



Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership Scheme



Evaluation summary ~ May 2020

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Summary ~ Land of Oak & Iron at a glance

Land of Oak & Iron is a Landscape Partnership Scheme funded by the National Lottery's Heritage Fund (NLHF) delivered over a 4¼ year period between January 2016 and March 2020, motivated by a desire to conserve, enhance and celebrate over 500 years of heritage, history, heroes and habitats within an area that once hosted a world leading iron and steel industry.

From information collected throughout the project period and presented in this evaluation Land of Oak & Iron can celebrate the following:

- **14 projects** delivering a **£2.5 million cash investment** within the Land of Oak & Iron area
- **11,500+ participants** involved in **340+ learning and participation** activities
- **21+ full time working years or 4,722 days** contributed from **350+ local volunteers** worth an additional £400,000
- **2,131 local school pupils** engaged
- **140 ha of biodiversity and landscape** areas have been enhanced and maintained
- **80 wildlife and heritage sites** in the area **have been improved or designated** and **5 features** installed to increase biodiversity
- **14 km** of access routes created and improved with **15 new walks and heritage trails** celebrating the Land of Oak & Iron area
- **3,500+ wildlife survey records** submitted
- **50+ site surveys and records** documenting the **cultural and natural heritage** of the Land of Oak & Iron
- **534 training accreditations and qualifications** awarded
- **133 training courses and workshops** for **1,082 participants**
- **87 different pieces of interpretation** and communication to help promote the area at **22 sites**
- **3 permanent visitor information facilities** with Land of Oak & Iron **exhibitions, displays and learning spaces** created
- **The Land of Oak & Iron Trust** created to help continue to improve the natural, built and cultural heritage assets of the area.
- **£700,000+ of planned legacy activity** as additional investment in the project area over the next five years.

Summary ~ Land of Oak & Iron key observations

LOOKING OUTWARDS

A successful scheme that met and in some areas exceeded intended outputs

The information collected and presented within the project evaluation demonstrates that Land of Oak & Iron has been a successful Landscape Partnership Scheme that has delivered significant activity within the Derwent Valley. All the planned outputs have been achieved with minor planned that have been incorporated into project delivery. The participation & learning and community engagement activities have been the undoubted success story far exceeding their original intentions. The presence of Land of Oak & Iron and the associated partnership projects has been able to secure almost £400K worth of volunteer activity within the Landscape Partnership area.

A programme that has integrated legacy planning and activity

One notable feature of this Landscape Partnership has been the focus on legacy planning and follow on legacy activity from an early stage. Figures presented in this evaluation from the delivery phase show a total cash investment of £2 ½ million and a volunteer contribution of £400K to March 2020 making the total value of activity so far around £2.9 million.

Legacy planning has seen the creation of the Land of Oak & Iron Trust, secured the ongoing commitment for the management and maintenance of assets from partners to the value of £620K plus the continuation of the Woodland Officer role and planned Events and Interpretation to the value of £100K. This planned legacy activity of £720K represents a figure equivalent to 25% of the value of the Landscape Partnership Scheme as additional investment into the project area over the next five years.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
LP Scheme	£2.5 million cash investment to March 2020				
	£400K volunteer contribution to March 2020				
	Total value of activity so far £2.9 million				

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Legacy	£620K Management and maintenance commitments				
	Land of Oak & Iron Trust				
	£36K Woodlands				
	£54K Events				
	Planned legacy activity so far £700,000 plus				

The focus on developing the three heritage centres as hubs for activity has left tangible assets that will continue to be the focus of volunteer and community activity for years to come.

A celebration of participation and engagement

As noted throughout the evaluation report the community participation and engagement activities have been the real success story of Land of Oak & Iron. The participation and learning outputs have been delivered with a mix of creative and innovative events that captured the imagination of the many participants and showcased the landscape and heritage of this unique area of the North East. The quality and success of the events programme is reflected in the recognition achieved and the range of local and national media stories that were generated during the course of scheme delivery.

The importance of volunteers

The other undoubted success story from Land of Oak & Iron strongly relates to the impacts on people and the contribution from the volunteers. A contribution of 4,722 volunteer days to March 2020, translating into **21½ full time working years** is a big achievement to build and sustain in just over four years of project delivery and has helped contributed to many of the natural, built and cultural heritage outputs that have been delivered.

The success of the programme can be gauged not just in providing the day to day training, support and feedback received during the programme delivery but the indication that many of volunteer groups intend to carry on working together in some form or another on completion of the Scheme as well as the evidence from 88% of volunteers responding to the survey who have been inspired in different ways to volunteer in other activities and projects.

REFLECTING INWARDS

Gathering up and appreciating what has been achieved

Despite the many successes delivered by Land of Oak & Iron, project delivery throughout the Landscape Partnership Scheme has not been straight forward with many projects being delivered right up to a delivery deadline in March 2020 with final completion further complicated due to the outbreak of coronavirus.

The evaluation has attempted to bring together and present the overall achievement and impacts of these activities but it is recommended that time is taken by the Land of Oak & Iron board and project partners to reflect on what has actually been achieved looking at the scheme as a whole and the lessons to be learnt and applied to other partnership projects.

This is the second successful Landscape Partnership Scheme to be delivered by Groundwork North East & Cumbria as the accountable body but given the over delivery of outputs in many areas by both schemes and for Land of Oak & Iron, some partners experiencing delay in receiving invoice payments; where were the internal checks and balances to say we can stop doing this, celebrate what has been achieved and focus attention in those areas that may need more help and support both within the host organisation and wider partnership?

A very small core project team

Linked to the above, there is a small team of four people, with the equivalent hours of three full time staff that have been involved in not just programme management but direct delivery and supporting partners with other projects. This was a wish of the partnership from the development phase but the number is small compared to other Landscape Partnership Schemes. For future projects of a similar scale and approach, consideration should be given to identifying possible role(s) to help capture and articulate the obvious benefits and successes that working in partnership can bring.

Project management and evaluation

The end of project reports have proved to be a helpful way of capturing impact and achievements. As with the other themes it may have been helpful to have worked with the project leads over the course of the Scheme delivery so that these reports would be ready to published on the Land of Oak & Iron website in order to tell the story of what has been achieved by the Scheme as a whole.

It is recommended that end of project reports should be applied to future partnership projects but consider a redesign and discussion with the project leads to capture a smaller amount of higher quality information, possibly on an annual basis.

It is best practice to have an independent external evaluation process integrated into project delivery at an early phase to help identify emerging key strategic issues and support the overall risk management of a multiyear programme.

Strategic Communication and promotion

To celebrate the achievements of Land of Oak & Iron it is recommended that some of the headlines and findings and in particular some of the project outcomes from this evaluation are captured and a dedicated web page of what has actually happened is created leaving an additional legacy.

Evaluation recommendations

The recommendations emerging from this evaluation would be:

- The Land of Oak & Iron board and project partners to **reflect on what has actually been achieved** looking at the scheme as a whole. The **lessons learnt to be identified** with a focus on identifying those strategic checks and balances needed to ensure successful project delivery and enable the partnership to celebrate what has been achieved.
- That as the partnership moves beyond completion of the Landscape Partnership Scheme, the Land of Oak & Iron **website should be amended** so that **the story and achievements** of the Scheme are consolidated and elements of good practice as identified within this evaluation are found in one place.

Combining these two recommendations along with dissemination of planned infographics would bring together the headline achievements in digital or print format which would act as an additional prospectus to help secure funding and future partner support for continued heritage activity within the Land of Oak & Iron area.