

TITLE OF REPORT: Land of Oak & Iron – Progress and Legacy

REPORT OF: Alice Wiseman – Director of Public Health and Well-being

SUMMARY

This report provides a summary update on the key achievements of the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership, the Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre and the legacy of this project.

Purpose of the Report

1. To highlight progress on the key achievements of the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership and how this has contributed to the promotion of rural Gateshead, to highlight the legacy of the overall Land of Oak & Iron partnership and to seek the Committee's views on progress to date.

Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership Project Update

2. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) since January 2016, the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership has delivered a wide range of benefits across rural west Gateshead and the wider area. NLHF awarded a grant of £2.2m against a total scheme value of £2.8m. With volunteer time, the Landscape Partnership is worth £3.2m.
3. The agreed vision is 'to work with local communities and partners to celebrate, conserve and enhance our natural, industrial and cultural heritage in an area stretching from the Derwent reservoir to the River Tyne. Through this, we will create a legacy of regeneration and local economic development'.
4. The Accountable Body for the Landscape Partnership is Groundwork North East & Cumbria, with Gateshead Council taking a lead on several access improvement schemes and the restoration of Crowley's Dam. The Council is represented on the Partnership Board and Project Delivery Group.
5. The Land of Oak & Iron covers 177km across the local authorities of Gateshead, Durham and Northumberland. The entire population is approx. 112,000 people, with the boundary based on the river catchments of the Derwent and the Tyne, similar landscape characteristics and more specifically shared industrial heritage. Partners include the other local authorities, Forestry Commission, Gateshead College and Durham Wildlife Trust among others.

6. The delivery element of the Partnership comes to an end this June 2020. Benefits to Gateshead can be summarised as:

- £1.5m / 48% of total scheme spend in the Borough;
- Over £250,000 value of volunteer time directly benefitting Gateshead;
- Strengthened partnership working with Durham, Northumberland, statutory agencies and the VCSE sector;
- £196,000 into the restoration of Whinfield Coke Ovens and removal from the Heritage at Risk Register, with improved access to and awareness of this industrial monument;
- Crowley's Dam protected and exposed for visitors to Derwenthaugh Country Park to admire as the only physical remain of Crowley's industrial empire;
- £100,000 invested in three key strategic access routes, making it easier for residents and visitors to explore the area (Woodhouse Lane in Whickham, Greenside, and Chopwell);
- £166,000 invested in a fish pass at Lintzford, allowing the passage of migrating fish for the first time in 300 years. Sensitive restoration of the River Derwent at various points, including removal of invasive species and habitat improvement for key native species;
- Traditional woodland management at Derwenthaugh Country Park, Victoria Garesfield Local Wildlife Site and Strother Hills. The latter has also been brought under long term grassland management using traditional grazing.
- £155,000 pump-primed into the restoration of Shibdon Meadow, one of the last wet meadows of the lower Tyne. Along with Shibdon Pond it provides a strategically important roosting and feeding site for wading birds.

7. A full scheme evaluation will be written by May 2020 and made available to all partners. This will be shared at a celebration event for key partners and funders on 3rd June 2020.

Landscape Partnership legacy update

8. The Landscape Partnership's mid-term review, and ongoing communication with stakeholders and partners, has identified a desire to maintain a commitment to joint working specifically around three broad themes:

- i. Brand Management
- ii. Volunteer, Events and Interpretation Coordination

iii. Woodland Owner Engagement

9. Gateshead Council is a key member of a newly formed Land of Oak & Iron Working Group, which aims 'to build on the success and vision of the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership, with a shared aim of promoting and celebrating the natural, cultural and built heritage of the Land of Oak & Iron'.
10. The Working Group will identify priorities for joint working that will benefit the Land of Oak & Iron geographical area and the shared aim of the Group. It will also support the Land of Oak & Iron Trust, a newly registered charity committed to the legacy of the Landscape Partnership through the continuation of volunteer led activities.
11. As Accountable Body for the Landscape Partnership, Groundwork will own the Intellectual Property Rights of the Land of Oak & Iron Brand. This includes the trademark for the name and the logo design. Overall management and protection of the Brand will be agreed and directed by the Working Group.

Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre update

12. A separately funded but interlinked 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 was progressed in parallel with funding provided from alternative sources. .
13. The £1.5m Heritage Centre at Winlaton Mill was officially opened on 1st October 2018. In addition to Council investment, the project secured substantial contributions from HLF Heritage Grants, Rural Growth Network and Groundwork NE & Cumbria making it the most significant investment in the west of the borough since the adoption of the Rural Economic Strategy.
14. The focus of the Heritage Centre is the incredible industrial history of Winlaton Mill. An internationally important iron works was constructed at 'old' Winlaton Mill by Sir Ambrose Crowley between 1691 and 1713. Crowley's Dam which is referenced above is what remains of a four-acre complex that was the leading supplier of iron to the Admiralty. The works were unprecedented in their scale and complexity, and some have argued that the works were in fact the birthplace of industrial revolution.
15. The visitor centre has subsequently won a number of awards and been shortlisted or been a finalist for numerous others. Appendix 1 lists these awards.
16. The visitor centre is managed by Groundwork North East & Cumbria and has achieved the following legacy of job creation, tourism, regeneration and economic benefits -
 - Nearly 100,000 visitors (132,000 to date)
 - Sample customer feedback includes:
 - "We had a lovely time and I had a bike ride" James (children)

- "Lovely food, great space. Thank you for allowing dogs"
- "Delighted with this facility. Great to allow dogs. Well done!!"
- "Great place - lovely for the community"
- "Beautiful place! Gorgeous graphics in the cafe! You've left a legacy Land of Oak & Iron"
- 18 part time / 9.5 FTE. Job created with 14 members of staff from Gateshead area.
- The café and shop seek to source produce and products for sale as locally as possible according to cost and brand fit. There are 18 Gateshead suppliers including:
 - Daniel Farm, IR8 Wood, Eco dog design, Estate Tea Co., Fell Cottage, Firebrick Brewery, Gastro North, Hogs and Strothers

17. Events at and from the centre include: 'Look Out Schools Out' heritage crafts during school holidays; evening local history talks with a light supper; folk music and creative dance in the courtyard; a regular felting class; 'Frost Fest' - a weekend of heritage related activity at the start of December; walking tours to Crowley's Dam Wall; bird walks by a local ornithologist. Local interest groups are also invited to display their items as part of an ongoing programme of interpretation, for example, Gibside Sewing Club will be hanging some commissioned pieces portraying the heritage of the site.

18. Land of Oak & Iron has worked with Filament PR to produce a business toolkit. The purpose of the toolkit will be to give local businesses the information they need to promote the Land Oak & Iron as a destination and what it has to offer to visitors. The toolkit will help businesses understand the special qualities of this area, and how to use these qualities in developing and promoting their own product. This toolkit was launched in October 2019.

Recommendation:

19. Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to comment on the work undertaken on the Land of Oak & Iron Landscape Partnership and the Land of Oak & Heritage Centre and their contribution to promoting rural Gateshead.

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Appendix 1 **Land of Oak & Iron Heritage Centre** – Awards

National Awards

1. **New Built Award**, Chartered Association of Building Engineers (CABE), Built Environment Awards 2019
2. **Silver (Public Building)**, The Green Organisation, Green Apple Award for the Built Environment & Architectural Heritage 2019
3. **Highly Commended (Sustainability)**, Chartered Association of Building Engineers (CABE) Built Environment Awards 2019
4. Finalist (Best Small Commercial Project), Local Authorities Building Control (LABC) Building Excellence Awards 2019

Regional Awards:

1. **Best Small Commercial Project**, Local Authorities Building Control (LABC) Northern Building Excellence Awards 2019
2. **Commended**, Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) North East Planning Excellence Award 2019
3. Finalist (Best Inclusive Building), Local Authorities Building Control (LABC) Northern Building Excellence Awards 2019
4. Finalist (Best Public Service Building), Local Authorities Building Control (LABC) Northern Building Excellence Awards 2019
5. Shortlisted (Tourism & Leisure), Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) North East Awards 2019
6. Shortlisted (Sustainability), Constructing Excellence North East (CENE) Awards 2019