimes take some time to develop and blossom – the full extent of connections within the community and between community and place fostered by the NLPS can only be fully appreciated in years to come.

There are a number of key examples of the connections created by the NLPS:

- Many projects and activities have helped people to **(re-)discover places** in the Blackdown Hills landscape. Furthermore, it is clear that these connections are likely to spread into the wider community, with many respondents highlighting how the scheme has given them the confidence to seek out and replicate similar experiences with family and friends.
- For many, **connections with place and with other people** happened simultaneously. Bushcraft days were as much about a new experience shared with family members as they were about discovering new places in the landscape and learning a new way of interacting with the natural environment.
- The scheme forged **new linkages between professionals** working with and interested by different aspects and potential uses of the landscape. Working within a scheme with a strong holistic vision for the Blackdown Hills landscape, partners and project team members gained a heightened awareness of the linkages between its artistic, cultural, historical, economic, access, recreation and human wellbeing potential.
- Allowing project team members the **freedom and flexibility** to be creative in project design and delivery engendered a high level of mutual trust and respect – a key component of social capital that connects organisations, groups and individuals.



- Working together, sharing experience, insights and knowledge has created a **learning environment** that respondents find enriching and exciting. Many actors said they had learnt practical skills and gained the confidence necessary to explore new project and funding opportunities. The decision taken by the LSG to form a Trust to continue the work initiated by the scheme is perhaps the most powerful example. It is clear that the NLPS has changed practices and built the capacity to extend the work of the scheme well beyond its original remit. In this sense, the NLPS has been transformative of groups and individuals and has created new social capital that can be applied to the next phase of the area's development.



9 Acronyms and Abbreviations

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
e.g.	for example
FC	Forestry Commission
ha	hectare(s)
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
km	kilometre(s)
LP	Landscape Partnership
LPP	Landscape Partnership Programme
LPB	Landscape partnership board
LPS	Landscape Partnership Scheme
LSG	Local stakeholders group
m	metre(s)
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
N	Number
NLPS	Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme
NLPHG	Neroche Parish Local History Group
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

The quotes in this report use the following notations:

[...]	means some text is missed out (to focus on key point)
...	(at the beginning of a quote) indicates quote starts mid-sentence or has preceding text in the interview script
...	(in mid text) indicates a pause or change of thought

10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Scheme Overview

Summary

The Neroche Landscape Partnership covers 35 square miles of the Blackdown Hills, and takes its name from the old medieval hunting forest which once covered part of the area. This landscape has retained its character and richness better than many, but its distinctiveness has suffered and it remains under threat. The special wildlife habitats of the area are fragmented and ill-served by modern economic policies. The access available to people is disjointed and seldom welcoming and knowledge of traditional land husbandry stands to be largely lost within a decade.

The Neroche Scheme is a partnership between the community of the Blackdown Hills and 17 agencies, authorities, local organisations and companies, led by the Forestry Commission (FC). It is centred on 1,000 hectares of public forest estate managed by the FC. The scheme offers the chance to do more than simply address each of the landscape's issues in isolation; it has been constructed to weave together the delivery of overlapping solutions and innovations which require different groups to work closely together.

This collection of organisations and individuals has worked together for over three years to produce a package of 23 projects to secure the landscape heritage of the area (see Appendix 2). The scheme addresses all aspects of landscape heritage – investing in the fabric of the heritage, making it accessible to all, and improving people's ability to manage the heritage into the future.

The scheme is governed by a Partnership Board comprising the funding partners and members of a Local Stakeholders Group (LSG). The LSG comprises eleven members of the local community who were closely involved in the design of the original bid, and now act as ambassadors for the scheme amongst their communities.

Delivery of the scheme is led by a core team, employed by the Forestry Commission and based with the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership in Hemyock, within the LPS area. The team comprises a Project Manager, Access & Interpretation Officer, Community History Officer, Forest Works Supervisor, Forest Schools Officer and Administrator. Some of these staff are based for part of their time with project partners, to support partnership working and provide for the possibility of staff being retained by partners beyond the life of the LPS.

The aims of the scheme

The aims of the scheme are:

- To invest in the natural, built and cultural heritage of the area
- To make the landscape more accessible to everyone
- To improve people's ability to sustain the qualities of the landscape

Heritage conserved

Landscape scale habitat restoration

The Neroche Scheme is restoring 250 hectares of former plantation forestry into a diverse network of wood pasture and open space, based on the historical landscape pattern which preceded the plantations. This new landscape will incorporate pockets of flower-rich meadows and glades which support remnant populations of rare butterflies, including Marsh Fritillary, Duke of Burgundy and Wood White. It is hoped that these populations will be strengthened by the new landscape and enabled to respond to future shifting climatic conditions. The new open forest landscape is being grazed by a newly established herd of English longhorn cattle established through the project.

Built heritage conservation

The scheme is conserving the important Iron Age and Norman fortress at Castle Neroche, and supporting the National Trust in work to conserve the Wellington Monument, a 19th-century obelisk built to commemorate the Duke of Wellington's military successes.

Community history

The scheme is running a popular Community History Project, helping establish new local history groups, and building capacity in groups and individuals to research, explore, document and express their local heritage.

People involved

The Neroche scheme has built a strong community base through its Local Stakeholders Group, which helped plan the bid and monitors its delivery, providing a conduit for communication with the wider community.

The scheme has brought together a wide partnership of interests from all areas of the heritage sector, and has included educationalists, foresters, trainers, nature conservationists, naturalists, archaeologists, access specialists, engineers, farmers, smallholders, artists and musicians.

The Scheme has an active volunteering programme, providing opportunities for volunteers to take part in practical site conservation, wildlife recording, local history research, oral history recording and other activities.

Neroche runs a popular public events programme, offering family bushcraft days, dawn chorus walks, public arts events and tours of historic sites.

Access and learning

Access to the heritage landscape

The scheme is developing a series of long-distance circular walking and horse riding trails to enhance the public's experience of the Blackdown Hills landscape. These Herepath Trails, named after the Saxon word for 'People's Paths' have been much welcomed by residents and visitors alike.

Telling the story of the landscape through the arts

The scheme is working with the local arts community to use visual arts, natural sculpture, storytelling and music to convey the qualities of the heritage in new, arresting ways. The approach is to create art works which are ephemeral, and add to people's enjoyment of the landscape without marking the landscape permanently. The interpretation programme for the scheme also includes an innovative project to use hand-held digital technology to enable people to carry words, pictures and sounds describing the landscape with them on their explorations.

Learning in the landscape

The scheme is using the Forest School approach to outdoor environmental education to enable children from all primary schools in and around the area to experience the forest landscape as a normal, regular part of their learning. The scheme is doing this by investing in training local school teachers to become Forest School Practitioners, so that the approach can become embedded in mainstream teaching. The scheme includes a Health Walks project which is bringing hard-to-reach audiences from nearby urban areas into the forest for guided walks and other activities.

Skills and training

Skills for the future

The Scheme has run a successful apprenticeships project, training a team of three local young people to NVQ Level 2 and 3, to enable them to develop careers in heritage conservation in the locality. The scheme is also offering advice to local landowners outside the forest, to extend the landscape-scale approach to conservation being pursued inside the forest.

Lessons learnt

Neroche has provided a lesson for those involved in the value of a collective approach to heritage conservation, which seeks to transcend barriers between professions and approaches to the management of land and buildings. The most exciting moments of the scheme have come where very different practitioners interact, and previously distinct perspectives coincide.

The scheme has learned much about the practicalities and ultimate value of community involvement, and the investment of time needed to keep people on board effectively.

Through the support of HLF, the Forestry Commission has been able to put its principles about multi-purpose forestry into practice, and reinforce its commitment to maximising the value of the heritage it manages and influences.

Long term benefits

The Neroche scheme set out to 'liberate the landscape' by:

- Creating a more sustainable structure of open space and broadleaved woodland, better prepared for adapting to the pressures of climate change.
- Enabling people to be free to explore and understand the landscape more fully.
- Building the use of the landscape into local education, as a mainstream part of every local child's education.

We believe these ambitions, once fulfilled, will have a lasting benefit for the area.

The budget

Main scheme costs	£
<i>Costs per programme</i>	
Natural heritage	£722,000
Built heritage	£258,000
Cultural heritage	£109,000
Physical access to the heritage	£713,000
Collective knowledge	£204,000
Opportunity to learn	£172,000
Opportunity to be involved	£400,000
Perpetuation of skills	£196,000
Total scheme costs	£2,945,000
Partnership funding	£945,000
Total Grant awarded	£2,000,000

10.2 Appendix 2: Summary of the 23 NLPS Projects

PROGRAMME 1: NATURAL HERITAGE

1. **Landscape regeneration in the forest**
2. **Restoration of coppicing**
3. **Grazing units** (pasture, heath woodland)
4. **Forest grazing** (innovative large scale forest grazing programme to generate favourable conditions for wildlife)
5. **Nature reserves and key wildlife sites**
6. **Ecological monitoring**

PROGRAMME 2: BUILT & ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

7. **Castle Neroche** (invest in the structure, protect it from erosion, improve accessibility)
8. **Wellington Monument** (invest in the structure, initiate its restoration, improve access)
9. **Ringdown Barn** (invest in this typical vernacular building, protect it for the future)
10. **Wychwood Lake** (restore its historical, wildlife and recreational value)

PROGRAMME 3: CULTURAL HERITAGE

11. **Community history** (enable local community to pursue local history projects; story-telling and theatre; Book of Neroche)

PROGRAMME 4: PHYSICAL ACCESS

12. **Neroche Herepaths** (Staple Fitzpaine Herepath; all-ability loop trail at Staple Hill; Culm Davy Herepath; Valley Heads Herepath)
13. **Timber and recreational tracks**
14. **Car parking for the Herepaths**

PROGRAMME 5: COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE - ARTS PROJECTS

15. **Creative interpretation** (use the arts to provide inspiring interpretations of the heritage landscape; e.g. Digital Trail Guides; Touching the Seasons events; fixed interpretation boards)
16. **Heritage awareness** (provide opportunities for the public to learn about heritage features face to face from local experts; e.g. public walks, public training events)

PROGRAMME 6: OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN & ENJOY

17. **Neroche Forest Schools** (provide outdoor learning environments; train local school teachers)
18. **Health walks** (for people who rarely visit the countryside)

PROGRAMME 7: OPPORTUNITY TO BE INVOLVED

19. **Partnership and communication** (maintain connected and communicative partnership; maximise community ownership)
20. **Volunteering** (opportunities for unskilled and skilled volunteer activity opportunities)
21. **Perpetuating the Neroche legacy** (put in place the capacity for the landscape partnership to take forward the work of the LPS after the HLF support concludes)

PROGRAMME 8: PERPETUATION OF SKILLS

22. **Neroche Apprenticeships** (forestry and countryside management)
23. **Land management advice** (equip land owners and managers with the knowledge, skills and support to manage their parts of the heritage landscape into the future)



10.3 Appendix 3: Beneficiaries Survey

This short survey by the Forestry Commission (FC) forms part of the evaluation of the Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) and its associated projects and range of activities. The LPS started in October 2006, and is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and a range of local partner organisations. It covers 35 square miles of the northern part of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, close to Taunton.

We would like to find out more about the people who use this part of the Blackdown Hills, your visit and/or your participation in specific activities. The information gathered in this survey will be used for research purposes, to help us design and provide more activities and facilities in this area in the future. None of the questions are compulsory, and your responses will remain anonymous.

Please reply to each question and add comments as you feel necessary.

Why have you visited here today? (e.g. to take part in an organised activity or to visit alone or with friends/family)

.....

Have you visited this area before? (Tick as appropriate) No Yes

We are interested to know how far people have come to visit here in relation to your home. Would you provide the postcode for where you live?

Your post code:

Are you aware of the projects, facilities and activities organised by the Neroche Scheme in this area?

- No
- Yes, I know about the following (Tick as appropriate):
 - The Herepath Trail and the Staple Hill All Ability Trail
 - Longhorn cattle grazing in the forest for wildlife conservation
 - Information boards and new car parking at Castle Neroche and Staple Hill
 - The Community History Project (e.g. the Playstreet medieval village excavation)
 - The Neroche Conservation Volunteers group
 - Health walks for disadvantaged groups
 - Forest School training for teachers in local schools
 - Events programme (e.g. family bushcraft days and local history talks)
 - Forestry apprenticeships for local young people
 - Local Stakeholder involvement in decision-making about the Neroche Scheme
 - Other (please specify)

What have you enjoyed about coming here today?

.....



Is there anything that could have been improved or done better?

.....

What is your involvement?

- This is the first time I've been involved in this type of activity / visited this area
- I regularly get involved in this type of activity in this area / visit this area

How often would you say that you visit this area?

- Everyday
- 1 to 3 times per week
- 4 to 6 times per week
- 1 to 3 times per month
- 4 to 6 times a year
- 1 to 3 times a year
- Less often

Have you come here today to:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / not relevant
Meet other people and socialise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend time with family and friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have fun and enjoy myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learn about the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be more active and keep fit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce stress and relax	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get involved in local community activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improve the local area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get to know the local area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
See wildlife, which I enjoy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reason (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thinking about this area/landscape (the Blackdown Hills / Neroche area) – is it:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / not relevant
A place where I can relax and de-stress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A place where I can exercise and keep fit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A place where I can have fun and enjoy myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A good place to socialise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A place where I can learn about the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
An important place for wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A place that brings the community together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A place that provides a sense of identity to this area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A place where I feel at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Something else (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



What comes to mind when you think about this landscape/area?
(For example, what do you particularly like or dislike about the area?)

.....
.....

Have you noticed any changes in this landscape/area over the past three years, and if so how do you feel about them?

.....
.....

Do you have any other general comments about the Neroche Scheme?

.....
.....

Thank you for answering these questions. It would help our analysis if you were prepared to answer the following additional questions about yourself, but you are of course not obliged to do so.

Sex: Male Female

Age: 16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65-74 75+

Are you (tick main occupation):

- Working as an employee On a government sponsored training scheme
- Self-employed or freelance Working paid or unpaid for your own or your family's business
- Retired Doing any other kind of paid work
- A student Looking after home or family
- Long-term sick or disabled? Other (*please specify*):

What is the occupation of the chief income earner in your household? (If the chief income earner is retired, what was his/her former occupation?) *Please state and tick the appropriate box*

- Armed forces/Police/Prison Services/Fire Brigade/Church Computing
- Farming Other Non-manual
- Director/Manager Manual - skilled
- Professional Manual - unskilled
- Foreman/Supervisor Apprentice/trainee



- Administrative
- Teaching/Education
- Medical
- Self-employed; **roughly how many OTHER people are employed by the business? Is it:**
 - Five or more staff
 - 1-4 staff
 - No other staff
- Don't know
- Student
- Unemployed
- Retired

What is the approximate total annual income in your household?

- Under 10K (£10,000)
- 10-20K
- 21-30K
- 31-50K
- 51-75K
- 75K +

How would you describe your ethnic background? (Please tick one box only)

- White
- Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- Asian / Asian British
- Other ethnic group (please specify)

Are you a registered disabled person? Yes No

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

- Yes, limited a lot
- Yes, limited a little
- No

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN MORE?

If you would like to be kept informed of future events and news about the Neroche Project, please provide your contact details:

Name:

Address:.....

E-mail: Tel:

THANK YOU! Please return this form to the FC staff / activity organiser



10.4 Appendix 4: Interview Template for LSG (actors)

This interview / group discussion is part of a research study of the Neroche LPS, evaluating its impacts and the learning by core partners and project participants. We would like to find out about your involvement and experiences, what you feel you have gained from the project, and any suggestions or lessons for other landscape partnership schemes. Participation in the discussion group is **voluntary** and you do not have to take part if you don't want to.

We would like to **record** the session with two digital audio-recorders. This helps us to keep a record of what you actually said in your own words rather than changing it to what we think or remember you said. Any material we may use from this session in a report or presentation is **anonymised**; that means we will not refer to your actual name, unless we have your permission to do so. We follow data protection laws in how we treat and store the data.

Hand out and ask them to check and complete the **'Information and Consent Form' and the 'Participant Profile Form'**.

Do you have any questions about the research or this meeting today before we start?

Start of LSG specific questions:

Would each of you briefly introduce yourself (background/interests, how long you have lived in the Neroche area [born here or moved here])?

Q 1: Can you tell us about when and how you got to join the Local Stakeholder Group?

PROBE How did you hear about Neroche LPS?
Were you asked to participate or did you respond to request?
How did you see your role within the project originally and has that changed as the project has developed?
Do you represent a particular organisation or specific community interests?
What activities have you been involved with? (in individual/private capacity)
How much of your time has the project taken up?
Have you been involved from the beginning of the project?

Q 2: How have you found working in the LSG?

PROBE Distinct roles/function? (individual contributions)
Where, when and how collaborate? (teamwork)
Who shaped the remit (role, power, participants) of the LSG?
Were decision-making powers set / negotiated / challenged? (internally? externally?)
How did the LSG evolve? Has it worked differently at different stages of the scheme?
How do you relate / connect with the LPS Board? (probe: social capital)
How is decision made about who of the LSG is part of the Board?
What is the LSG's contribution/involvement in terms of LPS activities?

Q 3: What do you feel has been the impact of the LSG personally/collectively?



(This is about the impact of LSG rather than LPS as a whole)

- PROBE What do you feel you have achieved as a group?
Deciding on the projects to be funded within the Neroche LPS (how easy/difficult?)
Sitting on the Partnership board and having an overriding vote on that board – what has that meant for the LSG?
Acting as the voice of the local community to the LPS partner organisations (how have you felt about the responsibility of this)?

Q 4: Did you encounter any difficult situations / problems? Have they been addressed? How and by whom?

- PROBE When during the LPS did problems occur (beginning / middle / end)?
Had they been foreseen or come as total surprise?
What/who caused problems / involved? (internal / external; individuals / orgs)
Any help/support available? Could problems be solved internally within the LPS or did they need 'external' help?
Has the LSG group been involved in addressing these issues?

Q 5: If such situation(s) occurred again, would you do anything differently?

- PROBE Are there any repeated problems?
Learning and adaptation process?

Q 6: If you represent specific community interests, how do you liaise?

- PROBE How do you cross-check/communicate with them? When?
What is the level of interest in and support for LPS?
What issues / problems have come up?

Q 7: Is there anything you'd like to change / improve in terms of how the LPS is run, who is involved and how decisions are made?

- PROBE Time and in-kind contributions?
More involvement? Did some organisations / people feel sidelined or left out?

Q 8: What will happen after the main funding ceases?

- PROBE Who and how decided about charitable trust? Who will be part and why?
What do you hope to achieve?
What is the community support / buy-in and how will that be maintained?
Decision-making, responsibilities and time input?
Financial management (profit distribution, longer-term security)

End of LSG specific questions

Would each of you say your name, job role and where you are from?

Q 1: Can you tell us about when and how you got involved in the Neroche LPS / activities?

- PROBE How did you hear about Neroche LPS?
What is your role within the project and what activities have you been involved with?
Have you been involved from the beginning?



How did the scheme evolve?

Q 2: What do you think about the Neroche area?

PROBE If you close your eyes and think about Neroche, what comes into your mind? [physical or social / cultural landscape?]
What do you like about the existing landscape and access/provisions?
Anything you dislike?
How do you feel about the changes made during the Neroche LPS?
Have you always lived here?
[Comparisons with other areas?]

Key Questions

Experience and Impacts of Neroche LPS

Q 3: What would you say has the Neroche LPS achieved from your perspective? What is good about it?

PROBE In terms of provisions / benefits for the public / to the environment
In terms of involving local people/groups
For the benefit of your organisation/work/employer
Impacts - processes

Q 4: Did you encounter any difficult situations / problems? Have they been addressed? How and by whom?

PROBE When during the LPS did problems occur (beginning / middle / end)?
Had they been foreseen or come as total surprise?
What/who caused problems / involved? (internal / external; individuals / orgs)
Any help/support available? Could problems be solved internally within the LPS or did they need 'external' help?

Q 5: If such situation(s) occurred again, would you do anything differently?

PROBE Are there any repeated problems?
Learning and adaptation process?

Governance

Q 6: How did you find working within the project?

PROBE Was it easy/difficult?
Were decision-making powers clear (remit and who)?
Were decision-making processes or decisions challenged at some point?
Have any changes occurred in who decides and how decisions are made?

Q 7: What is the level of awareness and support of your organisation/group for this LPS?

PROBE If good, what are the signs/actions/contributions?
What communication exists (vertical and horizontal)?
What will happen after main funding ceases?



Q 8: Is there anything you'd like to change / improve in terms of how the LPS is run, who is involved and how decisions are made?

PROBE Time and in-kind contributions?
More involvement? Did some organisations / people feel sidelined or left out?

Monitoring and Evaluation

Q 9: Has there been any monitoring and evaluation of the LPS? Can you give us any examples?

PROBE Who was involved?
Who decided what was measured/assessed?
When, how, how often was it done?

Q 10: What were the reasons for and the outcomes of past/ongoing M&E?

PROBE Who analysed and reported the results?
What did the data tell you about performance?
Were you able to connect good / poor performance to specific elements of delivery?
What changed / lessons learnt as a result?
If lessons were learnt, what enabled that process?
Box-ticking exercise or actual scope for reflection, learning and adaptation?

Specific issues / questions

[Check whether the following angles/issues have been covered in the discussion. If not, ask now:](#)

- Elicit specific examples of success / difficulties / failure of running NLPS / decision-making (governance)
- Elicit specific examples of success / difficulties / failure of NLPS delivery
- What is new / have they learnt?

Ending Question (each in turn)

Q 11a: Based on your experience and considering all that has been discussed within this group, what is most important to you about the Neroche LPS?

Q 11b: What is the most important thing that you have learnt / taken from it?

Q 12: Is there anything you would like to change / do differently next time?

Thank you for your time and contributions!



10.5 Appendix 5: Interview Template for LPB Members and Project Leaders (actors)

The questionnaire and this interview is part of a research study of the Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), evaluating its impacts and the learning by core partners and project participants. The LPS started in October 2006, and is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and a range of local partner organisations. It covers 35 square miles of the northern part of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, close to Taunton.

I would like to find out about your involvement and experiences, what you feel you have gained from the project, and any suggestions or lessons for other landscape partnership schemes. Participation in this interview is **voluntary** and you do not have to take part if you don't want to.

I would like to **record** the session. This helps us to keep a record of what you actually said in your own words rather than changing it to what I think or remember you said. Any material we may use from this session in a report or presentation is **anonymised**; that means we will not refer to your actual name, unless we have your permission to do so. We follow data protection laws in how we treat and store the data.

Do you agree to participate in the study? YES NO

Do you agree for the discussion to be audio-taped? YES NO

Do you have any questions about the research or this interview before we start?

Q 1: Can you tell me about when and how you got involved in the Neroche LPS activity? What was the reason for getting involved?

PROBE Have you been involved from the beginning? What is your involvement?
Have you participated in more than one activity? All organised by Neroche LPS?
How did you find out about the activity/ies?
Are you involved in other nature-based activities: frequency - range?

Q 2: What do you think about the Neroche project area (Northern part of the Blackhill AONB)?

Note: Neroche area spanning the border of Somerset and Devon, from **Culmstock Beacon** in the west to **Castle Neroche** in the east.

PROBE What do you like about the existing landscape and access/provisions?
Anything you dislike?
How do you feel about the changes made during the Neroche LPS?
Have you always lived here? [Comparisons with other areas?]

Q 3: What have you enjoyed about being involved in this activity?

PROBE In terms of provisions / benefits
Impacts - organisation - information / communication



Q 4: Have you met new people or got to know existing people better since becoming involved in the activity offered by the Neroche project?

PROBE What has been the impact/meaning of this for you?

Q 5: Were there any problems or is there anything that could have been improved or done better?

PROBE For example relating to the organisation / information / communication.
Is anything missing that should have been done?
If any problems, when did they occur (recently or beginning of the LPS)?
What caused problems / who involved? Who/how affected?
Was the issue raised formally?

Q 6: Would you have wished to be more involved in planning and running the activity?

PROBE Did you feel the event/activity was / was organized well/badly?
Were decision-making processes or decisions challenged at some point?
How would you have liked to contribute?

Q 7: Would you see yourself able to help with planning and running this, or another, activity in the future?

PROBE Would you have the skills/confidence, time and interest to do so?
If yes, what activity/ies would that be?

Q 8: What, if anything, would you say have you learnt from your involvement in the activity / Neroche LPS?

PROBE About the area, about the people involved?
Positive / negative?

Q 9: Is there anything you would like to change / do differently next time, or feel that others should do differently?

PROBE New ideas / different activities?
Any changes regarding e.g. how activity was advertised, communication, kind and frequency of events?

Q 10: Have you noticed any changes in this landscape / area over the past three years?

PROBE What? Where? Who benefits / is affected?
Positive / negative?

Q 11: Based on your experience and considering all that has come up in the interview, what is most important to you about the Neroche LPS?

Q 12: What is the most important thing that you have learnt / taken from it?

Thank you for your time and contributions!



10.6 Appendix 6: Member Selection Criteria for LSG

From applications received, selection of members of the Local Stakeholders Group will be made by a panel consisting of staff from Forest Enterprise. All applicants will have received the Proposed Terms of Reference and Explanatory Notes and made formal application on a form to be provided.

The following criteria will be applied in the selection of members:

- Local community members should live either within the Project area or within 5 miles of the Project boundary and will preferably have a broad range of interests appropriate to the Neroche Project.
- Local community members should have lived within or adjoining the area for at least 4 years.
- Applicants representing user groups should be able to demonstrate relevant interests and experience in relation to recreation in the Blackdown Hills along with membership of regional or local cycling, horse riding or walking groups.
- Applicants who are actively involved in their local community through membership of local groups or committees and those with associated positions of authority (chairperson of a local group, group secretary etc) will be particularly welcome.
- Local community members with farming, forestry or rural business experience would be particularly welcome.
- We would ideally like to see at least one group member representing the residents of Taunton or Wellington as the largest nearby conurbations.
- Applicants should not have direct connections with any of the principal funding partners – English Nature, Forest Enterprise, Forestry Commission, English Heritage, BHRP, Somerset CC, Devon CC, Taunton Deane BC, South Somerset DC or Mid Devon DC.
- Members of the group must be prepared to consider the area as a whole and the wishes / needs of the communities living within and around the Project area rather than focussing on issues which have an impact on themselves and their neighbours only.

In establishing the Local Stakeholders Group, Forest Enterprise will take account of the needs of young people, women and people on low incomes, to seek representation from people with disabilities and to encourage individuals from ethnic minorities to become possible members.



10.7 Appendix 7: LSG - Terms of Reference

Title

1. The Group shall be known as the Local Stakeholders Group for the Neroche Project.

Role and Responsibilities

2. The primary purpose of the Local Stakeholders Group is to advise the Partnership Board of the views of the local community and a variety of user groups in the development, management and delivery of the Neroche Project.
3. The Neroche Project – Local Stakeholders Group shall;
 - Pre Application (before 30th September 2004)
 - a) Advise the Board on the views of the local community to the proposed programme of projects to be included within the Landscape Partnership Scheme bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
 - Following Stage I Approval (May 2005 – April 2006)
 - b) Providing ongoing advice and steer the work of the Landscape Partnership (LP) Officer (the title used for the day-to-day manager of the Project) to ensure local community views are fully considered. Advise the Board on the proposed work programme for the 12 month Development Stage.
 - c) Advise on work undertaken during the Development Stage.
 - d) Advise the Board from the perspective of the local community and user groups on the Stage II submission.
 - Following Stage II Approval (November 2006 – December 2010)
 - e) Advise the Board on the management and delivery of the 3-4 year work programme.
 - f) Advise the lead partner (Forest Enterprise) on the management of the funds (cash and non-cash) available to deliver the scheme.
 - g) Assist in steering the work of the LP Officer.
4. The Local Stakeholder Group shall engage in constructive debate and seek consensus wherever possible. In circumstances where a consensus cannot be reached, decision will be made following an open vote (see Voting Arrangements section).

Membership

5. Membership of the Local Stakeholders Group will not exceed 12 members including;
 - the lead partner / the applicant (Forest Enterprise)
 - representatives from the local community (no more than 8)
 - representatives from the local horse riding, cycling and walking user groups (no more than 3).

6. In the first instance Group members will be selected by the lead partner (FE) from candidates responding to an advert placed in the local press. The selection criteria used for recruiting successful candidates will be transparent and publicly available.
7. Membership of the Local Stakeholders Group will be for a term of up to 2 years. At the end of this period any member can also be re-appointed if they wish.
8. All members from the local community are expected to contribute to the Group and make decisions on the basis of what is best for the local community across the Project area as a whole and its catchment, rather than just their specific local interests in it.
9. Three members of the Local Stakeholders Group will also attend Board meetings and represent the collective views of the Group and local community. These Board members will be elected by the Group.
10. Any member who has been absent for 3 consecutive meetings may be removed from the Local Stakeholders Group by the lead partner (FE). The lead partner will have the right to review the chairing and membership of the Local Stakeholders Group if necessary.
11. The Chair will hold office initially for one year and will be appointed by the Group at its first meeting held in that year.
12. The Chair may suspend any meeting if the meeting falls below a quorum of one third members currently appointed and/or nominated.
13. A member of the Local Stakeholders Group may resign by notice in writing to Forest Enterprise (the lead partner).

Voting Arrangements

14. In circumstances where the Local stakeholders group is unable to make a consensus decision an open vote will be called. Voting can only occur when a quorum of Group members is present.

Administration

15. Meetings will be held at least twice a year and more frequently when necessary. The Local stakeholders group will meet either within or very close to the Neroche Project area at a time of day that is convenient to most members (probably in the evenings).
16. Agendas will be produced for each meeting and circulated one week before. A minute will be produced following each meeting and circulated for approval within two weeks following each meeting. Minutes of the Local Stakeholders Group will also be circulated to members of the Partnership Board.



10.8 Appendix 8: Headline Outputs of the NLPS

NLPS Programmes	Headline Outputs at October 2010
Natural heritage - landscape regeneration in forest - restoration of coppicing - grazing units - forest grazing - nature reserves - ecological monitoring	75.4 ha of open pasture and heath created
	139.7ha of wood pasture and wooded heath created
	Natural regeneration initiated in 54.3ha
	6ha of neglected coppice brought into rotation
	1 woodchip corral created housing up to 100 cattle
	Grazing unit created and grazing taking place in 5 units
	Breeding herd of over 60 longhorn cattle established
	3.7ha of coppice restored on 3 reserves
	3050m fencing erected and scrub clearance on 4 reserves
	Access improved on 4 reserves
	Detailed habitat monitoring system in place for 220ha of forest
Built and archaeological heritage - Castle Neroche - Wellington monument - Ringdown barn - Wychwood lake	New steps improved paths and signage around Castle Neroche monument
	1 new surfaced path to access for all standard
	Cleared vegetation round Neroche to open up viewpoints
	Structural survey of Wellington monument
	Car park expanded and access track enhanced – Wellington monument
	Ringdown barn repaired
	Wychwood lake restored
	Disabled access in place around lake
Cultural heritage - community history	15 local history projects run over three years
	4 local history events held each year
	Book published to reflect local history projects
Physical access - Neroche Herepath - timber and recreation tracks - car parking	23km off road trails
	40.5km circular short walks
	1km all ability trail
	23km off-road Herepath
	New 45 place car park at Staple Hill
	Extended 35 place car park at Castle Neroche
	540m of upgraded multi-purpose track in Staple common
700m of upgraded multi-purpose track in Middle room	



NLPS Programmes	Headline Outputs at October 2010
Collective knowledge - creative interpretation - heritage awareness	11 'Season' events held 4 music and story-telling workshops delivered and 1 major event CD produced as a record of music and storytelling work Exhibitions by 2 commissioned artists displayed publically Digital content produced to interpret heritage in mobile form Digital trail guide units available for public hire by autumn 2009 Camera obscura constructed and used at 6 events 25 public walks/events held with over 400 participants 14 public training events held with over 200 participants
Opportunity to learn - Forest School - health walks	40 trained to FS level 3, 16 trained to level 2 Approximately 480 children received 3 Forest School sessions per year for 3 years 11 Forest School sites established on or off school grounds 140 health walks carried out for targeted audiences
Opportunity to be involved - partnership and communication - volunteering - perpetuating the Neroche legacy	Partnership board and local stakeholders group maintained Website established and maintained Newsletters sent out to residents 3 times a year for 3 years 800 volunteer days over 3 years 90 skilled volunteer days Blackdown Hills Trust established by 5 members of the LSG
Perpetuation of skills - Neroche apprenticeships - land management advice	3 apprentices employed and trained for 18 months 3 apprenticeships given experience with 2 partner organizations 3 apprenticeships achieving NVO2 and units of NVO3 Advice and assistance provided to land managers – 74 visits