Sefton Coast HLF Landscape Partnership

Evaluation Report Executive Summary

Prepared for the

Sefton Coast Partnership

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Overall Scheme Delivery

Overall, the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership (SCLP) scheme has been delivered successfully, achieving impacts and benefits across all three HLF outcomes: heritage, people and communities.

There were significant external pressures at the start of the scheme in 2010 caused by austerity cuts, with further cutbacks continuing throughout the programme. This led to a delay to the start of the scheme and it reduced partners' staff and financial resources available for project delivery.

Despite – or perhaps partly because of these early challenges – the delivery partners remained positive about the scheme. The SCLP provided a focus for the Sefton Coast partners, and there was a drive and determination to deliver their projects. Project managers are proud and pleased with the projects that they have been able to deliver, and highlighted that they would not have gone ahead without the impetus and funding provided by the HLF Landscape Partnership programme.

There have been many changes from the original SCLP scheme as submitted. The management of these changes, with continual guidance and advice from HLF, has allowed the successful delivery of the SCLP scheme as a whole, albeit over a longer timescale.

The Design of the Landscape Partnership Scheme

The Sefton Coast Partnership (SCP) was set up in the 1980s – long before the planning of the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership (SCLP) scheme began in 2006. The SCP had already researched, prepared and delivered plans for coastal management, which provided a solid basis for developing the SCLP scheme. The HLF Landscape Partnership programme was an ideal vehicle for the SCP, and the design of the SCLP scheme fits well with HLF outcomes.

The objectives set out for the SCLP have an emphasis on community engagement and were used to direct the development of the scheme, but they were not revisited or assessed during its delivery. There were no set targets for outputs, or indicators to measure progress against objectives, and there were no baseline figures, so it is difficult to quantify success. Since the SCLP bid was submitted, HLF has changed the application procedure, tightening the requirements for quantitative data. There have, however, been significant impacts and benefits for heritage, people and communities as a result of the SCLP scheme as shown below.

Partnership Working

The Sefton Coast Partnership (SCP) was well-established and had a three-tier structure, with a Board, a Partnership Working Group and a series of Task Groups. When the SCLP scheme began, a new SCLP Steering Group was set up to oversee its delivery, but it did not continue to meet in the latter part of the programme. Partners felt that this meant that opportunities were missed to work more closely in partnership.

A SCLP Steering Group could have played an important role in continuing the strategic management of the programme, particularly given the changes that have been necessary over the course of the scheme. It could have provided guidance when there were problems with partners not delivering; addressed specific problems, such as the loss of the website, by drawing in expertise and resources from partner organisations; provided better co-ordination of access and interpretation proposals; and brought projects and partners together, to add value and share best practice.

Delivery partners, however, reported that they had co-operated well at a practical level on project delivery. They said that there was continuous communication between officers on the ground, who constantly worked together to resolve issues and deliver projects.

Sustainability of the Sefton Coast Partnership

The budget cuts at the beginning of the scheme are part of the reason that the SCP was not as active as it could have been. Although it has been a difficult time for the SCLP scheme because of the lack of resources, the corollary is that the SCLP programme has helped to achieve the continuation of the operation of the SCP. The delivery of the SCLP scheme has maintained a focus for its operation and the SCP now appears to have been re-invigorated. The SCP has recently changed its name to the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership, perhaps reflecting the desire to maintain the impetus of the Landscape Partnership.

Impacts and benefits for heritage, people and communities

Heritage

- The SCLP scheme raised the profile of the history and archaeology of the coast and engaged new audiences in archaeology surveys and exploring local military history.

- New records of the Formby footprints were made.

- Two new booklets were published: "The Prehistoric Footprints at Formby" and "Forgotten Fort Crosby – Dune Heritage Revealed".

- The culture, tradition and history of Formby agriculture was explored and interpreted through the Asparagus Trail project.

- The Sefton Coast Woodland Plan was revised in consultation with stakeholders.

- Freshfield dune heath is better managed and Sand Lizards were re-introduced.

- New ponds and scrapes created as part of the dune wetlands project already have breeding Natterjack toads.

- 18ha of sand dune habitat were improved at Birkdale Hills.

- Two strategic footpath projects linked communities at Marshside and Ainsdale to the coast.

- A new boardwalk installed at the Ainsdale Sand Dunes National Nature Reserve (NNR) improved accessibility for people with disabilities, elderly people and young families.

- The Asparagus Trail provided improved physical access over 1km and provided new interpretation and information about the cultural heritage of the area.

- Access to information and interpretation on heritage was provided on the routes via sculptures, panels, leaflets and events.
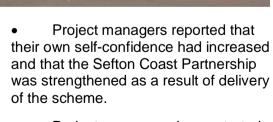
People

- There was more volunteering activity throughout the programme than anticipated, contributing volunteer time worth £49,500 in-kind above the original figure stated for the scheme.

- Some projects benefitted more from engaging volunteers instead of employing contractors, such as the dune scrub project with the 'Natural Alternatives' group and the NNR boardwalk construction, which involved local youth groups.

- Volunteers developed skills in a range of disciplines, including archaeology, path construction, woodland management, scrub clearance, leading walks, oral history, wildlife survey and monitoring.

- 89% of volunteers said they know more about coastal management as a result of volunteering.

- 86% of volunteers reported that their skills have increased as a result of volunteering;

- All volunteers reported benefits from engaging in the programme, including increased knowledge and practical skills; active way of life/exercise, fresh air/being out in the open, meeting/chatting to other people; and being able to pass on knowledge/skills to others.

- Project managers reported that their own self-confidence had increased and that the Sefton Coast Partnership was strengthened as a result of delivery of the scheme.

- Project managers demonstrated the skills and experience needed to deliver projects, and often a passion for their subject that ensured they were delivered to a high standard.

Communities

- More people were engaged through the annual events programme that ran from 2011 to 2015, which included 175 LP team events, attended by 3033 adults and 1347 children; and a further 171 events were organised by partners, totalling 346 events.

- Two coastal festivals provided a focus for events and partner activities and raised the profile of SCLP.

- Partners reported increased awareness amongst the public of the Sefton Coast Partnership, with more respect for, and understanding of, the landscape.

- Engagement of local communities and stakeholders was crucial to the success of revising the Sefton Coast Woodlands Plan, with 1,523 people attending 79 events.

- The Asparagus Trail involved the families of the people who established asparagus farming in the area, exploring and celebrating the cultural heritage of the people and the traditions.

- The practical input of local communities and volunteers was essential for the delivery of the Birkdale dune scrub removal and the installation of the boardwalk at Ainsdale NNR.

- The paths at Ainsdale and Marshside linked these two communities to the coast, which provides an opportunity for a greater sense of ownership and value.

- The Ainsdale NNR information centre enabled use by groups and can act as a 'stepping stone' for some groups to build confidence and further explore the wider coast.

- Social media has provided a broader and quicker way of promoting the coast. The Sefton Coast Facebook page has more than 5,000 weekly reach and a Twitter following of 2,700.

Lessons Learnt

A SCLP Steering Group could have continued to play an important role in managing the programme, addressing specific problems, co-ordinating projects and enabling partners to add value and share best practice.

The Programme Manager spent a lot of time in the first year delivering capital projects, which meant there was less time to engage with the community from the outset.

The LP team managed additional projects so had less time for strategic programme management, which is a concern when combined with the lack of governance from a SCLP steering group in the latter stages of the scheme.

Efficient claims and reporting procedures need to be established early in the scheme delivery. Formal training days at the start of the scheme would have been useful. More flexibility for budget spend within projects would help to reduce the reporting requirements.

Administrative and/or financial staff support could have freed up LP team time and maintained efficient reporting procedures.

The time required for achieving consents for working in protected areas should have been programmed in at an early stage, allowing for seasonal and other constraints.

The inclusion of a dedicated project manager would have benefitted the archaeology projects.

More work in the development phase could have helped to test volunteer involvement in specific projects, such as recording footprints.

The amount of time needed to support volunteers during the delivery phase was underestimated for some projects.

Volunteer training programmes need to be carefully designed and could be tested during the development phase.

A dedicated website throughout the scheme delivery would have provided an important communication tool.

Setting outputs and indicators and an evaluation framework at the start would have assisted in measuring progress throughout and at the end of the scheme.