



Habitats and Hillforts

Habitats and Hillforts Evaluation



Final evaluation of the Habitats and Hillforts
of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme 2008 - 2012



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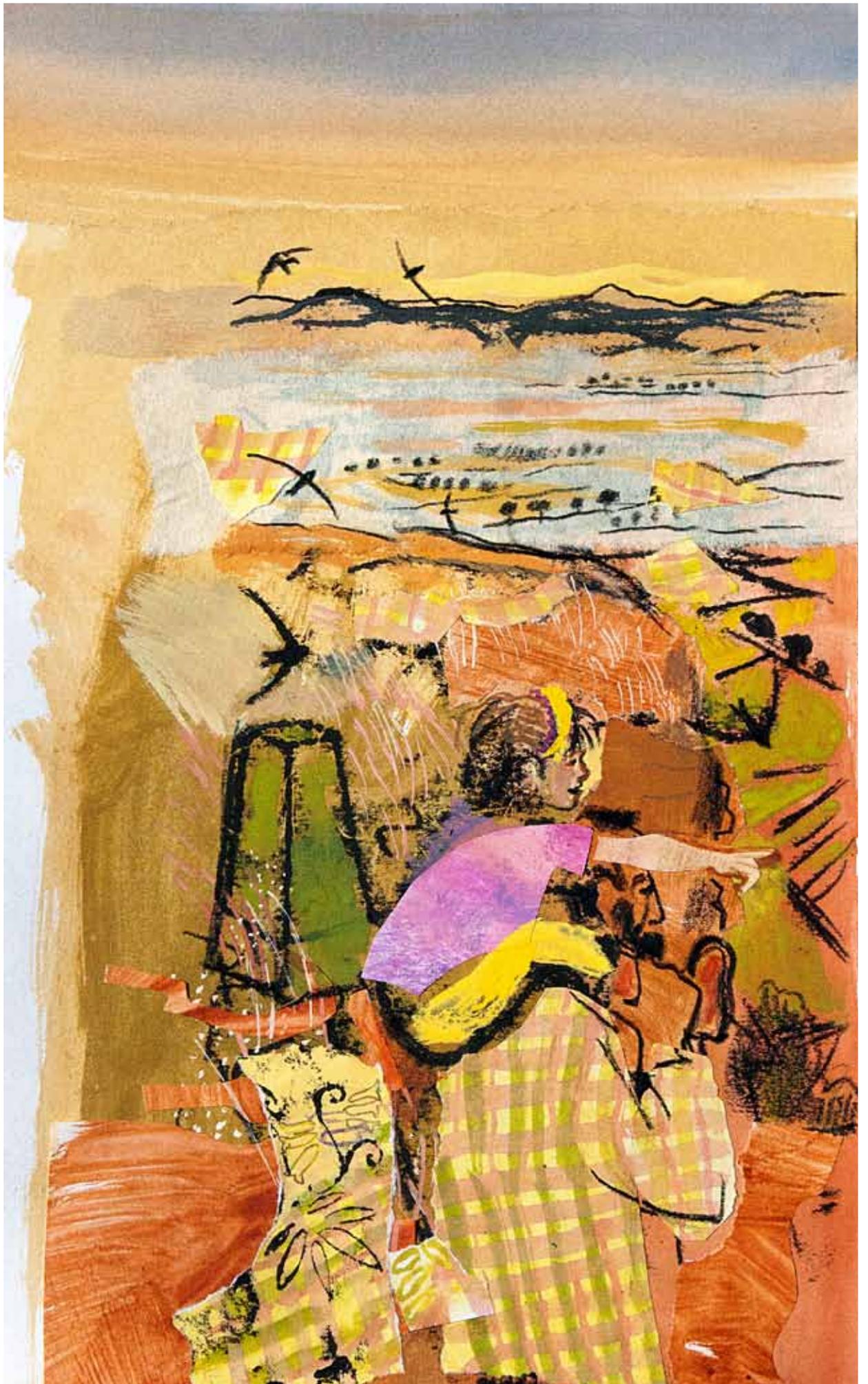
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BACKGROUND

The Landscape Partnership Programme is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and aims to conserve areas of distinctive landscape character across the UK. The Habitats and Hillforts Partnership was awarded £1.4m by HLF in 2007. HLF's contribution was complemented by cash contributions of £206,000 from local sources plus £568,000 worth of in-kind contributions from partners and volunteers.

The Scheme focussed on six iron-age hillforts found on the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge, together with the management zones surrounding them. These zones provide a variety of habitats including woodland, heath and wetland side by side with what is now productive farmland. The Sandstone Ridge is the most prominent landscape feature in Cheshire. Though small in comparison with the neighbouring hills of North Wales and the Peak District, it is significant because it stands right in the middle of the Cheshire Plain. The Ridge was important to past inhabitants who were looking for a safe and fertile environment to make their home.

The 'landscape' which the Scheme set out to conserve is much more than just a pretty view. It is everything that makes up the area: rocks and soils, vegetation that grows on the land and the wildlife that lives there. The landscape also tells the story of what happened in the past, and things that are

happening today. Landscape is what makes a place special to people: it's defined by the way we feel and the memories we have. To reflect all these elements the Scheme set itself six goals. To:

- Conserve the hillforts
- Restore and extend natural habitats
- Make it easier for people to access the hillforts
- Help local people and visitors learn about the Sandstone Ridge
- Involve local communities in the work of the Partnership
- Provide opportunities for people to volunteer their time and take part in training events.

Programmes of work

Activities were delivered through four programmes of work:

- Habitats of the Ridge – improving the semi-natural habitats around the hillforts.
- Hillforts of the Ridge – aiming to learn more about the hillforts and use that new understanding to help us manage and protect them in the future.
- Access and Interpretation - encouraging people to visit the hillforts and understand what special places they are, and to improve the routes people use to reach these sites.
- Training, Education and Volunteers - involving local people in the work of the partnership

PRINCIPAL OUTPUTS

Habitats

- Restoration of 6 ha of lowland dry acid grassland, 4 ha of lowland heathland, 12 ha of lowland mixed deciduous woodland and 52 ha of mere
- Restoration of 8 km hedgerow and the repair and restoration of 6 km of dry stone wall
- 350 trees planted at Willington near Kelsall and to the south of Bickerton Hill, at Duckington
- 60 bat boxes installed at Delamere Golf Course and at Beeston
- A contribution towards the construction of two bird hides and support for conservation grazing initiatives using Carneddau ponies and Longhorn cattle.

Hillforts

- Excavations at four of the six hillforts
- A LiDAR survey of the whole Ridge and a number of smaller scale geophysical surveys which reveal underground archaeological features
- A number of 'field walks' resulting in various archaeological finds
- A comprehensive set of publications which capture all that has been discovered
- Management reviews for Helsby, Woodhouse, Kelsborrow and Eddisbury, drawing on what has been learnt and highlighting archaeological issues which need to be addressed in the future
- Management works at the hillforts including control of bracken, gorse and rhododendron, Drystone wall and fencing repair and rabbit burrow reinstatement.

Access

- 8.4 km of improved footpaths
- 10 km of new bridleway established
- 0.3 km of access for the disabled created.

Interpretation

- Traditional interpretive media: seven on-site interpretive panels, 14 leaflets and self guided trails, a community history project, and a programme of talks and guided walks
- Digital media: six portable touch screen kiosks, plus the website www.habitatsandhillforts.co.uk
- A range of events, including an 'artist in residence' and a new theatre production "Forgotten Fortress"; a three-day festival; annual networking events and the ground-breaking 'Hillfort Glow'.

Training, education and volunteers

- 374 training / activity days, which provided over 5,000 'people-days' of engagement with the Scheme.
- Working with 112 primary schools (involving 2,675 pupils), two secondary schools and three university groups (involving more than 100 students)
- Construction of a replica Iron Age Roundhouse and a mock archaeological dig.



OVERALL ASSESSMENT: OUTCOMES AND LEGACY

The Scheme has undoubtedly been a great success. Most of the targets agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund have been met, and in several instances considerably exceeded. Resources have been managed in a responsible way, and overall value for money has been delivered. The work programmes were well balanced, and impact was achieved by concentrating on the management zones around the hillforts, rather than delivering a more diluted programme across the whole of the Sandstone Ridge. The scheme was delivered in a flexible way which allowed additional unanticipated benefits to be delivered.

The scheme's legacy includes:

- The way it encouraged people of different ages and backgrounds to engage with the Hillforts area. People have become more aware of what's on their doorstep, and identify more strongly with their local heritage. A new community of like minded people has been brought together as a result of the Scheme's volunteer and training programme
- Improvements that have been made on the Ridge itself. Wildlife habitats are in better condition and four of the hillforts are no longer considered to be 'at risk'. The area is better interpreted and accessibility has been improved
- An improved understanding of the Ridge and its past
- Better working relations between the organisations and individuals who have been involved in the partnership
- Those who own and manage land on the Ridge have developed a greater sense of pride and understanding of the heritage which they are responsible for, which bodes well for the future.

These improvements won't necessarily last for ever, but the scheme has set in place mechanisms which will help in the longer term:

- A management and maintenance plan has been agreed covering the next ten years. This will be resourced by a legacy fund of £60,000
- Land-owners have signed up to a range of management agreements. Potentially sustainable land management approaches (for example the use of grazing herds of ponies and cattle) will maintain some habitats in favourable condition for the foreseeable future
- The Sandstone Ridge Trust, established in 2011, will build on the work of the Habitats and Hillforts scheme.

Some lessons learnt and issues for the future

- Despite the improvements delivered by the Partnership, priority habitats along the ridge are still highly fragmented and many species may struggle to survive as we face changes to the climate in coming decades
- The scheme may have missed an opportunity in choosing from the outset to work mostly with sections of society who have a track record of involvement in heritage activities, rather than working also with more 'hard-to-reach' groups
- The scheme did not set out to make an overt contribution to the local economy. One way of sustaining heritage is to identify ways in which wildlife and heritage can support enterprise, and so help secure their own future
- The scheme achieved some very favourable media coverage, but more might have been achieved if the staff team had included someone with a communication brief
- The landscape partnership programme at a national level needs to develop a more sophisticated and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation, which would enable it better to demonstrate its value
- The time and energy needed to negotiate permissions to work on scheduled archaeological sites should never be underestimated.

THE HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

The Heritage Lottery Fund distributes money raised by the National Lottery to support projects involving the national, regional and local heritage of the United Kingdom. The Landscape Partnership programme, which was launched in 2004, is the only HLF grant programme specifically focused on the countryside. Schemes are delivered by a partnership of organisations which have a stake in an area of distinctive landscape character. A partnership will typically include local authorities, statutory agencies (for example English Heritage and the Forestry Commission), NGOs (such as the National Trust, the Woodland Trust and Wildlife Trusts) and community organisations.

Each scheme comprises a portfolio of smaller projects, which are selected to complement each other.

Applications for funding are assessed through a two stage process. The first-round is competitive, with decisions made at a national level by HLF trustees. If a scheme is successful at round one it receives funding to support development work over the following 12-18 months. The full award of funds is given once the second-round submission has been approved by the relevant regional or country committee.

To date HLF has awarded funds to more than 60 Landscape Partnerships, each of which has received between £500k and £2 million (amounting to around 60% of total costs).

PROGRAMME AIMS

The Landscape Partnership programme has evolved over time. In 2007 when the Habitats and Hillforts Scheme received its 'stage one' pass schemes were required to deliver evenly across four programme outcomes:

- *To conserve or restore the built and natural features that create the historic character of the landscape*
- *To conserve and celebrate the cultural associations and activities of the landscape area*
- *To encourage more people to access, learn about, become involved in and make decisions on their landscape heritage*
- *To improve understanding of local craft and other skills by providing training opportunities.*

Since 2007 the focus of the programme has changed. What has not changed is that works must primarily be for public benefit, not private gain; that schemes must actively engage local communities; and they should support the local social, environmental and economic agenda.

Map showing the location of landscape partnerships which were awarded funds by HLF between 2004 and 2012



LANDSCAPE

One way of looking at landscape is in terms of scale: 'landscape' projects can be contrasted with 'site-based' projects in that they set out to make an impact over a wide area - in the case of Landscape Partnerships this has been defined as an area of between 20 and 200 km². Working across a wider area will nearly always involve engaging with a number of different landowners (both private and institutional), with different communities, and with a range of interests. A partnership approach is very important when seeking to address such complexities.

The landscape of a given area is the result of a whole range of factors, including for example geology, soils, land cover and history. But landscape is more than just the sum of a number of different locations and 'facts'. Landscape and its impact on us is something intensely personal: it's defined by our experience and by our (sometimes) shared memories of a place. The landscape is where we live and work, or where we choose to visit. Landscape encapsulates what it is that makes everywhere special.

An overarching concern for nature conservationists in Britain is the extent to which different habitats have

been fragmented, and of how or whether these can be re-connected in ways which will allow species and ecosystems to adapt to our changing climate. This challenge can only be addressed if we think at a landscape scale. Archaeologists also can only properly understand and manage our archaeological heritage when individual sites are seen in the context of the wider historic landscape. We only start to imagine how people on hillforts lived and thought when we consider the wider world as they saw it.

The UK is signatory to the European Landscape Convention (ELC), committing us firstly to the goal of protecting and managing all landscapes, and secondly to raising awareness of the value of living and changing landscapes. HLF's Landscape Partnership programme and the ELC share the same philosophy, of seeking to understand our landscape heritage and to manage landscape change in a way which respects the past while also meeting the needs of the future.

The Landscape Convention also provides us with a useful and widely accepted definition of landscape:

"An area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and /or human factors".



The view north from Helsby Hill

THIS EVALUATION

A condition of HLF funding is that Landscape Partnership schemes need to carry out an end-of-scheme evaluation. The HLF guidance on evaluation summarises the aims of evaluation as “proving” (that resources have been well spent, ambitions achieved) and “improving” (capturing lessons learnt through the experience of delivering the programme). The Habitats and Hillforts Scheme appointed David Mount of the Countryside Training Partnership to undertake this evaluation, following a competitive tendering process undertaken in June 2012.

In addition to meeting HLF requirements, we hope this evaluation will prove to be of interest and value to those who have been involved with the Habitats and Hillforts scheme, and also to those who will continue with this sort of work on the Sandstone Ridge in the future. While there is an element of judgement and criticism in an evaluation process, for those involved in the scheme it can also provide a lot of positive feedback. A good evaluation helps people to take stock of what they have achieved, it assesses the legacy which has been created, and perhaps most importantly identifies, and helps motivate, ways in which activities might be carried forward. The most useful evaluations are concerned with celebration as much as they are with judgement, and with looking forward as much as with looking back.

Evaluation of a complex, multi project scheme like Habitats and Hillforts presents some specific challenges. We have looked across the full range of activities which the scheme has undertaken, looking not only at the measurable outputs of the Scheme but also the longer term and less tangible outcomes.

The process adopted

This evaluation was carried out over the summer of 2012. The initial phase of the work was a process of familiarisation: finding out who was involved and the overall scope of activities. As well as some initial meetings with the project team, we reviewed plans and reports which have w logged activity over the last four years.

A formal launch of the evaluation process was held on 19th July at Castle Park in Frodsham. This event was extremely well attended, by project staff, colleagues from Cheshire West and Chester Council, individuals representing organisations who make up the Partnership and the steering group, training providers, the principal interpretation contractor, volunteers involved in the archaeological digs and a number of other interested parties. At the launch we explained the purpose and approach to this evaluation, and those who attended took part in some useful workshop discussions which provided a mass of useful information about the programme and the way people had responded to it.

Following the launch we reviewed a good deal of paperwork, including the original proposals submitted to HLF; “output data” showing what was planned by the scheme in January 2009, and what had been delivered by Jan. 2011 and by July 2012; and progress and finance reports submitted to HLF throughout the life of the scheme. Publicly available information, including of course the Habitats and Hillforts website, also provided a lot of information about what was going on.

A programme of useful meetings were then organised with the staff team, partners, colleagues working for CWAC, those involved in developing the Cheshire Ridge Trust and others, including attendance at the final Steering Group meeting held on 14th August.

Finally it was of course important to get out on site, to appreciate the feel of the landscape, to visit the hillforts and surrounding management zones, and to have a look at some of the Scheme’s outputs.

Delegates at the evaluation launch held on 19th July 2012



THE HABITATS AND HILLFORTS SCHEME

WHAT THE SCHEME SET OUT TO ACHIEVE

Six strategic objectives were identified for the Habitats and Hillforts Scheme:

- Conserving the hillforts and any associated features in the vicinity
- Restoring and increasing the extent of natural habitats in the vicinity of the forts.
- Making the hillforts more accessible by improving footpath access where appropriate and linking them to the Sandstone Trail
- Interpreting the historical landscape, the natural habitats and the management work which is being carried out to enhance them
- Involving the local communities of the parishes in which the hillforts are located and from a wider area
- Providing appropriate volunteering and training opportunities

To deliver against these strategic objectives the Scheme managed its work under four programmes, each comprised of a number of different projects:

- *'Habitats of the Ridge'* - aiming to enhance the semi-natural habitats in the vicinity of the hillforts
- *'Hillforts of the Ridge'* - aiming to conserve the hillforts themselves
- *'Access and Interpretation'* - aiming to enhance the interpretation and physical and intellectual access to these areas
- *'Training, Education and Volunteers'* - aiming to involve local communities through enhanced education and training opportunities.

As a result of the very nature of the Scheme these strategic objectives and programme areas were not discrete – most projects contributed to more than one of the Scheme's objectives.

THE CHESHIRE SANDSTONE RIDGE AND ITS HILLFORTS

The mid-Cheshire Sandstone Ridge runs north-south across the Cheshire plain for a distance of about 30 km between Frodsham in the north and Bickerton in the south. The Ridge is irregular and reaches only modest heights - 123m (400 feet) at Helsby in the north and 227m (750 feet) in the Peckforton Hills to the south. Despite its modest proportions the Ridge however is very prominent, as it rises up sharply from the plain.

The key characteristics of the Ridge landscape are:

- The sandstone ridge itself with outcrops and upstanding bluffs, forming a distinctive landmark and providing spectacular long distance views across Cheshire and beyond towards Wales, the Peak District and Shropshire
- High density woodland compared with the rest of Cheshire, mostly of ancient woodland and post medieval conifer plantations
- The largest areas of surviving lowland heath in Cheshire
- Low density dispersed farms
- Sandstone buildings, boundary walls and sunken lanes.

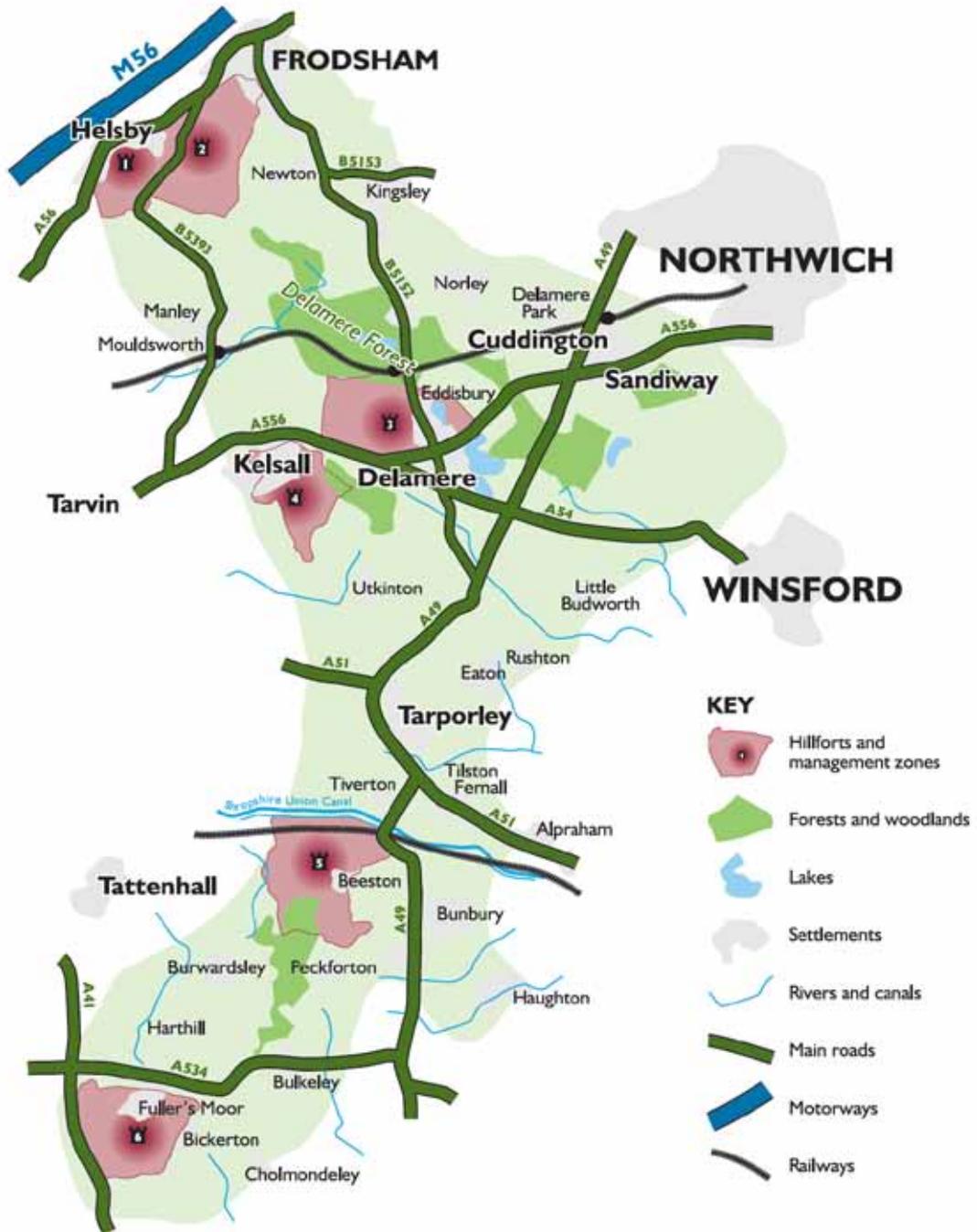
Specific features include:

- Six iron age hillforts with surviving earthworks
- Historic halls at Utkinton and Peckforton Castle
- Industrial archaeological remains such as sandstone quarries and copper mines.

The Ridge has been described as the pre-eminent landscape feature in Cheshire. It has had a significant impact on the cultural, social and environmental history and character of the county, and in particular played an important part in the early settlement and defence of the area.

The Habitats And Hillforts Scheme Area, showing the scheduled hillforts and wider management zones.

The blue line marks the boundary of the Sandstone Ridge ECOnet Partnership



The Sandstone Ridge as a whole, encompassing approximately 220 km², has been identified as a National Character Area (NCA area no. 62 – the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge) by the Countryside Agency / Natural England:

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/cheshire_sandstone_ridge.aspx

THE HABITATS AND HILLFORTS SCHEME

THE HABITATS AND HILLFORTS SCHEME AREA

The Habitats and Hillforts scheme focused on six hillforts together with their surrounding 'management zones'. The Scheme identified these six management zones as representing some of the most valuable environmental, heritage and recreational resources along the Sandstone Ridge, suggesting they were "an underutilised heritage resource". The area of the hillforts themselves is approximately 2 km², while the management zones together cover something like 32 km². With one notable exception (a 2 km permissive path through Peckforton Woods) site based project work has all been located within these management zones.

The Six Hillforts

Two of the hillforts (Helsby Hill and Maiden Castle) are owned by the National Trust; two (Eddisbury Hill and Kelsborrow Castle) are in private ownership; Beeston Castle is managed by English Heritage under a 99 year lease from Peckforton Estate; and Woodhouse Hillfort is partly in private ownership and partly owned by the Woodland Trust.

Ecological assessments and archaeological condition surveys were carried out on all six hillforts during the Scheme's development phase. The archaeological

surveys suggested that five of the six hillforts were in the 'high risk category' and consequently in particular need of active management. Principal threats include agricultural activities (for example ploughing and the passage of farm vehicles, pasture improvement works, trampling by stock), vegetation growth (trees, rhododendron, gorse, other scrub species and bracken), damage by animals (rabbits, badgers and moles), and visitor erosion.

Access

Access by visitors to Maiden Castle, Helsby Hill and Woodhouse Hillfort is good, and a right of way runs along the eastern edge of Kelsborrow Castle. There is no statutory right of way access to Eddisbury Hill, although the owner welcomes organised visits and local school groups. Visitors who are not members of English Heritage pay a fee of £5.70 to visit Beeston Castle.

Designated sites

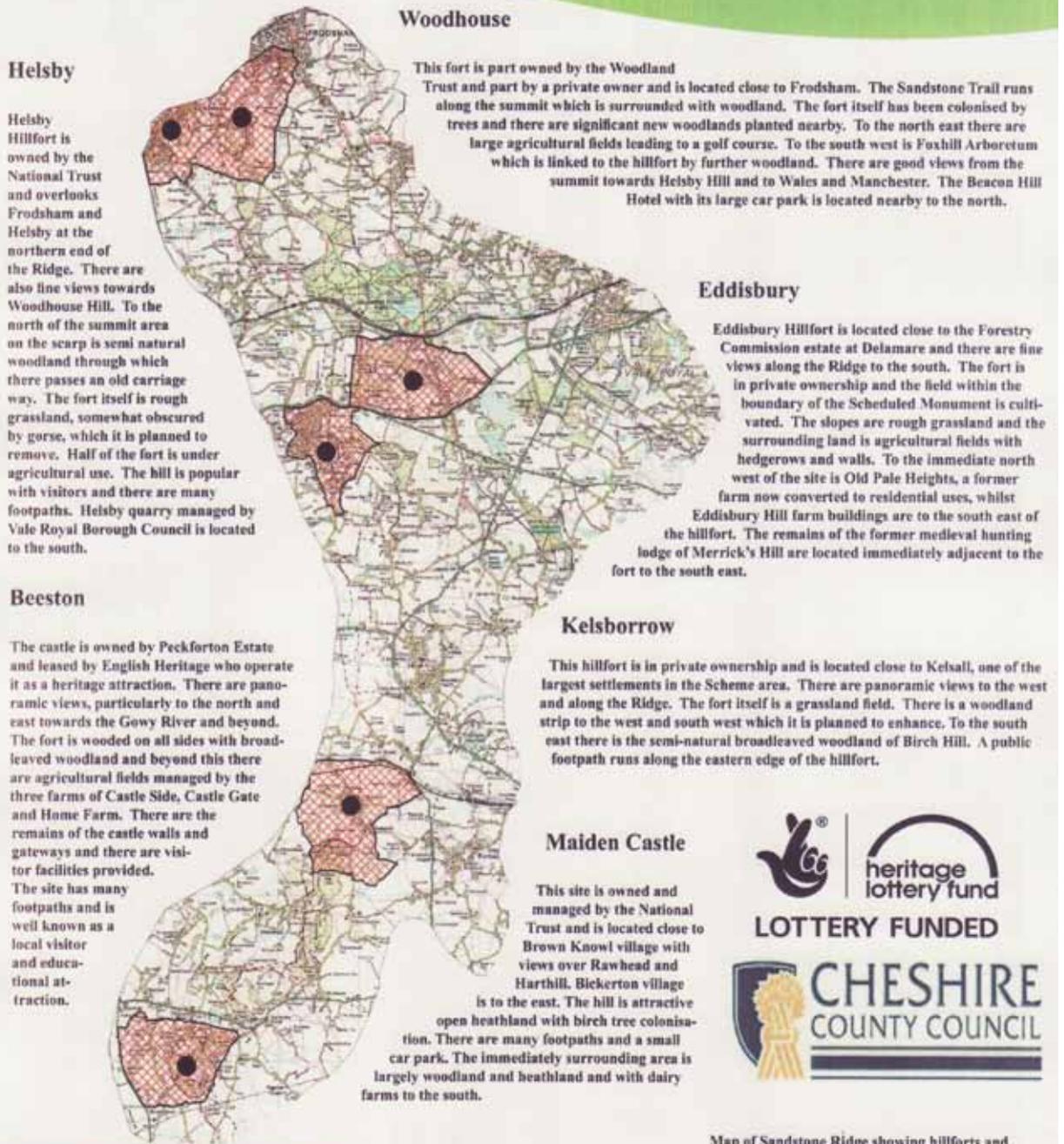
All six hillforts are designated as Scheduled Monuments, and Maiden Castle is also included in the Bickerton Hill SSSI. Helsby Quarry (within the Helsby Hill management zone) is designated as a local nature reserve. Cheshire boasts 490 local wildlife sites ("Sites of Biological Importance") of which about 60 are on the Sandstone Ridge.



Landscape change is nothing new: Beeston Crag, once the site of a hillfort was completely changed by later occupation of the site and the construction of a medieval castle upon the hilltop.

This map and the descriptions of the hillforts is taken from a publication produced by the scheme in 2008, before project delivery commenced.

Habitats and Hillforts



Map of Sandstone Ridge showing hillforts and management zones
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THE HABITATS AND HILLFORTS SCHEME

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHEME

Previous initiatives on the Sandstone Ridge

The Sandstone Ridge has been of heritage and recreation interest for many years. The two most significant forerunners of the Habitats and Hillforts Landscape Partnership were the Cheshire Sandstone Trail and the Sandstone Ridge EONet initiative.

The Cheshire Sandstone Trail

In 1974 a 34-mile long distance walk was created between Frodsham, close to the Mersey Estuary, and Whitchurch, in Shropshire. This provides a route along much of the sandstone ridge, using a mix of statutory rights of way and concessionary routes. The Trail has been promoted by some as a three day family walk, but (as is the case with most middle and long distance walks) most users enjoy much shorter excursions on sections of the Trail. The trail ranger, previously employed by Cheshire West and Chester Council, recently retired and as a result of current financial cutbacks has not been replaced. This has caused considerable disquiet amongst trail users and a number of the landscape partnership stake-holders

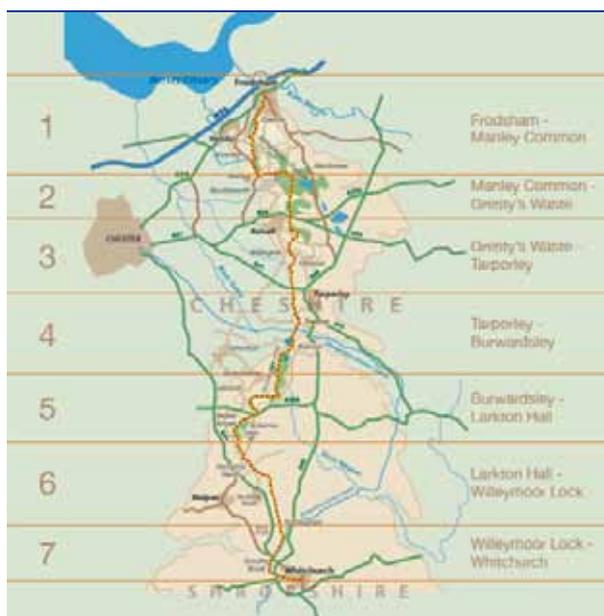
The Sandstone Ridge EONet

The idea of an ecological network along the Sandstone Ridge was conceived in the mid 1990s. During the period 1999 – 2003 the LIFE EONet project was awarded funds under the EU's LIFE-

Environment Programme, with the aim of demonstrating how ecological networks can help achieve more sustainable land use planning and management, as well as overcoming the problems of habitat loss, fragmentation and species isolation. This was the only ecological network initiative in the UK at this time, and it received widespread recognition and praise across Europe. The initiative was show-cased by the Local Government Association at the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002. Some stake-holders (see 'Outcomes and Issues' below) have suggested that the project achieved rather more in terms of highlighting the challenges of climate adaptation and habitat fragmentation than it did in terms of actually addressing the ecological issues on the Ridge.



The Sandstone Ridge EONet Partnership Board (SREP) first met in August 2005 with an agreed vision "Action to improve the landscape for people and wildlife 2005-10". The Habitats and Hillforts Landscape Partnership built on and expanded the remit of SREP.

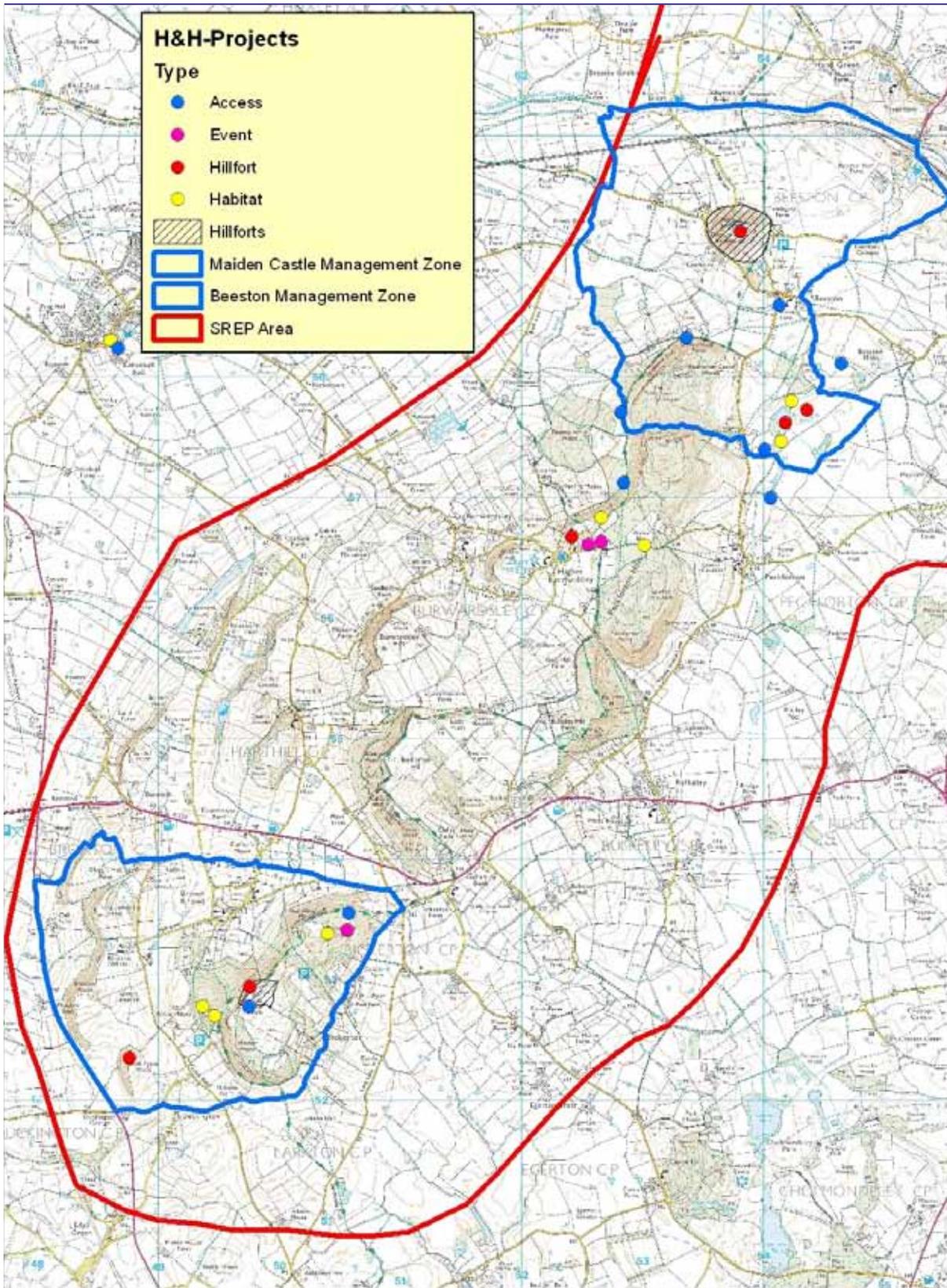


Route of the Cheshire Sandstone Trail

TIMELINE FOR HABITATS AND HILLFORTS

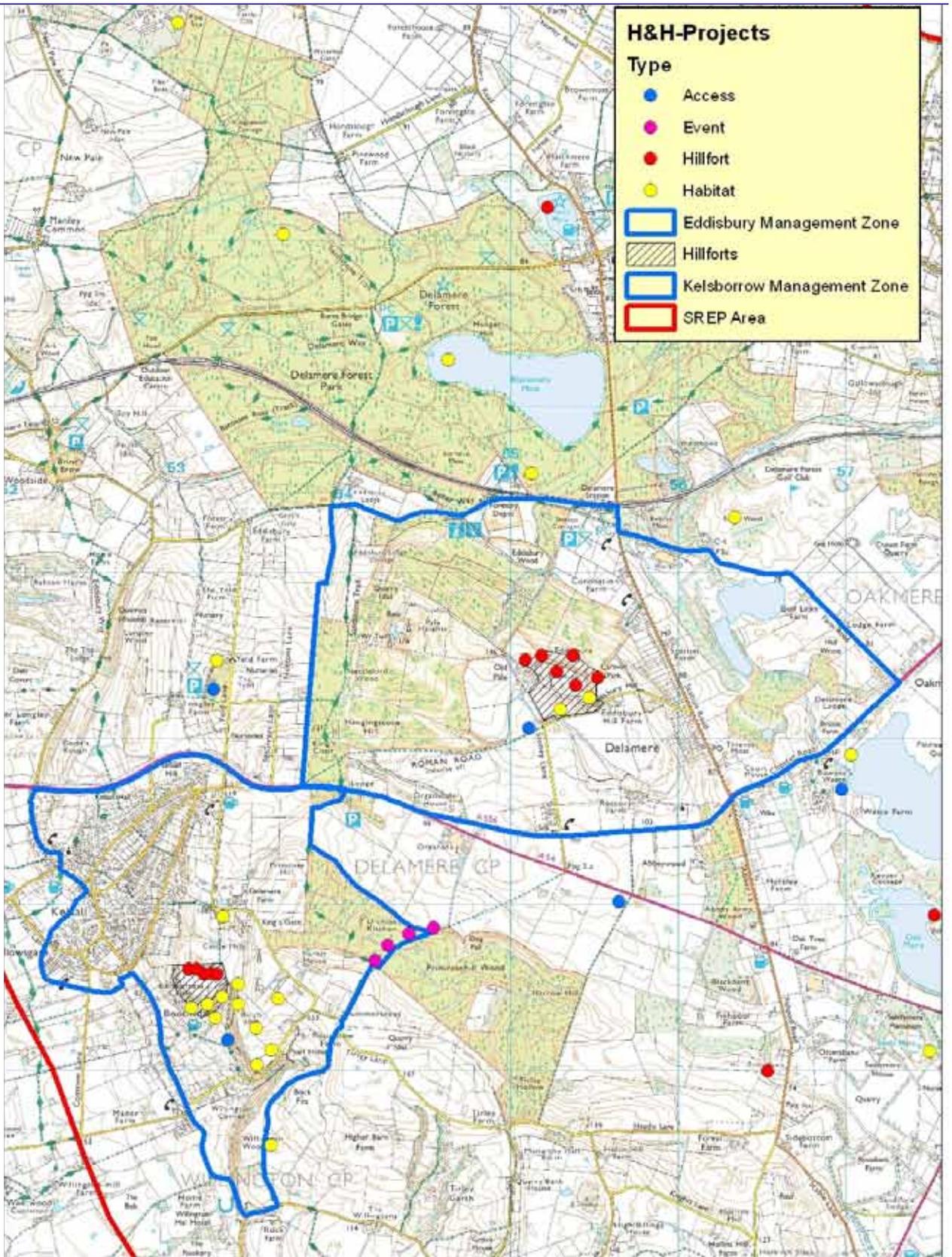
- An initial Stage 1 application was submitted to HLF in 2005. This scheme covered the entire ECONet area / National Character Area 62, but the application was turned down by the HLF trustees in 2006. One reason for this was that the size (220 km²) exceeded the maximum allowed under the Landscape Partnership programme at that time (200 km²). It was also felt that the application focussed too much on archaeology and not enough on habitats.
- A fresh application was submitted in the autumn of 2006 and a Stage 1 pass was granted in April 2007. HLF awarded the Partnership development funding of £52,600, which - together with a contribution from Cheshire County Council - paid for the work required to produce a detailed Stage 2 submission.
- Following a year of development work the Stage 2 submission was submitted in March 2008, and an HLF award of £1,394,000 was announced in June 2008. The total Scheme budget was £2,178,000. Cash contributions of £203,000 were provided by the two constituent local authorities: Cheshire County Council (£200,000) and Vale Royal Borough Council (£3,000). A further £3,000 was provided by the Mersey Forest Trust. The Partnership undertook to raise the balance of match funding (£568,000) through in-kind contributions (see 'Management and Finance' below).
- The three-year scheme commenced delivery in October 2008, with a launch event at Beeston Castle. A range of stakeholders, landowners and steering group members attended this event.
- Local government re-organisation meant that Cheshire County Council (lead partner and accountable body for the scheme) was abolished in April 2009. The lead role was taken on by a new unitary authority: Cheshire West and Chester Council. This administrative re-organisation appears to have had no major impact on delivery, although it created some issues for the staff team and resulted in the loss of support from the wider Cheshire County Council team quite early on in programme delivery.
- In September 2009, November 2010 and September 2011 well-attended annual progress events were held at Peckforton Castle, Willington Hall (near Kelsall) and at Castle Park (Frodsham).
- The finish date for the scheme was originally set as September 2011. It was recognised however during 2010 that keeping to this timetable would unnecessarily restrict what could be achieved with the allocated resources – not least because the contingency budget (£189,000) and the budget line to cover inflation (£88,000) remained largely unspent. An application was made to HLF to continue the scheme for a fourth year, and this extension was agreed in January 2011, meaning a revised end date of September 2012.
- In April 2012 the Scheme suffered an unwelcome and unexpected setback with the death of independent chair and project champion, Dr. Andrew Deadman.
- In October 2012 there will be an end-of-scheme event to celebrate all that has been achieved, and to review how work can best be continued and the Scheme's legacy safeguarded.

THE HABITATS AND HILLFORTS SCHEME

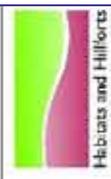
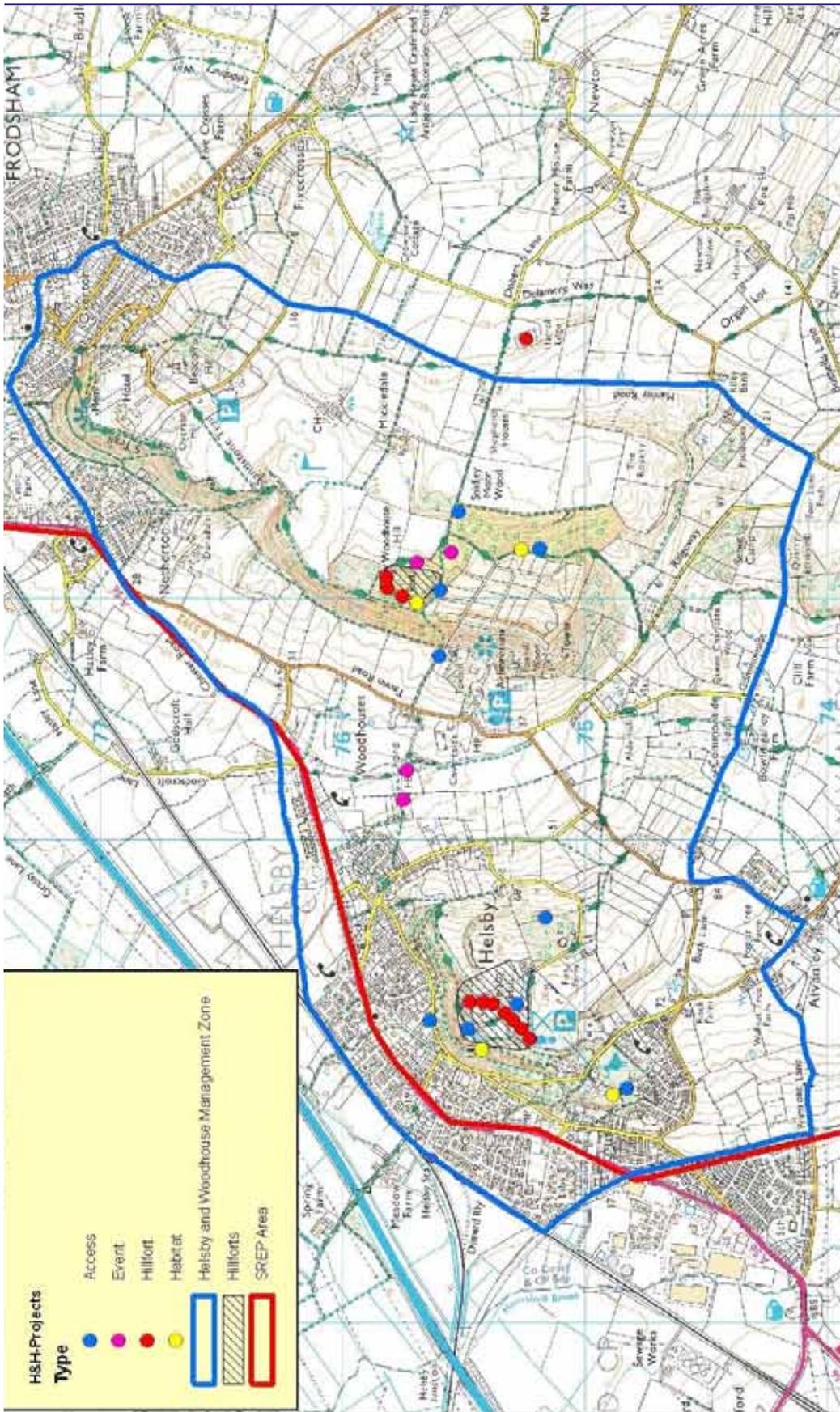


Project locations in and around the two management zones at the south end of the Ridge: Maiden Castle and Beeston

Project locations in and around the two management zones towards the centre of the Ridge: Kelsborrow and Eddisbury



THE HABITATS AND HILLFORTS SCHEME



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Project locations in and around the two management zones at the north end of the Ridge: Helsby and Woodhouse

HABITATS OF THE RIDGE: PURPOSE AND APPROACH

The goal of the habitats programme was to enhance the semi-natural habitats in the vicinity of the hillforts. This was to be achieved around all six hillforts through a combination of:

- Semi-natural woodland restoration, involving:
 - * Small scale native broadleaf planting to link existing woodland blocks, and so reverse current fragmentation
 - * Woodland management, including tree felling and thinning
- Restoring meres and mosses through water management and the removal of non-native species and scrub
- Restoration of areas of acid grassland through scrub and grassland management, including bracken, gorse and rhododendron control. Remnant acid grassland survives on the Ridge only in small patches – most grassland is species-poor having been fertilised and re-seeded
- Heathland creation – adding to the one significant area of lowland heath remaining in the area at Bickerton Hill (by Maiden Castle)
- Boundary restoration, including hedgerow restoration and drystone walling. These traditional field boundaries make an important contribution to the area's landscape character, and have suffered from gradual loss and lack of management both around agricultural fields and along woodland boundaries
- Ecological monitoring.

Roughly half of these habitat projects were carried out by contractors, and half carried out by volunteers involved in the training courses delivered by the Conservation Volunteers (TCV). The detailed work programme was developed in the light of ecological field and desk surveys carried out in 2007.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Restoration of 6.3 ha of lowland dry acid grassland on land which was previously unimproved grazing (a target of 5.6 ha was set at the outset)
- Restoration of 4 ha of lowland heathland, on land which was previously permanent pasture (5 ha target)
- Restoration of 11.5 ha of lowland mixed deciduous woodland on land which was previously improved grassland (11.8 ha target)
- Restoration of 52 ha of mere (15 ha predicted).
- Expansion of 2 ponds (5 predicted)
- Restoration of 7.7 km hedgerow (1.58 km predicted)
- Repair / restoration of 6.34 km of dry stone wall (0.39 km predicted)
- Installation of 6.34 km of new fencing (1.58 km predicted)
- 350 trees planted at Willington and at Rock cottage
- 60 bat boxes installed (at Delamere Golf Course and Beeston)
- Contribution to the installation of 2 bird hides at Bickerton Hill (Maiden Castle)
- Management plans completed for Boothsdale and Peckforton Mere
- 13 wildlife surveys (10 predicted)

From the list above it can be seen that most of the Scheme's original targets have been exceeded (in several instances to a considerable extent) but with some shortfalls. No progress was reported in respect of three targets:

- Expand lowland dry acid grassland by 1 ha
- Expand lowland mixed deciduous woodland by 1.26 ha
- Restoration of 5 ponds

HABITAT HIGHLIGHTS

Work at Peckforton Mere.

This was an ambitious project involving removal of non native tree species, 2,000m of new post and wire fencing and the installation of a impoundment structure / sluice to manage water levels. The outcome is an alternative long-term, low-input management regime which better reflects the natural processes of the catchment around the Mere. An additional benefit is that a Scheduled Monument has been taken out of arable production and is now under permanent grassland.

This project had a long lead in time, requiring an extensive period of negotiation with the Peckforton Estate, with Natural England regarding extension to a Higher Level Stewardship agreement, and with the Environment Agency concerning water tables. Delivery was accomplished through the involvement of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Ponies in support of heathland restoration

The Scheme helped with the purchase of a number of Carneddau ponies which the National Trust is using



Monitoring water levels at Peckforton Mere.

to graze the heath on Bickerton Hill. The ponies' presence is helping with the reversion of the ten acre field back to heath, and will be retained as a long term management tool. Sheep cannot be grazed here because there are too many visiting dogs, and managing the ponies in-house means the Trust is not dependent on the changing needs of a grazing tenant.

The arrival of Carneddau ponies (a breed which still lives in the wild in their native Carneddau Hills) attracted considerable media interest.



Ponies on Bickerton Hill

HABITAT HIGHLIGHTS

White-faced darter dragonfly



Meres and mosses restoration at Delamere

The meres and mosses project in and around Delamere Forest resulted in the restoration of meres at four sites within Delamere Forest (managed by the Forestry Commission) and four sites nearby (managed by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust). Targets were substantially exceeded, thanks in part to the involvement of Natural England and additional management work carried out by the Forestry Commission which counted as an in-kind contribution to the Scheme. One indicator of the success of these works in the longer term will be if they can support the re-introduction of the white-faced darter dragonfly to Delamere, a species which has become locally extinct.

Domino at work



Horse power forestry

A local contractor, Alan Williams of 'Horse Power Forestry' carried out logging works using his Clydesdale cross cob, Domino, at Bowyers Waste and at Willington. Horses are well suited to small or inaccessible woodland areas of this type because they can handle slopes and turns better and do less damage underfoot. There is also less noise disturbance to wildlife.

Longhorn cattle at Boothsdale



Conservation grazing

Working in partnership with local landowners and the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, who maintain a herd of Longhorn cattle for conservation grazing, the Scheme was instrumental in organising a new management regime on lowland meadow grassland in the Boothsdale valley (in the Kelsborrow Hillfort management zone). The steep terrain and invasion of Himalayan balsam meant that such grazing is the only viable way to retain the grassland mix.

PROGRAMME 2: 'HILLFORTS OF THE RIDGE'

HABITATS OF THE RIDGE: PURPOSE AND APPROACH

The goal of this programme was to conserve and improve understanding of the hillforts. During the Scheme's development phase desk-based and site-based condition assessments of the hillforts were carried out by specialist archaeological consultants. While a regional survey suggested that 15% of Scheduled Monuments in the North West of England are at high risk, these condition assessments suggested that in 2008 five of the six hillforts along the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge were in the high risk category, and so were in particular need of active management.

The principal activities under this programme were a series of excavations and surveys, together with management works to safeguard these sites. The excavations and surveys were not carried out just as an end in themselves, but a way firstly of engaging a range of people in archaeological fieldwork, enabling them to learn the basics of a number of archaeological techniques, and secondly to inform better management of these sites in the future.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Excavations at four of the six hillforts:

- Woodhouse (July 2009).
- Helsby (March 2010)
- Eddisbury (July 2010). This incorporated both training for Habitats and Hillforts volunteers and a separate 'Field School' training excavation for 80 students from Liverpool University.
- Kelsborrow (October 2011)
- Eddisbury Phase 2 (August 2011).

Excavations were not undertaken at Beeston or Maiden Castle as these sites had already been extensively dug. At Beeston Castle English Heritage already have things well in hand, and did not want any further invasive work carried out.

Other excavations were undertaken by the Scheme at Seven Lows Round Barrow cemetery (August 2012)



Part of the hachure plan of Woodhouse

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

A programme of non-intrusive surveys:

- Lidar (airborne laser scanning) survey of the whole Ridge. Costing £28,000 this was the single most expensive part of the whole scheme
- A number of geophysical surveys have revealed underground archaeological features without resorting to excavation, while topographic surveys have enabled the Scheme to draw up hachure plans of the forts (hachure is the standard way of displaying archaeological landscape data, indicating slope direction and steepness using a set of shaded lines as an alternative to contours)
- Field walking on Eddisbury Hill (2009, 2010 and 2011).

Publications and reports include:

- Management Reviews for Helsby, Woodhouse, Kelsborrow and Eddisbury which draw on the results of the excavation work and highlight potential archaeological issues for the future.
- Excavation reports which are being made available on-line via the Archaeological Data Service (<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk>)

- Digitised illustrations of excavation work
- A colour booklet aimed at the general reader covering the highlights of the archaeological work during the project.
- Specialist reports following collection of samples (such as pollen, macro-fossils, cremated bone, prehistoric lithics and prehistoric pottery)
- Interim reports for the Council for British Archaeology (North West) for each of the hillforts together with a self guided walk around Eddisbury.
- A final publication in the form of a British Archaeological Report (BAR) monograph will bring together all of the archaeological work completed as part of the project.

Management works at the hillforts included:

- Tree felling, thinning and removal from ramparts
- Bracken, gorse and other scrub control, rhododendron removal
- Drystone wall repair
- Fencing repair
- Rabbit burrow reinstatement
- Drystone walling at Eddisbury to 'interpret' the entrance way as excavated during July 2010.

Volunteers were involved in all aspects of survey and excavation work.

One management aspiration which was not achieved was arable reversion to grassland at Eddisbury. An unanticipated outcome however is that the Scheme facilitated the process whereby Peckforton Promontory Fort was been taken out of cultivation, and is now part of the Peckforton Estate Higher Level Stewardship agreement

One of the Scheme's publications

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT HELSBY HILLFORT (SM 25688)
EHDCMS Ref HSD 9/211078
REPORT No. MH007



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PROGRAMME 2: 'HILLFORTS OF THE RIDGE'

HILLFORT HIGHLIGHTS

Development of the archaeology volunteer group

Over the four years of the Scheme something like 200 volunteers have been involved in survey work and excavations. A committed core group have become particularly active and for some of these this involvement has been life changing. Three individuals are undertaking study at undergraduate or postgraduate level, as a result of their involvement, using the hillforts as a dissertation focus.

Finds from the excavations and field walks

These included many interesting bits of pottery and prehistoric flint tools, a complete Roman glass 'melon' bead, horse shoe and possible spur and most recently four early Bronze Age cremation urns.



Volunteers in action at a dig

"I would never have gone back to university if it weren't for Habitats and Hillforts"

Archaeology volunteer

"The volunteers worked really hard in poor conditions, with rudimentary or non-existent welfare facilities".

Andrew Deadman
Chair of the Landscape Partnership



Finds from the excavations and field walks

HILLFORT HIGHLIGHTS

The Ramparts at Woodhouse, now protected from possible root damage



Safeguarding Woodhouse Hillfort

The ramparts at Woodhouse Hillfort were being damaged by tree roots, but simply removing the trees would result in more regeneration, and possibly more bracken damage. The site is part owned by the Woodland Trust and this complicated matters as their mission is of course focussed around woodlands. The Scheme was able to come to a compromise with the Woodland Trust whereby trees were cleared from around the ramparts but woodland was retained elsewhere on the site. Now this regime has been established the Woodland Trust has incorporated new prescriptions into the site's management plan which will ensure longer term protection of the archaeological features.

New understanding of the past

The Scheme's investigations have resulted in new evidence which gives us better insight into what the hillforts would have looked like. This new knowledge has been incorporated into the Scheme's Interpretation programme, for example in reconstruction drawings of hillfort entrances

Eddisbury Hillfort



PROGRAMME 3: 'ACCESS & INTERPRETATION'

ACCESS & INTERPRETATION: 'PURPOSE AND APPROACH'

The goal of this programme was to enhance the physical and intellectual access to these areas, through improvements to rights of way and the provision of interpretation. The improved access provision and much of the interpretation is available to all, but the primary focus of the Scheme was local people rather than visitors from further afield.

An interpretive plan was drawn up at the outset, identifying a set of objectives, possible media and approaches to be adopted, and a set of interpretive themes to be addressed. The overall goal was to provide the means whereby local people, visitors and land-holders might better understand and appreciate the special qualities of this area, and (for example) to encourage responsible use of footpaths and bridleways.



ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Access works

- 8.4 km of footpath improved (a target of 4.1 km was set at the outset)
- 9.98 km of new bridleway established 0.7 km target)
- 0.3 km access for the disabled created (no target set)

These quantitative outputs cover a number of works, including:

- Footpath improvements (Helsby)
- Multi user route (Woodhouse)
- Bridleway access and permissive path (Peckforton)
- Disabled access route across the Yeld (common land between Eddisbury Hill and Kelsborrow Castle)
- Steps (Maiden Castle)
- Kissing gates (Maiden Castle, Delamere and Peckforton)
- Bridleway (Bickerton Hill)

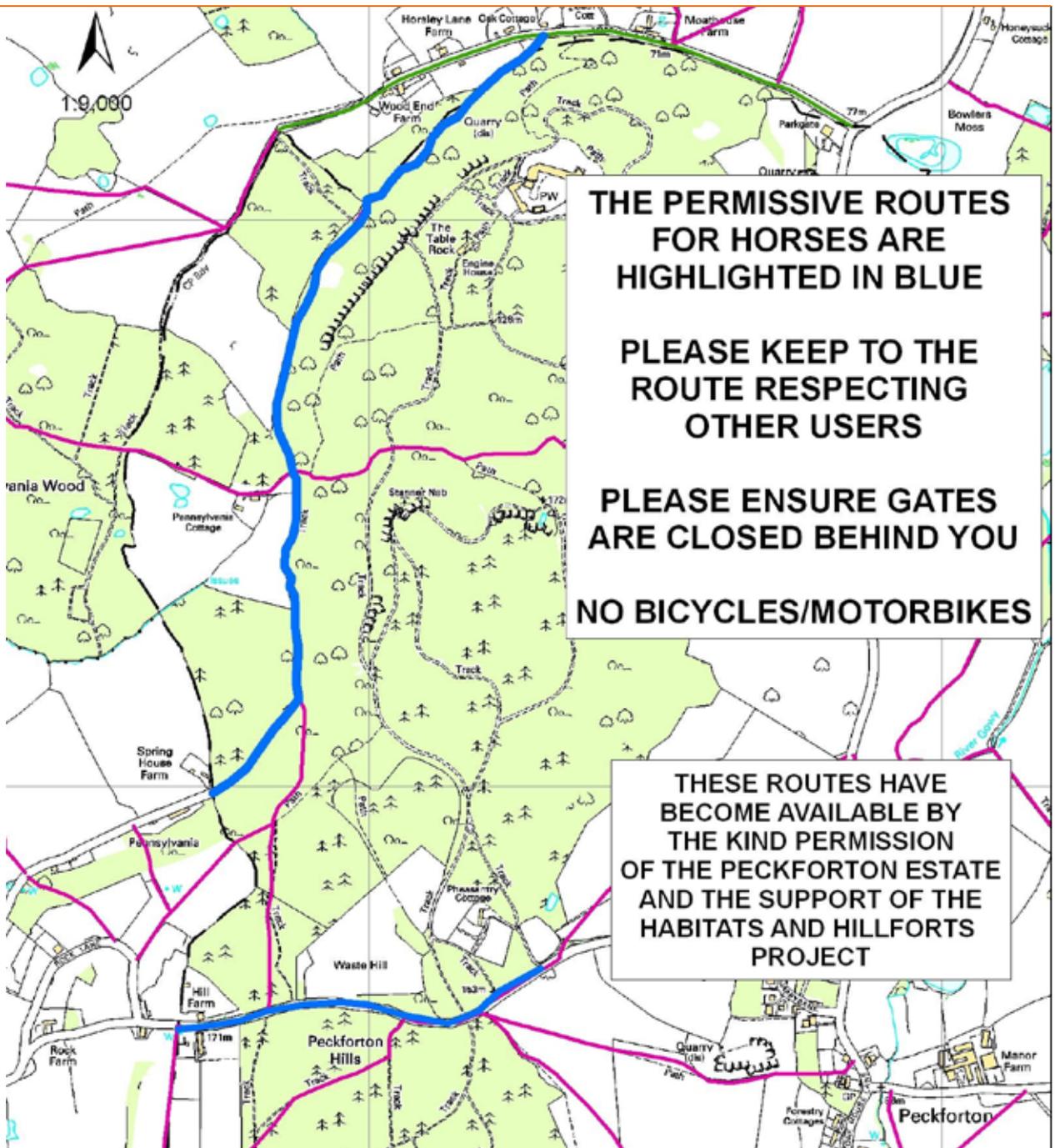
From the list above it can be seen that the Scheme's original access targets have been exceeded by a considerable extent

ACCESS HIGHLIGHT

One highlight of the Access work is a new permissive route for horse-riders through Peckforton Woods.

This route, established along an ancient trackway, has been established through a ten-year agreement with the Peckforton Estate. It is of particular value as it provides a means whereby horse-riders can cross the ridge without needing to use public roads

Sign board at each end of the new permissive route



PROGRAMME 3: 'ACCESS & INTERPRETATION'

INTERPRETATION

Interpretive provision was planned around nine different themes relating to geology, settlement, the people who lived here in both prehistoric and historic eras, the woodland heritage, and the ecological / nature conversation importance of unimproved grasslands, heathland and the meres and mosses.

A wide range of interpretive techniques were used (see table below). Some of these (in particular the artistic and other events) really caught people's imaginations; some of the 'traditional' media, by contrast, don't appear to be saying anything new (e.g. the habitats leaflets, telling a non site specific story told many times before).

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Traditional interpretive media

- Seven A0 on-site interpretive panels installed on sandstone plinths, two at Woodhouse plus one at each of the other hillforts
- 14 different interpretive leaflets – four self-guided circular walks leaflets, covering all six hillforts, four 'Habitats along Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge' leaflets and six hillfort leaflets - one for each of the Scheme's hillforts, with a different theme addressed in each one

Initial print runs were 5,000 for each of the habitats and archaeology leaflets, and 10,000 for each of the walks leaflets. A second print run of archaeology leaflets was commissioned

- Community history and reminiscence project which resulted in the publication 'Captured Memories'
- 35 talks given to local groups, and 29 guided walks
- Five Scheme newsletters have been produced – approximately every 8-10 months or so
- Exhibitions of the work being carried out by Habitats and Hillforts were put on at the Grosvenor Museum and the Weaver Hall Museum.

Digital media

- Six portable, touch screen kiosks
- Website: www.habitatsandhillforts.co.uk or www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/microsites/habitats_and_hillforts.aspx

This is a well designed, easy to navigate, good quality site, which has been kept up to date throughout the lifespan of the Scheme. The website includes a wealth of interesting material, including information about the four work programmes and individual projects as well as, for example, 15 podcasts and two short films.

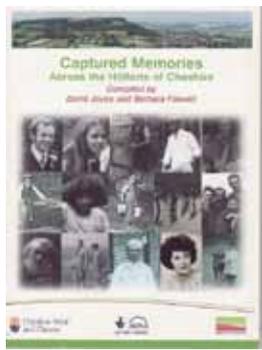
Art / festivals / events

- Performing and public arts projects - 'Forgotten Fortress' and 'Private views made Public'. See more below under 'Interpretation Highlights'
- The originals of artwork created for the interpretive leaflets etc. have been displayed at art exhibitions put on in the Castle Park Art Centre in Frodsham and at Bickerton Village Hall.
- A three day festival held in September 2011. Activities included willow weaving, guided walks, visits to an archaeological excavation and dry stone walling. Perhaps as a result of timing (the very end of the school holidays) only 100 people or so attended the festival
- Well attended annual update and networking events were put on for partners, landowners and volunteers each autumn
- Hillfort Glow - a ground breaking event put on jointly with the Heather and Hillforts Landscape Partnership. See more below under 'Interpretation Highlights'

Nearly all of the Scheme's interpretation targets were met or exceeded. No progress was reported in respect of three targets:

- 3 walks for disabled people
- Creation of play space/equipment
- Interpretation viewpoint at Beeston.

INTERPRETATION



PROGRAMME 3: 'ACCESS & INTERPRETATION'

INTERPRETATION HIGHLIGHTS

Private views made public

Patricia MacKinnon Day was appointed as the Habitats and Hillforts' "digital artist in residence." The output from the residency was her exhibition "Private views made Public", a set of six time-lapse films of sites across the Ridge, through night and day and over the seasons.

These films when projected at a large scale offer her audiences an "ethereal, contemplative and meditative experience to reflect on the passing of time and what endures and what fades". The films were shown in Chester, where they were seen by 189 people as part of Chester's film and digital media festival 'Screen Deva 2010', and also in the crypt of Liverpool Cathedral. They can still be seen small scale on the Habitats and Hillforts website..



Private views made public

The films prompted much debate – some people loved them, some found the open approach, "take from this what you want", too 'arty', preferring stories which are more directly interpreted.

Digital flythrough

This reconstruction of what the Sandstone Ridge may have looked like in the Iron Age is a captivating educational tool.

The professionally produced digital flythrough was created using computer generated imagery and presents the topography of the Ridge from a bird's eye view, exploring the locations of the hillforts.



Screen grab from the Habitats and Hillforts website

INTERPRETATION HIGHLIGHTS

Hillfort Glow

Hillfort Glow was a community event jointly organised with the Heather and Hillforts Landscape Partnership in north Wales. The ambitious goal was a mass experiment to test the Intervisibility between hillforts across north-east Wales and Cheshire. Over 350 people took part, across ten hillforts.

The Hillfort Glow



Feedback from participants was extremely positive while media interest was described as 'phenomenal'. Intervisibility was demonstrated between most of the hillforts – a real insight into what our ancestors might have been able to see on a clear night.

As can be imagined, practicalities and logistics were complex and participant safety was a priority. An initial date had to be abandoned because of bad weather, but the event on 19th March 2011 (at the Equinox, with a full moon) was clearly an enormous success.

Forgotten Fortress

Jointly with the Arts Council the Scheme was instrumental in commissioning a new production by the Chester based 'Theatre in the Quarter'. The play was written (and new music composed) in the light of research amongst the Sandstone Ridge community,

and the production - which involved participation by local schoolchildren - was delivered to professional standards with the highest quality lighting, design and music. The play was put on approximately 20 times, including performances at Peckforton Castle and in over a dozen village halls up and down the Ridge.

Forgotten Fortress



An independent evaluation of the show suggests that performances were very well received, attracted people who would not normally attend such events (which was one of the company's goals) and succeeded in raising awareness of the Cheshire hillforts to a diverse audience. Total production costs were between £30-40,000. £8,000 of this came from Habitats and Hillforts, £4,000 from Cheshire Rural Touring Arts, and the balance from the Arts Council.

PROGRAMME 4: TRAINING, EDUCATION AND VOLUNTEERS

TRAINING, EDUCATION, & VOLUNTEERS: PURPOSE AND APPROACH

This programme set out to involve local communities in the Habitats and Hillforts Scheme through a range of education and training opportunities. The training programme was outsourced to a group of six training providers, who together acted as the Scheme's 'Training Group'. The organisations involved, and their particular "offer", were as follows:

The Conservation Volunteers (previously known as BTCV, working from their office in Chester)

TCV delivered a series of training courses in practical conservation skills, including for example drystone walling, safe and effective use of hand tools, step construction, practical pond creation and management, orchard creation and hedging.

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

FWAG delivered training directed in particular at farmers and landowners. Course topics included woodland restoration and management, environmental stewardship and CAP reform, identifying and controlling invasive plant species, and management and use of traditional farm buildings. In 2011 FWAG nationally went into administration, but fortunately the Cheshire branch of FWAG was then incorporated into the newly created Reaseheath Agricultural Development Academy (RADA), based at Reaseheath College. The training contract with Habitats and Hillforts helped support this new arrangement.

Reaseheath Agricultural College

Reaseheath College delivered a programme of training leading to NPTC certification for a number of volunteers – see below under 'Training Highlights'.

The Harthill Arts Trust

Harthill Arts Trust is a small organisation which came into being in 2008 (at the same time as the Habitats and Hillforts Scheme). Harthill ran events linking art and the local environment, including landscape painting, sketching, storytelling, willow arts events, ceramics, poetry and iron age weaving.

Cheshire's Outdoor Education Centres (specifically the Burwardsley Outdoor Education Centre)

A mock archaeological dig, together with a replica roundhouse, have been established at the Burwardsley OEC. During 2010 and 2011 the Scheme helped fund an additional member of teaching staff at the Centre to capitalise on these assets with visiting school groups (see below).

RECORD - the local biological records centre based in Chester which covers the Habitats & Hillforts area.

RECORD was added to the pool of training providers in the final two years of the Scheme, delivering species identification courses covering groups such as bats and other mammals.

In addition to the above, archaeological training was managed in-house as part of Programme Two 'Hillforts' by Dan Garner, and delivered by him and other associates. Training topics included topographic and geophysical surveys and lithic analysis. Colin Slater and other local experts delivered training linked to Programme One: 'Habitats'. Topics included drystone walling (led by Colin himself) and bat identification with the Cheshire Bat Group.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The Numbers

The scheme did not differentiate between volunteers in general and people who took part in the training programme and so numbers for those involved have been grouped together. In total the Scheme organised 374 training / activity days, which yielded 5,105 person days of engagement. It has not been possible to analyse the data in a way which reveals how many different individuals were involved (since a committed core attended a large number of events).

The training plan which formed part of the Stage 2 submission to HLF in 2008 presented detailed targets for different categories of people who might receive training:

Category of people to be trained	Target
Local residents who are interested in contributing to the environment and heritage of their area	150
Local landowners and farmers	100
Parish councillors and other local amenity groups	100
Local people seeking qualifications and possible work experience	100
Special interest groups such as amateur naturalists and historians and art groups	120
Staff of the partner organisations	15
Further education and university students	25
Project staff	3
Total	613

When it came to delivery this analysis has not proved to be particularly useful, firstly because people don't easily split into these categories, and secondly because in practice the Scheme having identified relevant training topics was then happy to welcome willing trainees from any background, not least because this helped reach targets for volunteer involvement and added to the 'in-kind' contribution.

Who took part in the training / volunteered?

The majority of trainees / volunteers were aged over 45, evenly balanced between men and women. Many were (early) retired and middle class. With only one or two exceptions all were white British, with a very thin sprinkling of Asian / black (< 2%). This reflects the ethnic mix in this part of Cheshire.

Response to the training / activities provided

Training providers submitted course reports, costings and end of course evaluation sheets completed by participants for each event. A review of participants' questionnaires suggests that satisfaction with the training and other events was generally very high indeed.

Practicalities

Training events were advertised on the Habitats and Hillforts website, in the local press and through an annual course programme which was widely distributed. The training was provided at no cost to Cheshire residents in years 1-3, and with a token £5 charge being made in the final year of the Scheme. For those living outside the county the Scheme offered a subsidised rate for each course of £25 per day per person, although in practice uptake by non-Cheshire residents was minimal.

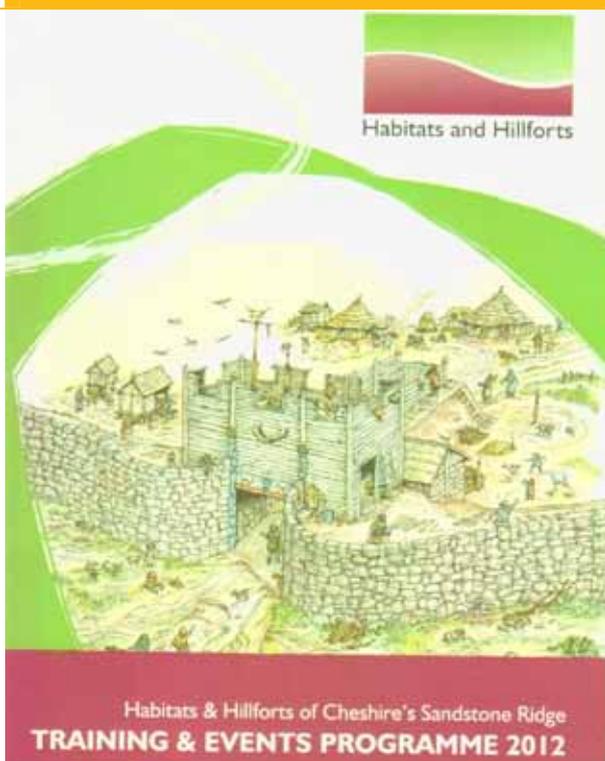
Buy-in

The arts courses in particular reported quite a high number of "no-shows". This may reflect a well known phenomenon whereby if something is offered at no cost some will regard it as consequently of low value.

A full list of the training events is being published on the Habitats and Hillforts website.

The 2012 training programme.

5,000 copies were produced and circulated



PROGRAMME 4: TRAINING, EDUCATION AND VOLUNTEERS

TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS

NPTC training at Reaseheath College

18 people were supported by the Scheme in undertaking a programme of NPTC* training in partnership with Reaseheath College.

Trainees, all of whom lived within ten miles of the Ridge, were selected following an application process which took into account their previous experience as volunteers as well as how they thought they might use the skills gained through the course in the future. The training package included use of a chainsaw, brushwood chipper, brushwood cutting and pesticides. All 18 were successful in qualifying. It's not known what happened to all these trainees, but some at least are actively engaged in volunteer work on or close to the Ridge, and one made such an impression on his tutors that he is now employed at Reaseheath.

* NPTC - the National Proficiency Tests Council, specialists for agricultural and land based qualifications, part of the City & Guilds Group.

Harthill Arts Courses

The Harthill Creative Centre, based at the southern end of the Ridge, delivered five courses a year linking art and the local environment, and drawing on the expertise of a number of local artists. Some were



advertised in the local press, while some were targeted at a specific group, in one instance staff from a local hospital. The goal in all these events was to provide an environmental art 'experience' to people who wouldn't usually engage in such activities. All the courses included an element of engaging with the Ridge landscape, and then using that engagement as a basis for art work. Feedback from those who took part suggests that the events really helped people to see things in new ways, and go away with a new vision. One particularly successful event was called "mythic tales of the trail" – helping teachers to use story telling in their work:

"I've been a teacher for 30 years and this is the best inset course I've ever been on"

This programme of events was successful in meeting the Scheme's aims, but it seems unlikely there will be any follow up now this source of funding is no longer available.



Harthill trainees at a willow weaving course

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Worked with 112 primary schools involving 2,675 pupils (a target of 12 schools was set at the beginning of the Scheme). This impressive total was achieved principally through activities at the Burwardsley Centre (98 primary schools and 2,475 pupils). Eight of these schools (200 pupils) also were involved in the Forgotten Fortress production. The original target was to work with a total of 3,700 primary and secondary school pupils
 - Worked with 2 secondary schools (target - 12)
 - Worked with 3 colleges / universities, involving more than 100 students (target – 2 institutions, and working with 25 students)
 - 2 learning / resource packs created (target – 2)
 - 6 school visits to site (target – 30)
 - 10 outreach visits to schools (target 10)
- Did not work with any youth groups (target 5)

EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

Activities at Burwardsley Outdoor Education Centre

The Scheme supported the construction of a replica Iron Age Roundhouse at the Burwardsley Centre in 2010, together with a mock archaeological dig (containing specially manufactured artefacts). The roundhouse and the dig underpinned an education programme for primary school children – bringing to life what it was like to be part of an Iron age Celtic family – and has also been the focus for open days attracting a diverse audience. The Scheme help fund a part-time teacher at the Centre over a two year period, to develop and deliver programmes using these facilities, and subsidised visits by local schools. Feedback from teachers suggests that the children enjoyed positive learning experiences during their time at Burwardsley.

“There is no way this could be delivered in school ... an excellent teaching and learning session”

The replica Iron Age roundhouse at Burwardsley Outdoor Education Centre.

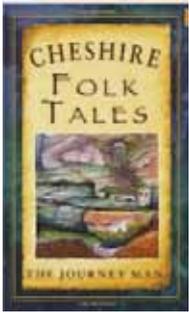


PROGRAMME 4: TRAINING, EDUCATION AND VOLUNTEERS

EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

Story telling: the Journey Man

Johnny Gillett, who lives in Bunbury at the southern end of the Ridge, is a professional story teller and performer. Appearing as the Journey Man, he was commissioned in July 2009 to walk the length of the Sandstone Trail over four days. Each evening he stopped at one of the hillforts and told local stories he has unearthed linked to the Sandstone Ridge. A total of 150 people met the journey man, and it is reported that he not only captured their imaginations but also significantly raising the profile of the Scheme as a whole. In June 2012 the Journeyman published a book of folk tales from across the whole of Cheshire.



The Journey Man making an entrance

OTHER ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS ACROSS THE FOUR PROGRAMMES

- Engaged with 20 landowners/farmers, across all six hillforts (original target: 20)
- Regular visits to these individuals made by all three members of staff (estimate of several hundred visits in total)
- External funds drawn down from Biffa (£10k match funding for management works at Woodhouse) and from the Arts Council (approx £40k for forgotten Fortress)

Created three internal full-time staff jobs (as predicted) plus a part-time finance officer during the fourth year of delivery. The Scheme also supported a total of 65 external jobs: 47 of these were amongst suppliers and contractors; 12 amongst training providers; four in learning, interpretation and outreach, two in project management and administration (predicted total of 15 FTE jobs would be created)



Children's worksheet: the 'Hillfort Challenge'

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Cheshire County Council acted as lead applicant to HLF on behalf of the Landscape Partnership, and following award of HLF funds took on the role of 'Accountable Body'. Following local government reorganisation in April 2009 the County Council's remit relating to Habitats and Hillforts was picked up by Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC).

The staff team were employed by CCC/CWAC, and the scheme has been able to make use (for example) of the Council's legal services and its financial, IT and website systems. Procurement of services and materials has been through CWAC, in line with the Council's standing orders and thresholds. These systems appear to have been fit for purpose: there has been sufficient flexibility to secure the services of high quality and locally relevant contractors while at the same time demonstrating accountability. This has been achieved by judicious use, for example, of 'single tender actions'.

The Scheme appears successfully to have jumped through the administrative and bureaucratic hoops placed before it. One example which often creates problems and delays for landscape partnership schemes is securing State Aid clearance from Defra. Habitats and Hillforts was fortunate in that the Scheme inherited such clearance from the EConet programme, and this was then successfully renewed through Defra on an annual basis.

THE STAFF TEAM

Three full-time members of staff were appointed at the outset:

- Ellie Morris (née Soper) was appointed as programme manager in November 2008. Ellie was responsible for overall scheme co-ordination, and also took the lead in delivering programmes 3 and 4. Ellie already had an established post within Cheshire County Council prior to November 2008 and had previously been involved in the development of the Scheme. Her input to the Scheme was reduced

to that of a half-time post from November 2011 and she will be moving on to other work within the Council once the Scheme has been wound up. For the additional, fourth, year of the Scheme her costs were covered by CWAC, and this counted as in-kind contribution

- Dan Garner - project officer (archaeology). Dan was responsible for delivery of Programme 2 (appointed November 2008, contract ends December 2012)
- Colin Slater - project officer (ecology). Colin was responsible for delivery of Programme 1 (appointed October 2008). Colin left the Scheme at the end of 2011 when his original contract came to an end.

In contrast with most other landscape partnerships, the staff team:

- Comprised heritage specialists (selected primarily for their archaeological and ecological expertise) rather than individuals with (for example) a community development brief
- Did not have dedicated finance / administrative support during years 1-3. This meant the programme manager (Ellie) had, amongst other things, to commit a full week every quarter to the submission of HLF claims. In year four, with Ellie's input down to 50% FTE, a finance officer (Julie Kivlin) joined the team on a one day per week basis.

The Scheme spent less on staff than comparable landscape partnerships, and experience suggests that having an additional colleague dedicated to publicity and communications, and to the management of events and administration would have increased the efficiency of the overall operation.

Something like 40 different individuals or companies were involved in the delivery of the Scheme, all of whom engaged to a greater or lesser extent with the staff team. Some of these individuals took on a quasi-staff team roles, for example:

MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

- A long term interpretation contract (2009-2012) was awarded to Tony Bowerman of “Interpretat!on”. Tony led on the design and implementation of the interpretive panels and leaflets
- Individuals associated with the Training Group have enjoyed long-term, ongoing relations with the Scheme. One prime example is Martin Kirkman, who was employed on a 0.4 contract at the Burwardsley Outdoor Education Centre over a period of two years, providing teaching sessions to schools which capitalised on the mock archaeological dig and replica roundhouse. Martin’s job was fully funded by Habitats and Hillforts in the first year, and jointly funded by the Scheme and CWAC in the second year.
- Cheshire Community Council, now known as Cheshire Community Action
- English Heritage
- The Forestry Commission
- The National Trust
- The Woodland Trust
- Vale Royal Borough Council (until abolition in April 2009).

Once the Scheme was underway the partnership established a Steering Group to guide and monitor the implementation of the Scheme, working to terms of reference adopted in March 2009. The steering group included not only the original partners, but also representatives of local communities, landowners, farmers and organisations with an interest in rural Cheshire (e.g. the Cheshire Landscape Trust).

Staff continuity over the four years of the Scheme has undoubtedly been enormously beneficial. Other landscape partnerships have been less fortunate, in particular finding that key staff move on to new posts a few months before the end of the Scheme, as the end of their fixed term contracts draws near. Given the complexity of managing schemes of this nature this often presents insuperable problems.

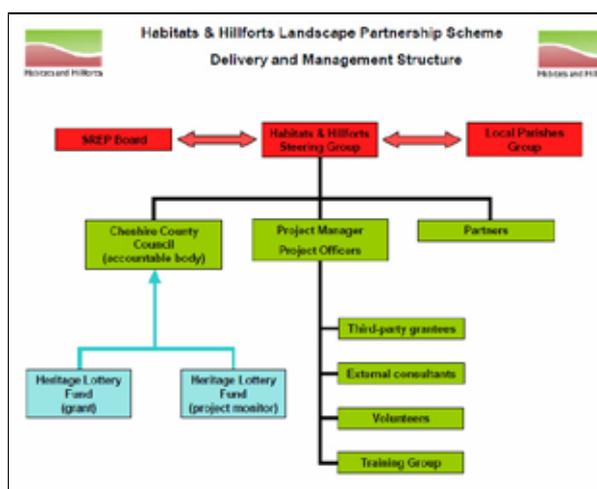
The diagram below, taken from the Stage 2 HLF submission, illustrates the Partnership’s planned management structure. Note however that the Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership was wound up in 2009-10, and the area’s constituent parish councils took a disappointingly parochial view of their remits, and declined to work together as a ‘local parishes group’.

It should be noted that the project team has been operating on 50% capacity for much of the additional, fourth year, of the programme. As a result of careful programming, with a tailing off of activity, this does not appear to have resulted in any loss of momentum. Effective delivery in the last few months of the scheme also reflects favourably on the calibre of the individuals concerned.

THE PARTNERSHIP AND THE STEERING GROUP

Organisations which were signatories to the partnership agreement which was adopted in March 2008 were:

- Cheshire County Council (Lead Partner). This responsibility was subsequently taken on by Cheshire West and Chester Council



After the scheme was launched members of the Partnership never again felt the need to meet other than as members of the Steering Group, and - as is often the case when things go well - there was never any need to refer back to the partnership agreement.

Significantly it was agreed that the Steering Group should be chaired by an organisation or individual independent from any of the partner organisations. The Partnership were fortunate indeed to secure the services of Andrew Deadman for this role, from the outset of the Scheme until his untimely death in April 2012. Andrew had recently retired from a position with English Nature, and was also an active National Trust volunteer.

Programme management of the Scheme was in some ways atypical in comparison with other landscape partnerships:

- The appointment of an independent chair is unusual but if - as in this case - the right individual is prepared to take on this role can be highly effective
- Although CWAC was the lead partner, the Council – especially in the later stages - was not always represented at Steering Group meetings by anyone other than members of the staff team. In other local authority led partnerships a more senior colleague often attends (and indeed takes the chair at) partnership / steering group meetings. The team kept specialist colleagues in the council informed of progress, but nonetheless it appears that a lot of responsibility rested with just a few individuals. Partly because the team worked effectively, the impression is gained that others within the Council weren't always taking a really active interest in what was going on, certainly not across the whole breadth of partnership activity
- The steering group appears to have provided a valuable sounding board for the staff team but maybe did not challenge decisions as much as it might have done. This may in part reflect the fact that no partner organisations (other than CWAC) had a financial stake in the Scheme
- Some of those who attended steering group meetings had an overriding interest in just one of the hillforts, and so were perhaps primarily motivated to fight their own corner, rather than acting as an advocate for the Scheme as a whole
- With the Scheme staffed by local government officers, based in council offices, and with its web-site a micro-site of the Councils (albeit accessible through its own domain name - www.habitatsandhillforts.co.uk) in many ways this felt like a public sector project rather than a Partnership project. High quality, customer focussed public sector programmes are increasingly guided by a significant level of input from third parties – and as a result of this the difference between a well-networked local authority project and a partnership project with significant local authority input is decreasing.

None of the comments above should be interpreted as necessarily critical in terms of what this Scheme has achieved. Those involved in project delivery have clearly worked well together, and these good working relations have had a significant impact in achieving successful outcomes. In designing future programmes these factors could usefully be taken into account. It's a great help when people co-operate to the full and work in an imaginative and flexible way, but systems need to be designed so that they will deliver even when that isn't the case.

**SCHEME FINANCES:
INCOME**

Sources of funding	
Heritage Lottery Fund	£1,394,000
Cheshire West and Chester (previously CCC)	£200,000
Vale Royal Borough Council	£3,000
Mersey Forest Trust	£3,000
Value of in-kind contributions	£568,000
Total income	£2,168,000

The HLF award amounted to 64.3% of total scheme costs. This is mid-range in terms of intervention rates awarded by HLF to Landscape Partnerships. 9.5% of the Scheme budget was supplied as match funding, and 26.2% as in-kind contributions.

In comparison with other landscape partnerships this is a low percentage in terms of cash, and a high one in terms of in-kind contributions. Habitats and Hillforts is also atypical in that nearly all the matching cash contribution came from the principal local authority. Habitats and Hillforts' projects attracted additional external funds (from Biffa and the Arts Council – see s. 4 'other activities and outputs' above), but again not to the extent achieved by some other Partnerships.

Partners in other schemes have committed cash from the outset. New Landscape Partnership applications in 2011 identified on average seven potential cash funding sources, while in previous years (including 2007 when H+H was approved) schemes identified an average of 11 cash funding sources. Not all these potential sources would have been realised in practice. This lack of cash buy-in by key Habitats and Hillforts partners, such as the National Trust and the Forestry Commission, does not appear to have been an issue. Both these organisations subsequently went on to make substantial in-kind contributions.

The corollary to this situation is that the Scheme had to work hard to achieve the high level of in-kind contributions, especially when it came to Programme One 'Habitats':

Programme area	cash	in-kind	total	In-kind as % of total
1. Habitats of the ridge	£235,447	£172,500	£407,947	42.3%
2. Hillforts of the ridge	£312,976	£130,400	£443,376	29.4%
3. Interpretation and access	£270,188	£128,800	£398,988	32.3%
4. Training, Education, Volunteers	£299,371	£136,300	£435,671	31.3%
Total	£1,117,982	£568,000	£1,685,982	33.7%

The Scheme is on track to achieve this ambitious in-kind target. Life for the project team would however have been easier if they hadn't had to spend so much time chasing up volunteer timesheets etc.

There also appears to be an anomaly across the UK in that in some regions / countries the time contributed by steering group members is applied at the HLF 'professional' rate, whereas in this instance it was only credited at the 'unskilled' rate.

EXPENDITURE

The original expenditure plan, submitted to HLF in 2008, was for a three-year programme, to run from September 2008 - September 2011:

Summary Costs per Programme	
1. Habitats of the Ridge	£365,725
2. Hillforts of the Ridge	£381,375
3. Interpretation and access	£376,464
4. Training, Education, Volunteers	£385,297
Total cost of all programmes	£1,508,861
Overhead Costs	£382,399
Other Costs	
Inflation	£87,998
Contingency	£189,126
Total Scheme Costs	£2,168,384
<i>Overheads as % of total scheme 17.6%</i>	

During 2010 it was recognised that keeping to this timetable would unnecessarily restrict what could be achieved with the allocated resources – not least because both the contingency budget (£189,000) and the sum set aside to cover inflation (£88,000) remained unspent. This underspend appears to be the result of cautious budgeting and sound financial management by the staff team together with their finance colleagues in CWAC.

With the agreement of HLF the Scheme was extended for a fourth year, with a revised expenditure plan based on the same global budget:

Summary Costs per Programme	
1. Habitats of the Ridge	£407,947
2. Hillforts of the Ridge	£443,376
3. Interpretation and access	£398,988
4. Training, Education, Volunteers	£435,671
Total cost of all programmes	£1,685,982
Overhead Costs	£456,915
Other Costs	
Inflation	£0
Contingency	£25,488
Total Scheme Costs	£2,168,385
<i>Overheads as % of total scheme 21.1%</i>	

The increase to each of the Programme areas which resulted from this extra year was:

Programme	% increase
1. Habitats of the Ridge	11.5%
2. Hillforts of the Ridge	16.3%
3. Interpretation and Access	6.0%
4. Training, Education, Volunteers	13.1%

Overheads

The lion's share the overhead budget was incurred through the costs of employing the staff team. Committing to a fourth year had significant implications and resulted in an increase in an overhead costs from 17.5% to 21% over the whole period, even though the team reduced from 3 to 1½ FTE. Those working on heritage schemes other than Landscape Partnerships might consider 17% / 21% to be a high figure for overheads. Given however the complexity of the scheme, and the number of projects delivered, this percentage seems reasonable.

Habitats and Hillforts position vis-à-vis overheads compares favourably with comparable Landscape Partnership schemes. The cost of overheads budgeted for by the batch of applications received by HLF in 2011 ranged from 14% to 59%, with an average of 27%. These schemes on average plan to employ 3.65 full time equivalent posts.

Budget out-turn

By August 2012 the Scheme had either spent or committed £2,130,194 (98.2% of total budgeted costs).

Earlier in this report we presented a summary of activities and outputs delivered by the Scheme. This section considers the more difficult issue of outcomes and legacy. While outputs are the direct result of the activities the Scheme undertook, outcomes are the (usually longer term) consequences of this activity in terms of the landscape heritage and the communities and individuals who use or value the Ridge and its hillforts.

OUTCOMES AND LEGACY : HEARTS AND MINDS

The greatest achievement of the Scheme appears to have been the extent to which it encouraged a range of people (both adults and children) to engage with the Hillforts area, increasing awareness and interest in the significance of these sites. Some of the people who have engaged in Scheme projects have not previously taken much interest in “heritage” and this engagement has clearly been profound in some cases. Many of those interviewed as part of this evaluation are hopeful that this broadening of horizons will be sustained. Conservation and enhancement of the heritage features has also been significant, but is seen by many as being less of an achievement than this engagement with hearts and minds.

“People have become much more aware of what’s on their doorstep”

“Training courses have prompted further volunteering activity, real lifestyle changes and health benefits”

“Involvement in a range of projects has created a stronger sense of identity, and a feeling of belonging and ownership towards our local heritage”

The legacy for people

The access legacy can be seen on the ground in the improved condition of footpaths and structures (stiles, steps etc.) across the management zones. The permissive bridleway at Peckforton will be kept open for at least ten years - the landowner has entered into an agreement to this effect. Eventually the physical

access improvements will of course require further management work.

The interpretation legacy exists in published materials, in the interpretive panels at the hillforts, and in the touch-screen kiosks (provided these continue to find locations where they will be used, and arrangements are made for their maintenance and for updating the content). Resources have been set aside to pay for further print runs of the interpretive leaflets, and also for replacement of the on-site interpretive panels.

The replica roundhouse and mock dig continue to be used in education programmes at the Burwardsley Outdoor Education Centre

The website will be taken over and hopefully will be developed and updated by the Sandstone Ridge Trust

The impact of training and volunteer activities is in people’s heads, and many trainees continue to be actively involved. Further opportunities for engagement are needed to ensure people make the most of the knowledge and skills they have acquired. A new, independent wildlife recording group has been created by RECORD as a result of the training programme.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The archaeological elements of the Scheme have achieved a higher profile and had a greater impact than the habitats work. The headline achievement for archaeology is that at the outset five of the monuments were deemed to be “at risk”, and on four of these this risk has now been reduced. The improvements at the hillforts which have led to this desirable situation aren’t necessarily all down to works completed under the Habitats and Hillforts banner, but the Scheme acted as the catalyst for bringing other work forward.

Eddisbury Hillfort is still very much “at risk”, because much of the hilltop is still being ploughed for cereal production. This is clearly a disappointment, and reflects the way in which landowners still call the tune even on designated sites. The view of some stakeholders is that the only long term solution would be for a conservation organisation to purchase the site if it ever came onto the market.

The archaeological legacy

Much has been learnt about the hillforts and the surrounding areas, and this has been captured in a number of publications. Data from the Lidar survey and from pollen analyses etc. have been passed to Cheshire’s Historic Environment Record (HER). This, together with a mass of other information, is available on-line through ‘Revealing Cheshire’s Past’, an accessible version of the HER.

The improvement in condition of the hillforts will only last a certain time and then further work will be required to arrest natural succession. Over the next ten years this management work will be supported through the Scheme’s management and maintenance plan (see below) and as a result of management agreements which the site owners have signed up to. Changes in management practice and philosophy (for example by the Woodland Trust at Woodhouse) are hopefully embedded amongst some of those who have long term responsibility for these sites.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

The scheme has been successful in delivering a number of quantifiable ecological benefits. The condition of a number of sites has improved, and ongoing management of these sites is guaranteed for at least the next ten years as a result of agreements which have been entered into and resources which have been secured. The expansion of the Higher Level Stewardship agreement at Peckforton Mere is a particular pleasing outcome, which was not originally anticipated, while the improvements achieved at Boothsdales have been described as “massive”.

Habitat works have also been carried out on a number of small sites which would otherwise have slipped under the radar, and which are not large enough to justify entry into an Environmental Stewardship agreement. One advantage of the concentration of activity in the six management zones is that this has helped raise wider awareness of location of different habitats along the Ridge, and the need for joined up thinking across wider areas.

These habitat improvements must be seen however as comparatively modest set against the giant step required if we really are to achieve habitat connectivity along the length of the Ridge. Managing existing habitats is the straightforward part of this work; creating new habitats remains a huge challenge in the face of high land prices and existing land-owner priorities.

Securing the Scheme's habitat legacy through management planning

The use of ponies and cattle to graze sites is a positive development. The National Trust intends to retain the ponies at Bickerton Hill for the foreseeable future, and if this proves to be a long term solution to site management then this will be a significant legacy of the Scheme.

A management plan for Boothsdale has been adopted by the relevant landowners in conjunction with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. The Habitats and Hillforts legacy fund will cover the costs of cattle grazing for the next ten years.

A ten-year management plan for Peckforton Mere has been adopted by the Peckforton Estate, and was a supporting document used to amend the HLS agreement.

insular, approach. This desirable outcome reflects the value of organisations working as a network, rather than everything being channelled only through the Scheme's project officer.

Landowners have been engaged in the Scheme's activities. This doesn't mean suddenly heritage conservation is more important to them than earning a livelihood from their land. It seems to be the case however - as has been the case with the wider public - that awareness and interest has been raised, and in some instances a new sense of pride has emerged about the heritage value of their land-holdings.

Volunteers

The Scheme has brought together a new community of like minded people who have shared and developed their interest in heritage. This community has not developed into a formalised "Friends of the Cheshire Hillforts" group, although the archaeology volunteers in particular have created strong bonds with one another.

OTHER OUTCOMES

Knowledge

We know more about these sites now than we did at Scheme outset. This is in terms not only of new data which has been codified (new wildlife records, increased knowledge of the archaeological remains which can be found at the hillforts, what this tells us of the area's history), but also in terms of the numbers of people who share this knowledge and have developed a real understanding of the significance of these sites

Bringing people together

Partnership working has raised the level of agency interaction, for example between the bodies that own and manage the different hillforts, and between training providers (e.g. FWAG and TCV). In part this is the result of personal links created through the Scheme, but there is also evidence to suggest that at least in some instances there is a change in the culture of the organisations involved, meaning that they are less likely to revert to their previous, more

Some have argued that the last thing that is needed is another volunteer group, given the range of existing volunteer opportunities - including those provided by partner organisations such as the National Trust, the Wildlife Trust, the Conservation Volunteers, RECORD and other more local groups. A specific gap which could be filled however is a group to undertake access work along the Sandstone Trail, now that the CWAC ranger is no longer in post.

Another legacy of the scheme is that the volunteer base of these groups has been strengthened. Existing volunteers have benefitted through their engagement with Habitats and Hillforts, learning new skills and working alongside new people, on different activities, and on different sites. Some "conservation" volunteers for example have for the first time got involved with archaeological digs.

The end result is a more motivated and active volunteer pool. It is reported that as a result these volunteers are now happy to take a more flexible view of the sorts of activity they might want to undertake. Training provided by the Scheme seems in particular to have acted as a catalyst in this change.

Spin-off activities

The most significant organisational spin-off from the Scheme is the creation of the Sandstone Ridge Trust (see below). Other projects have also led on to new activities, a prime example of this being the way the Scheme's artist-in-residence, Patricia Mackinnon-Day, subsequently developed a work entitled "Rural Voices". Having successfully applied for £10,000 from the Arts Council, Patricia created film portraits and sound projections with twelve women from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds living along the Sandstone Ridge. The project illuminates their viewpoints on personal isolation, financial and economic pressures, the impact of foot and mouth disease and other matters. For further information have a look at Patricia's website: <http://www.mackinnon-day.com/recentProjectPage.aspx?SelectedProject=23&SelectedPage=48>



DID THE SCHEME ACHIEVE VALUE FOR MONEY?

All claims to HLF over the lifetime of the Scheme were vetted by HLF's Scheme monitor, Fiona Southern. This system is designed to pick up any unusual expenditure at the time of the claim.

A broad brush review of the expenditure spreadsheet does not reveal any startling irregularities. Given the amount of activity which has been undertaken and the number of people who have been involved it appears that overall the Scheme has delivered value for money in comparison with landscape partnership schemes elsewhere.

While the total scheme budget was substantial, it is important to recognise that these funds were spent over four years across six different hillfort management areas. Thus for example in terms of habitat works the average spend on each management area, per year, was a fairly modest £17,000.

So far as hillforts programme goes, it must be remembered that on Scheduled Sites excavation is always a costly process, as English Heritage insist (quite rightly) that no corners can be cut.

Letting the interpretation work out on a single, long term contract was a cost effective approach. This also helped in terms of core staff time, given that programme 3 did not have the benefit of a dedicated project officer.

The cost of delivering training courses worked out on average at £45 per head per day, in range £25-£65.

CHALLENGES, ISSUES AND LEARNING POINTS

The Habitats and Hillforts Scheme was launched just as the world economy ground to a halt. Fortunately by then the basic financial package was already in place, and no additional fund-raising had been planned. It has however been a difficult time for those thinking about follow up activities, and the squeeze on public sector finances from 2010 onwards has no doubt made it more difficult to guarantee the Scheme's legacy.

Was the Scheme ambitious enough?

The Scheme was successful in delivering against nearly all its targets, and this very success raises the question therefore of whether those targets were sufficiently challenging. Landscape Partnerships are able to deliver a number of diverse projects, and this provides the opportunity to strike a balance between safer and more risky strands of work.

While it is no doubt true to say that "some thousands of people have been touched by the Habitats and Hillforts programme", a lot of the adults who have been most involved come from a narrow demograph (middle class, over 45 years old), while young people have been engaged mostly through the formal education system. As an alternative, the Scheme could also have set out explicitly to engage a higher proportion of 'hard-to-reach' audiences (e.g. disaffected 16-25 year olds, younger families), working through youth groups or other non-formal mechanisms. If such an approach had been followed, some of the training provision in particular could have been much more targeted. There is an issue of 'depth and breadth' here – with the option of touching perhaps fewer, less biddable people but in a deeper way.

Concentration and impact

Most stake-holders agree that concentrating projects within the six hillfort management zones has worked well, creating a greater impact than would have been the case if projects had been scattered across the entire Sandstone Ridge.

A balanced programme

Under the Landscape Partnership programme schemes are obliged to spread resources evenly across HLF's four programme areas – balancing heritage conservation and engagement with people. Schemes elsewhere in the country have struggled to achieve this balance (initiating for example expensive training programmes with questionable heritage outcomes). Habitats and Hillforts however appears to have had no issues in striking this balance, and there does not appear to have been any conflict between HLF's aims and the ambitions of the principal partner organisations.

There may be some issues with the extent to which individual projects reflecting the multiple aims of the Scheme. One example is the flagship project at Peckforton Mere. While this has been a great success in terms of habitat management, the site is not particularly accessible. This could be addressed in the future, given landowner agreement, if resources became available for the construction of a bird hide / boardwalk.

Flexibility in delivery

HLF is happy for the plans submitted at the outset of a scheme to be renegotiated. A number of significant opportunities were identified after Habitats and Hillforts had moved into the delivery phase and these have been successfully incorporated into the work programme. Additional works include the mock dig and roundhouse at Burwardsley, and the meres and mosses work at Delamere. It became clear that a Lidar survey would be the best way to reveal archaeological insights (and create a resource for the future). In the light of this advice it was agreed to allocate £28,000 for this purpose from monies previously earmarked for landscape survey work.

It was clearly a good decision to extend the programme into a fourth year. This enabled additional footpath maintenance works and signage, delivery of the meres and mosses project, a larger programme of archaeology work including an additional excavation, and created the time needed to produce the final archaeology publication. Many people benefitted also from the extension of the training and volunteering programmes for an additional year.

Contribution to the local economy

Unlike a number of schemes elsewhere in the country, Habitats and Hillforts did not set out to support the development of the 'natural economy' as a principal part of its agenda. Here the focus instead was on engagement with local people. The green economy had been the primary focus of previous proposals to the North West Development Agency, which in the event did not progress.

Future work on the Ridge could usefully build in a more overt link to the economic benefits of wildlife and heritage, identifying how heritage can be more central to the area's tourism and visitor offer. One peg for such a strategy would be to capitalise for example on the return of the nightjar to Delamere after long break, an outcome which has been achieved as a result of the creation of glades within the woodland.

Nightjar distribution across the British Isles



Profile and identity

The Scheme has achieved some notable successes through its communications. This has been both at a local scale in letting people know about proposed woodland management operations (where tree felling especially can often result in adverse comments), and through a number of high profile activities which have caught the media's attention such as the ponies at Bickerton Hill and the 'Hillfort Glow'.

Some stake-holders however feel that the profile of the Scheme both amongst those involved and the wider public has not been as great as it might have been. It has been a challenge to attract media and wider interest to the Scheme's more workaday activities. It has been suggested that the Scheme wasn't launched with a big enough splash, and (for example) that the arts events would have attracted more interest if they had been more extensively promoted.

Some opportunities have been missed in promoting the scheme's identity. The training providers have sometimes not made it clear in their promotion and course materials that funding and support is coming from the Scheme, while the website promoting the photography <http://www.harthill.org/photography/> hardly mentions the Scheme at all (and only then in a slightly negative, restrictive context), and neither does it acknowledge HLF support.

A joined up Scheme?

Many of the people who have been engaged with the Scheme are unaware of the full scope of activities which have been undertaken, and some still do not seem to have taken on a full sense of the heritage importance of the Ridge. This state of affairs persists despite the well attended and well received briefing events held each autumn, the newsletters and the website. The challenge as ever is to get people to focus on aspects of their heritage away from their own particular interest.

The proposed 'Parish Group' never took off, perhaps in part because parish councils at the present time are much taken up with statutory agendas (planning issues, localism etc.). Future projects may find that parish councils often are not the best medium through which to reach people in the community with a latent interest in heritage.

Schemes always need to look for ways to pull projects closer together when this is possible. It has been suggested that the two principal arts projects (Forgotten Fortress and Private Views made Public) could have been put on jointly when the former was performed at Peckforton. This would have broken the mould in Cheshire, in that it would have been the first time that the touring network had incorporated an art installation into one of its shows. However such joint activities can only be undertaken with the wholehearted support of the artists involved.

Project monitoring and evaluation

This evaluation has unearthed some anecdotal evidence relating to Scheme outcomes, but overall it would have been helpful if more thought and effort had gone into monitoring and evaluation work from the outset. This is a weakness across the Landscape Partnership programme nationally, which HLF is taking steps to address.

Ideally for each project the Scheme should have listed planned outputs and outcomes, identified one or more indicators which would help measure levels of success, and allocated some resource to monitor these. Such an approach would, for example, have resulted in a systematic assessment of users' response to the interpretation / access projects, and could have prompted the installation of a counter on the website to log the number of hits and downloads.

Some reviews of activity have been carried out, for example at the end of training events and of the Forgotten Fortress production. While such reviews provide useful feedback for those involved in delivery, from a Scheme perspective evidence of long-term outcomes is of much greater interest.

Working on scheduled archaeological sites

The experience of those involved in the Hillforts programme (programme 2) was that it generally took much longer than expected to secure permission from English Heritage to work on Scheduled Monuments, and that conditions accompanying these permissions were more rigorous than had been expected. While some stake-holders see English Heritage as being over-restrictive, and accused them of 'pickling' these sites, English Heritage would say that it is their responsibility always to take a precautionary long term view of our archaeological heritage.

Governance

Scheme governance and accountability appears to have been of the highest order. This in part is a result of being able to plug into local authority management and financial systems. Having CWAC as the accountable body also meant there were no problems relating to cash flow.

It has been suggested that the Scheme might have achieved a higher profile and better public perception (amongst some stake-holders) if it had been based with a voluntary sector / independent organisation rather than being seen on occasion as "another council initiative". This feeling exists despite efforts by the team to emphasise the Scheme's independence. Certainly if the Scheme had needed to raise additional funds there would have been benefits in basing it outwith the public sector.

The death of Andrew Deadman has had a significant impact. This is not so much in terms of the final months of delivery of Habitats and Hillforts, but more for the Sandstone Ridge Trust. When one individual takes on such a critical role, the loss of their input for whatever reason should be identified as a risk which could have a significant impact, and thought should be given early on to how this might be mitigated.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

Local Nature Partnerships and Nature Improvement Areas

Two initiatives emerging from the Government's Natural Environment White Paper (published in June 2011) have particular significance for landscape scale initiatives: Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) and Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs).

The Cheshire Region Local Nature Partnership was formally recognised by Government following a successful application to Defra in July 2012. The 'Cheshire Region' covers the old county boundary. Unfortunately government recognition does not (as yet) bring with it any additional resources. Nonetheless the existence of the LNP might in the future facilitate landscape-scale work on or around the Sandstone Ridge.

Twelve Nature Improvement Areas were designated earlier this year following a national competition run over the winter of 2011-12. The 'Meres and Mosses of the Marches' was successful in achieving recognition from Defra, with an award of £570,000. While this NIA incorporates some wetlands, peat bogs and ponds in Cheshire it does not extend as far north as the Cheshire Ridge. The Meres and Mosses programme will work in the River Perry catchment, aiming to contribute to habitat connectivity by reducing diffuse pollution (through work with the farming community), improving peatlands and restoring wildlife.

The Cheshire Region Local Nature Partnership



Meres and Mosses of the Marches Nature Improvement Area



Learning from the NIA pilots will - in theory at least - be used to help extend this landscape-scale approach to restoration and conservation to other areas. It is currently unclear whether the Government will provide additional funds to a future round of NIAs, or indeed extend the 3 year funding available to the twelve pilots. It should be noted that the maximum size of an NIA is 500 km², larger than the guide size for a landscape partnership (20-200 km²). The awards made by Defra to NIAs is much smaller than awards typically made by HLF to landscape partnerships.

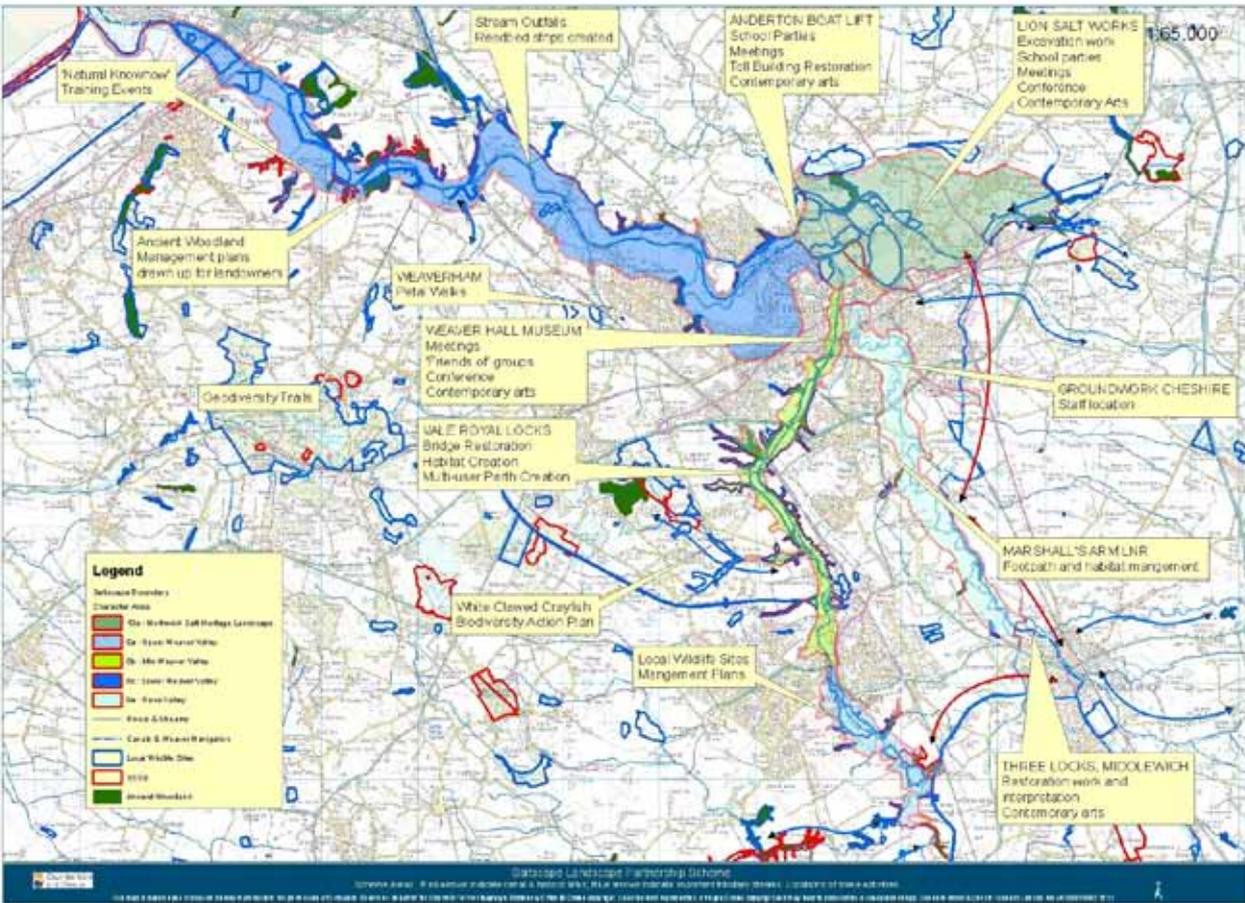
The Landscape Partnership programme and ‘Saltscape’

Just as the Habitats and Hillforts programme is drawing to a close another Landscape Partnership scheme in Cheshire - ‘Saltscape’ - has been successful in achieving a Round One pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This three-year scheme will conserve and open up the natural habitats of the Weaver Valley and its surrounding towns, which are steeped in the history of the salt industry. Plans include looking after ancient woodlands and grazing meadows along with restoration work to locks and toll buildings. Volunteering will be a key element of

the project with training delivered by staff from Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the National Waterways Museum.

Saltscape is one of the final batch of awards to be made by HLF under the existing Landscape Partnership programme. A new Landscape Partnership programme will however be launched by HLF in February 2013, with more resources nationally (£22m per year) and a higher ceiling figure for each partnership (£3m).

Saltscape Landscape partnership scheme



THE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE PLAN

The challenge now is to ensure the benefits of the Habitats and Hillforts Scheme are sustained, and that if possible heritage activity continues to take place on the Ridge.

The Scheme has allocated £60,000 to be spent over the next ten years on management and maintenance works. Responsibility for the implementation of these works will rest with the Sandstone Ridge Trust, under a service level agreement organised through CWAC. The programmed work is presented in a Management and Maintenance plan:

The Habitats and Hillforts Management and Maintenance Plan, 2012-2022

£40,000 will be used for habitat works (continuing the work of Programme 1), including

- Follow-up treatment and re-planting of failed trees
- Scrub control and rotational coppicing around the perimeter of Peckforton Mere
- Supporting ongoing grazing of the Boothsdale grassland by Cheshire Wildlife Trust
- Re-planting any failed hedgerow trees & shrubs
- Hedge laying
- Rhododendron Control
- Scrub Management
- Heathland Restoration
- £10,000 has been allocated to a programme of maintenance work and erosion control on the

- It should be recognised the level of funding is comparatively modest (£6,000 per year across a range of sites and projects). Hopefully however these works will act as a catalyst to keep partners jointly engaged, to maintain the profile of the work which has been carried out, and if possible can be used as match funding to help lever in other resources.

hillforts (continuing the work of Programme 2). This includes:

- Strimming regime on ramparts
- Maintaining gorse levels, controlling birch saplings off the ramparts and rabbit burrowing control.
- Gorse management on ramparts

£10,000 has been allocated for interpretation renewals (continuing the work of Programme 3). This includes:

- Reprints of the leaflets
- Replacement of interpretive boards

Landowners are entering into 10 year agreements where works have been carried out on their land, committing them to support the implementation of the management and maintenance works. The agreements also bind them not to implement other actions which might jeopardise what the Scheme has achieved.

THE SANDSTONE RIDGE TRUST

The Sandstone Ridge Trust was formally established in October 2011 with the goal of protecting and enhancing the wildlife habitats and historic heritage on and around the Sandstone Ridge, not only building on the work of the Habitats and Hillforts Scheme but also with the potential to identify new activities and initiatives.

In addition to the £60,000 allocated for delivery of the Scheme's management and maintenance plan (see above) the Trust has 'inherited' £35,000 from the EConet Partnership,

The challenges faced by the new Trust should not be underestimated, including:

- Lack of dedicated staff. While the Habitats and Hillforts scheme enjoyed the services of a dedicated staff team, realising the Trust's objectives will be depend to a great extent on its (unpaid) trustees. CWAC will no doubt continue to be supportive of the new trust especially with regard to delivery of the Habitats and Hillforts' management and maintenance plan
- 'Landscape Detectives – a programme of walks and talks
- A survey of ancient trees along the Ridge working with the Woodland Trust.



The Trust has started to develop a number of new project ideas:

- 'Well Carved' – an initiative to look anew at the cultural heritage of the Ridge based around the area's principal building blocks: sandstone and water
- The trust will not be able to draw on the full time services of a professional archaeologist, and this will make it difficult to meet English Heritage requirements for working on Scheduled Monuments. The undoubted expertise of one of the trustees may well help to make up for this shortfall
- It is important to ensure the Sandstone Ridge Trust complements the mission and activities of others already working on the Ridge, rather than in any way being seen to be in competition for volunteers or funds.

CONCLUSIONS

- The story of the Habitats and Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme, presented above, is clearly one of success. The Scheme comprised a complementary mix of projects, and these mostly delivered in line with, or in excess of, the implementation targets set at the outset.
- The impact of the Scheme as a whole was greater than the sum of the individual components. Landscape scale benefits have been achieved in the way the hillforts and the Sandstone Ridge are perceived by many, and in terms of the improved condition of the hillfort archaeology. The Scheme stimulated a number of projects that probably would not have been conceived except as part of a larger scheme. These include, for example the Hillfort Glow and the Forgotten Fortress production.
- The Scheme has supported the delivery of European Landscape Convention ambitions, by raising landscape awareness in general, by increasing understanding of this particular landscape, and by implementing projects which contribute to the protection and management of the hillforts and their surrounding management zones.
- There has been positive engagement with the scheme by a significant number of people, and these individuals have been able to contribute some 'bottom up' perspectives to the Scheme. Awareness of the hillforts and the wider Ridge has been increased amongst a much larger group of people who have been touched by the programme of activities. The Scheme did not set out to engage with groups who have been described as 'hard to reach' in terms of their engagement with heritage.
- The Scheme has established a significant cadre of volunteers who will almost certainly continue to undertake heritage activities in the future. Others touched by the Scheme have enjoyed their new engagement with heritage, but are less likely to continue with these activities on their own initiative.
- Good working relationships have been established between a number of individuals and organisations, and this bodes well for future joint activities. The Scheme created the context for real dialogue between landowners, local communities and heritage enthusiasts.
- While individual projects have made a significant contribution in terms of the condition and extent of a number of priority habitats, ecological connectivity along the Ridge has not been increased to any significant extent.
- Scheme governance, leadership and project management has been effective. There have been no major disasters, the bulk of the programme being implemented through well tried and tested approaches. Risks were well managed and a number of delivery challenges were successfully addressed.
- Resources were used in a flexible way, resulting in significant additional benefits over an extended four year period. The Scheme had no significant economic impact beyond that created by the direct expenditure of Scheme funds.
- The Sandstone Ridge Trust, and the management and maintenance plan which it is charged to deliver, will help sustain the Scheme's legacy. The new Trust faces major challenges and in particular needs to identify ways in which it can complement the work of existing organisations along the Ridge and also retain the current level of interest in various aspects of this special landscape.



Habitats and Hillforts

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