

TITLE OF REPORT: Land of Oak & Iron and Tourism in the West of the Borough

REPORT OF: Darren Collins, Strategic Director Corporate Resources

SUMMARY

This report provides a summary update on the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership, the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre and on Tourism in the West of Gateshead

Purpose of the Report

1. To highlight progress on the implementation of the specific actions highlighted above which were agreed as part of the OSC Review of Opportunities to promote Rural Gateshead and to seek the Committee's views on progress to date.

Background

2. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded the **Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership** a £2.2m HLF grant to deliver a programme of activity over 4 years starting in 2016. The awarding of the grant concluded a process which started in late 2012 and involved a nationally competitive bidding round. The accountable body for the Partnership and employer of the delivery team is Groundwork North East & Cumbria.
3. The project boundary covers 177km and crosses 3 local authorities of Gateshead, Durham and Northumberland (see map as appendix). The entire area has a population of approximately 112,000. The boundary is based on the river catchments of the Derwent and Tyne as well as the similar landscape characteristics and more specifically shared industrial heritage. Partners include the other local authorities, Environment Agency, Gateshead College and Durham Wildlife Trust amongst others.
4. The delivery element of the project which is now at a mid-point includes inter-connected initiatives that not only celebrate the industrial heritage of the area but also the natural and cultural heritage. These range from a community archaeology scheme to various restoration initiatives that cover woodlands, historic structures and the river Derwent. Visits to schools and skills training are also part of the project.
5. A separate but very much linked project is the development of **the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre** at Winlaton Mill. It was intended that this would form part of the Landscape Partnership project but its scale has meant it has been

progressed separately with funding provided from alternative sources. It will deliver a legacy of job creation, tourism, regeneration and economic benefits.

6. Efforts to promote **Tourism in the West of Gateshead** have focused on a marketing campaign titled 'Gateshead's Great Outdoors' which was delivered in the summer of 2017. The Council's Rural Economic Strategy (2015-2020) highlighted that Gateshead's rural tourism offer is less defined and developed than the existing NewcastleGateshead urban offer.

Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership Project Update

7. There are a number of site specific schemes and project wide schemes that are beneficial to Gateshead. Most are led by other project partners with Gateshead responsible for leading and delivering on access improvements and the restoration of the remains of the 17th century ironworks in Derwenthaugh Park.
8. Access improvements are being managed by the Council's Rights Way of Officer. More than £100,000 of funding is available to deliver four schemes that have links to old waggonways and railways which today are footpaths, bridleways and multi-user routes. These routes were built to service local industry and allowed the export of goods to other parts of the country, Europe and the rest of the world. Without these networks the area would not have prospered as it did during the early industrial period.
9. Two of these schemes have already been delivered at Greenside and in Chopwell with new surfaces provided and pot holes filled. The Greenside scheme involved improvements to a stretch of the old waggonway to the rear of Burnhills Gardens including new steps. The Chopwell scheme improved the old mineral line link from the west of North and Greenhead Terraces to the entrance to Milkwellburn Wood.
10. Woodhouse Lane which provides links to the Derwent Valley, Swalwell and Sunnyside is currently being improved. It is a remnant of the original Western Way I waggonway which was the first along the Derwent Valley. The improvements will focus on both ends of the lane which are in the worst condition.
11. The final scheme to be delivered as part of the access scheme is improvements to the Red Kite Trail which includes part of the route of the Garesfield to Chopwell railway. New surfaces and drainage will be installed to improve accessibility on two sections that have been identified as priorities on this 11 mile circular route which takes in some of Gateshead's most beautiful countryside.
12. The restoration of the remains of the 17th century ironworks in Derwenthaugh Park is being led by the Council's Conservation Officer. Winlaton Mill ironworks was constructed between 1691 and c 1713, and was the original core of an internationally-important manufacturing complex, with a forge, slitting mill, steel furnaces, and squares of workshops. The works are a Scheduled Ancient Monument with most now preserved in a stable condition beneath landscaped amenity land, but the dam and weir complex are exposed and in need of conservation

13. The Council is working closely with Historic England as part of the Landscape Partnership project to ensure that the dam, now on the Heritage at Risk register, is brought back into a good state of repair. Project development work including surveys is underway with vegetation clearance due to start next month on the dam structure, which is approximately 80 metres in length. Vegetation clearance will allow a repair schedule to be put together by appointed experts and subject to securing further funding the project will progress to the restoration and conservation stage.

14. There are various projects being delivered that are site specific or area wide which have benefits for Gateshead. Summaries of work that is complete or is underway are provided below –

- *Fish pass at Lintzford Weir - Tyne Rivers Trust*
 - £166,000 of investment to create a rock pool type fish pass allowing passage of migratory fish for the first time in 300 years
 - Success was immediate with adult fish seen using it within hours of completion
 - Juvenile salmon subsequently caught upstream as part of an Environment Agency sample

- *Derwent River Restoration – Tyne Rivers Trust*
 - Himalayan Balsam a non-native invasive species has been targeted on the banks of the Derwent
 - Access to the river bank from Gibside has been improved through the creation of small stiles
 - A licence has been granted to tackle another invasive species, Japanese Knotweed, in Derwenthaugh Park for the next 3 years

- *Whinfield Coke Ovens – Tyne & Wear Building Preservation Trust*
 - £180,000 of capital investment with work planned that will restore the remaining ovens which are a Scheduled Ancient Monument
 - Access improvements are also underway so that visitors can view from the rear via a woodland walk
 - An objective of the works is to see the monument removed from the Heritage at Risk register

- *Woodland Restoration – Durham Wildlife Trust*
 - Thinning works have taken place at Kite Hill in Derwenthaugh Park in addition to scrub removal at Victoria Garesfield Local Wildlife Site
 - Further work is planned at Strother Hills Local Nature Reserve which is an important ancient woodland site close to Whinfield Coke Ovens
 - Training on using scythes has been provided and volunteers have been working together on a Dormice survey project

- *Community Archaeology – David Heslop*
 - Successful completion of an excavation near Gibside linked to the 18th century coal industry

- Delivery of a dig at Fellside, Whickham on the most important of the early 18th century waggoways in the Derwent Valley
- Plans to carry out an excavation near Axwell on the route of very early 17th century waggonway
- *Creative Interpretation – Groundwork*
 - 25 oral history recordings including an excellent session at Blaydon West Primary School with children interviewing parents and grandparents
 - Musical piece commissioned including Ryton based musician, Ian Stevenson, working with students from St Thomas More at Blaydon
 - Drama performance to be commissioned with a procurement process to get underway in March
- *Education – Groundwork*
 - Sessions delivered at Blaydon West Primary School focusing on industrial heritage including a tour of Derwentcote Steel Furnace
 - St Joseph's at Highfield have taken part and visited nearby Whinfield Coke Ovens
 - Gibside, Rowlands Gill and Chopwell Primary schools have also taken part in this scheme that has been well received by teaching staff and enjoyed by pupils
- *Skills – Gateshead College*
 - Art and Design students produced a Land of Oak & Iron Christmas card
 - Computer Science students have had the opportunity to provide content for the website
 - Business students have conducted surveys as part of research initiatives linked to the Land of Oak & Iron
- *Community Grants*
 - A small grants pot is in place with amounts between £500 and £2,000 available to be bid for every six months
 - Almost £36,000 has been awarded to date with £24,000 available in the next two bidding rounds
 - A number of Gateshead groups have benefitted including Chopwell Regeneration CIC, Friends of Red Kites, Vale Mill Trust, Hop Garden CIC and Gateshead Community Rowing Club
- *Marketing & Promotions*
 - A website for the Land of Oak & project has been created and updated - <http://landofoakandiron.org.uk/>
 - News and event information is provided on the website in addition to being promoted on social media and through traditional means
 - A Land of Oak & Iron film is in the early stages of development and is being produced by volunteers

15. A significant element of the Marketing & Promotions activity has been Chopwell WoodFest. This heritage event was organised by the Land of Oak & Iron team in partnership with the Friends of Chopwell Wood as part of their 25th anniversary celebrations. More than 1,500 people attended the event which took place on Sunday 9th July last year. Feedback was excellent from both attendees and those that provided craft related activities such as willow weaving. The event will take place again this year on 8th July.

Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre Project Update

16. The Heritage Centre at Winlaton Mill is part way through construction following a start on site of September 2017 with completion expected this summer. The project that has secured £1.2m of funding from HLF Heritage Grants, Rural Growth Network and Northumbrian Water making it the most significant investment in the west of the borough since the adoption of the Rural Economic Strategy. The project is managed by Groundwork North East & Cumbria and is anticipated to deliver the following economic benefits –

- 5 new jobs to manage and run the Heritage Centre
- Enterprise space to encourage start-ups and small businesses
- 27 indirect jobs will be created via multipliers and through the supply chain
- £1m of additional revenue per year in the local economy

17. The design is in the shape of a water wheel which was inspired by the revolutionary iron works at 'Old' Winlaton Mill. Iron works were established in the 1690s in what is now Derwenthaugh Park and used up to 9 water wheels to harness the power of the river Derwent. They became the first fully integrated iron founding and iron goods manufacturing plant in Europe. A stone dam is all that remains with the scheme to restore and conserve described above.

18. The design was chosen by local residents following a competition involving 35 architecture students from Northumbria University. A shortlist of 6 was presented to more than 100 people at Winlaton Mill Village Hall in March 2016 with the water wheel design the overwhelming choice. The winning design was unveiled in June at the same venue with again more than 100 attendees.

19. On-site parking will be more than doubled to 85 spaces with another 150 spaces within walking distance. It will act as a gateway to the Land of Oak & Iron located only a mile from the A1 but in a country park setting that provides walking and cycling routes in all directions including the national C2C link. The site is also well served by the Red Kite bus routes.

20. Derwenthaugh Park where the Heritage Centre is being constructed already attracts approximately 400,000 visitors per year. The development will be an attraction to existing users and new visitors. With 1.8m people living within 20 miles the audience potential is significant.

Digital Image of the Heritage Centre



Heritage Centre under construction – December 2018



Tourism in the West of the Borough Update

21. Work was undertaken from the beginning of 2017 in conjunction with NGI to plan and deliver a marketing campaign for the rural area to tie in with the busy summer period. The target audience was identified as day visitors from the local area and the region, with the intention to raise the profile of key rural assets and businesses. The campaign resulted in over 1 million engagements, thus raising awareness and understanding of the rural area and its tourism offer. Feedback from venues has been a positive with a number reporting increased footfall over the summer holidays.

22. The campaign was made up of a number of different parts to target both families and older people:

- A leaflet was created that featured 24 key attractions with 20,000 copies distributed and advertising took place in numerous publications such as the Journal and Sunday Sun (see example) with a combined circulation of 190,000.
- Media coverage included articles in the Evening Chronicle in June and July
 - [Hidden gems in Gateshead: Nine places you must visit in and around Gateshead](#)
 - [Gateshead Great Outdoors campaign launched to reveal the borough's rural areas](#)
- Global radio ran a competition to win a weekend in Gateshead's Great Outdoors.
 - The competition was a part of the regional drive time show on Heart FM, and was targeted at a family audience.
 - Prizes were supplied by some of the attractions featured in the campaign, and Global Radio added value through a partnership with Gateshead Hilton who provided an accommodation package.
 - As part of the competition Global created a video of presenter, Tom Campbell exploring Gateshead's Great Outdoors, which was provided to NGI for additional use in the campaign.
 - 54 promo trails ran across a two-week period directing people to their website to enter the competition, which was heard by an estimated 193,000 adults an average of 3.6 times.
 - The competition ran from 10 to 24 July and generated 3,004 page views, 1664 of which were unique, and received 451 entries.
 - Global's social media on the campaign achieved a total of 44,960 reach.
 - In addition to the competition Global have featured Gateshead's Great Outdoors in their "Things to Do" guide, which was live across the summer holidays.

- The use of bloggers was a significant part of the campaign to attract families
 - [*5 child-friendly places to stop for coffee, juice and cake in rural Gateshead*](#)
 - [*http://www.newgirlinton.co.uk/2017/08/gateshead-path-head-watermill-birkheads-secret-gardens.html*](http://www.newgirlinton.co.uk/2017/08/gateshead-path-head-watermill-birkheads-secret-gardens.html)
- Gateshead's Great Outdoors messaging was integrated into the NGI social media plan with the video produced by Global hosted on NGI's YouTube channel and viewed over 20,000 times.
- The web address www.gatesheadsgreatoutdoors.com was purchased to use throughout the campaign and redirected visitors to a bespoke landing page about rural Gateshead

23. A number of key products and attractions have been identified and through the format of the leaflet and formulation of blogger outings, these products have been packaged into day trips which local audiences can use to plan a day out in Gateshead's Great Outdoors. The opening of the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre this year will provide an opportunity to once again focus attention on the west of the borough and to build on the campaign of 2017.

24. In addition to the above, funding opportunities for groups and businesses in the area continue to be promoted through the Council's networks. Funding is currently available through North Pennines Dales LEADER, the Rural Growth Network and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Significant sums of funding can be bid for with the Rural Growth Network recently confirming that more than £1m is available across Gateshead, Northumberland and Durham. This includes monies for the creation of enterprise hubs, multiple business units, strategic tourism sites and unlocking economic sites.

25. Improving brown signage to highlight attractions in the west of the borough is planned. This will include examining the current provision of signs to Gibside and also introducing signage for the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre.

Recommendation:

26. Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to comment on the work undertaken on the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership, Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre and Tourism in the west of Gateshead.

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