Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership
Heritage Centres Summary

Gateshead Council
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Summary

Aim
The Place to Showcase project will create three ‘heritage centres’ across the project area. This will consist of one main centre at Winlaton Mill and two satellite centres. The satellite centres will be located at The Lodge in Consett and the Tyne Riverside Country Park centre at Prudhoe. The Heritage Centres will not only be information and interpretation hubs but also provide bases for other project activity which will contribute to the long term sustainability of the Land of Oak & Iron project. The Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre will be a gateway to the project area and an attraction for the significant and nearby urban population.

The Land of Oak & Iron project will benefit from having a significant physical presence. The fascinating industrial heritage of the area including pioneering ironworks and sword making is little known even locally. The Heritage Centres will make sure that this heritage is understood, accessible and easy to enjoy for the local population and for visitors. This will deliver the Partnership’s vision to reveal one of the North East’s best kept secrets for the community and visitors to enjoy.

Activities
With the heritage centres located in three places and three local authority areas it will be possible to focus on the story of the landscape in the immediate vicinity and also across the project area. The exhibition and interpretation material in all three heritage centres will be informed by the research undertaken in the development phase and in particular the information that has been learnt from local historians and residents. The landscape has been heavily influenced and exploited by industries including iron works, coal mining, steel production and coke works. For example, the Crowley Iron Works founded in 1691 employed up to 1,000 people with the complex unique across Europe. It was the forerunner of the factory system with structural remains located within walking distance of the Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre.

Digital interpretation will allow the same information to be provided in each of the centres but as suggested above there will be the option of focusing certain topics in each so that there is an incentive for users to visit all three. Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre as a dedicated facility to the Land of Oak & Iron will provide the most complete information and will be the centrepiece of interpretation activity. This offer will include:

- Exhibition that tells the story of the Land of Oak & Iron;
- Information point including interactive digital interpretation;
- Office accommodation for the four strong Land of Oak & Iron Delivery Team; and,
- Base for project activity including volunteering, education and skills.

The two satellite centres at Consett and Prudhoe are existing facilities with established uses. In both cases, under-utilised space will be improved and used to display information and host exhibitions. This will attract additional visitors and help sustain both facilities.

All of the centres will be supported by complementary activity to draw people in that perhaps would not visit if the offer was limited to interpretation and exhibition information. It will therefore significantly increase the number of people that the project will engage with. This complementary activity will vary at each centre but options include a café offer and cycle hire including electric bikes and charging points.

Location(s)
Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre - NE21 6RU.
Consett (The Lodge) – DH8 5TA
Prudhoe (Tyne Riverside Country Park Café) – NE42 6UP
Start and finish dates
Project planning will begin as soon as possible following the assessment process. The Consett and Prudhoe facilities will undergo minor refurbishment and installation of display information in 2016. Subject to securing funding for the construction of the facility and necessary consents the Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre will be open by the end of 2017.

Target audience/ benefactor
The target audience of a Place to Showcase is the local population and that of the surrounding area; both of which are significant. The Land of Oak & Iron has a population of approximately 112,000. Within 20 miles of the proposed site of the Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre live nearly 1.8m people, which make up 70% of the population of North East England. Furthermore, all three centres already have some form of existing audience. The site of the proposed Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre is the busiest part of the Derwent Walk / Derwenthaugh Park with more than 200,000 people accessing the area at this point in 2014. The five counters located in the area and within walking distance of the site recorded 813,865 visits in the same period including those at Winlaton Mill.

Outcomes
The main outcomes that the investment will deliver are:
1. The area will be a better place to live, work or visit.
2. More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage

Outputs
Three visitor information facilities will be provided. A range of other outputs will be delivered including increasing visitor numbers and employment creation.

Risks
The main risk is linked to the delivery of the Winlaton Mill Heritage Centre which requires other external funding sources to be secured for its construction. Potential funding sources have though been identified and positive discussions have taken place. Bids will be submitted in the summer of 2015 and early 2016. In the unlikely event that funding cannot be secured the allocated HLF resources will be recycled back into the project.

Similar projects
Other projects that will take place in the Land of Oak & Iron that the reader might be interested in include and are geographically close:
- Crowley’s Dam;
- Land of Oak & Iron Sculpture Trail;
- Gateshead Lower Derwent Valley Woodlands;
- Prudhoe Woodlands and Heritage Trail.

Contact details
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