

Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership Scheme Final Review



Executive Summary

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Purpose of this document

This document summarises the findings of the Final Review of Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership Scheme, an external evaluation, as required by Heritage Lottery Fund. It was conducted by MRE Unlocking Enterprise from Autumn 2018 to late Spring 2019. The full Final Review document provides a more detailed account of the evaluation and is available from the Partnership.

Introduction to the landscape

As you drive from Birmingham to Tamworth on the motorway, you would be forgiven for thinking this is an essentially urban environment with little to offer in terms of landscape or nature. But take the



Figure 1: Catchment of the River Tame

time to venture into the area between Coleshill and Tamworth and a hidden landscape exists of 1000 hectares of lakes, rivers and canals. These are the Tame Valley Wetlands, unified by the passage of the River Tame, the largest area of interconnected wetlands in the Midlands, offering havens for wildlife, beautiful vistas, and tranquillity, despite their proximity to towns and dense business development.

Human activity has been a double-edged sword for the wetlands: mining, gravel extraction, construction of the Hams Hall power

station, disposal of the power station's by-products and pollution all caused great damage to the landscape in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The River Tame, Birmingham's largest river, was declared a 'dead river' in the 1960s as it was so badly polluted by West Midlands industries. But the pits that were abandoned after gravel extraction were given over to wildlife, environmental controls have improved water quality and contaminated land has been remediated. Now, the River Tame meanders from Birmingham towards Derby, for part of the way in parallel with the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal. It is once again providing important habitat for flora and fauna as it weaves through a tapestry of wetlands and lakes, offering refuge for wildlife and open space for people.

Caring for the landscape – making the change

Several organisations have made a long-term commitment to conserving the built heritage and natural landscape of the area. Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT), the RSPB and Warwickshire County Council, amongst others, own and manage individual wetland sites here. In recent years, however, development pressure from major infrastructure projects, not least Hams Hall Business Park and the High Speed 2 rail link, has created additional challenges that meant working at the individual level with different ownership was no longer sufficient to secure the long-term protection of the wetlands. In

2005, led by WWT, a partnership of organisations was formed to take a more holistic approach to conservation - the Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership. Several local authority and county boundaries meet in this area, which could have made partnership working more challenging. In Tame Valley, however, partners were determined to work across the boundaries to the benefit of the local countryside.

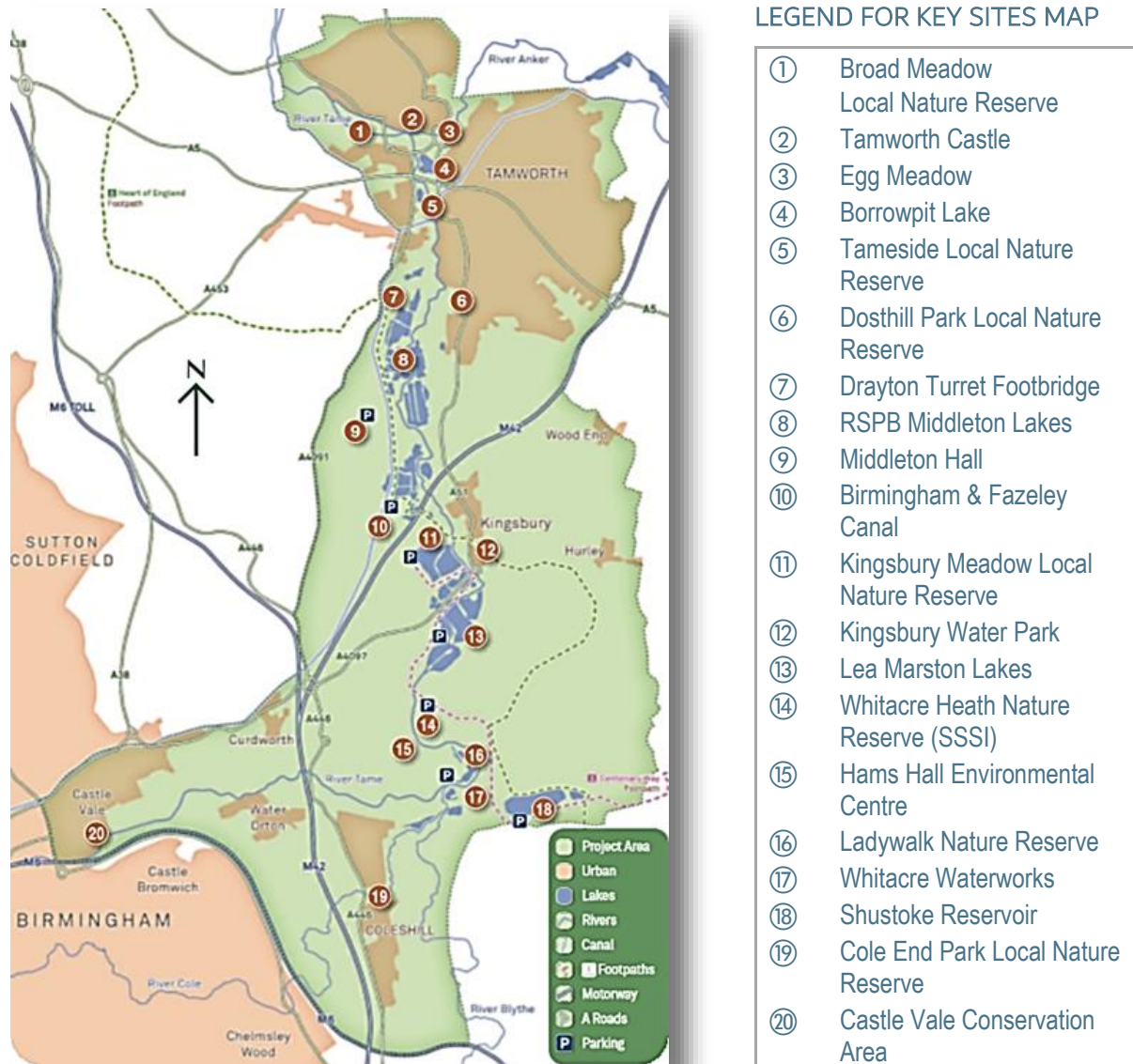


Figure 2: Key Project Sites in Tame Valley Wetlands

The Partnership undertook an initial audit of the area, which revealed many opportunities to improve nature sites, create new habitat and open up access so local people could enjoy their local countryside more easily. While the organisations continued to allocate resources for this purpose, it was obvious that the step-change they planned to make would need substantial funding. Negotiations commenced with the Heritage Lottery Fund to secure a grant from its Landscape Partnership Scheme fund. The Partnership was not successful at first but continued to make and to strengthen its case. In 2013, it was awarded £1.72m of HLF funding, for a 4-year programme of activities (2014 – 2018), which would be enhanced by funding from the partners to create a pot of approx. £2.5m.

The Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) for Tame Valley Wetlands (TVW)

The point of LPS funding is that it works at the level of a landscape, seeking to help conserve the features that make up that landscape, not just individual aspects of it. The plan or 'Scheme' put together for Tame Valley Wetlands worked across 20 sites between Coleshill and Tamworth. Warwickshire Wildlife Trust took responsibility for managing the contract and the grant from HLF. The Board of the Partnership, representing ten organisations and the local community, took on the role of forming a management board to oversee and steer the Scheme. The vision of the Partnership was:

“to create a wetland landscape, rich in wildlife and accessible to all.”

To make it easier to chart a practical route to achieving this vision, the Partnership agreed four Aims (see table below). The four aims centred on:

- Improving built and natural heritage, including habitat improvements,
- Getting people interested and engaged in Tame Valley Wetlands,
- Improving access to and interpretation of the area and
- Providing opportunities for formal and informal learning to develop the relevant skills of both local people and the employees of partner organisations.

Volunteering was recognised as pivotal to the success of the Scheme, not just to help deliver projects but also to provide long-term help to conserve sites, so forming a permanent volunteer group was an important objective. Raising people's awareness about the importance of the area was also vital, so they would be more likely to care for the environment in the future and participate in activities to help protect it.

Table 1: Aims set by the Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership Landscape Scheme:

The 4 Aims of the Tame Valley Wetlands Scheme		
Conserve, Enhance, Restore	built and natural heritage features in order to improve the fragmented and degraded landscape of the Tame Valley.	Aim 1
Connect People and the Landscape	Reconnect the community with the landscape and its heritage by engaging and involving people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.	Aim 2
Access and Learning	Improve both physical and intellectual access and learning for local people through a range of resources.	Aim 3
Training and Skills	Provide training for local people through taster and courses, award schemes and certificates in heritage and conservation topics.	Aim 4

Using its audit of potential improvement works, an activity plan known as a 'Programme' was designed for each Aim and given the designation Programme A, B, C or D respectively for Aims 1, 2, 3 and 4. Each programme contained a range of projects.

A fifth programme within the Scheme set aside funds to allow the Partnership to employ a Scheme Manager plus a team of six delivery staff and administrative staff with the necessary specialist skill sets for the different programmes. Together, the five programmes that would deliver the Partnership's vision were known as the "Local Conservation Action Plan" or "LCAP".

Key Achievements

In total, 40 projects were identified to deliver the vision, split across the four programmes. A selection of photographs later in this document illustrate the sort of projects carried out to deliver each aim.







Inevitably, delivery of some projects has not been without its challenges but by the end of the Scheme, 39 of the 40 projects had been successfully completed and only one project remained to be completed.

Each project had an associated set of targets. The total list of targets is long – 49 in all - yet the evaluation found that 40 targets (82%) had been delivered and 37 of the 40 were actually exceeded, some by a significant proportion. Only nine targets were not completely achieved but these were generally less important or there was a valid explanation. For example, a target was set for the number of taster sessions and training days as well as the number of training participants. The latter was exceeded. The number of events was below target, so the number of people who were trained was actually achieved by holding fewer events, resulting in a cost saving.

The following table shows a sample of activities from different programmes that exceeded the set target.

✓ *By the end of the Scheme, 39 of 40 projects in the Action Plan had been completed and one was nearly complete.*

Table 2: Examples of LPS activities where targets were exceeded

MEASURE	TARGET		ACTUAL
Bird/bat boxes installed	9		92
Ditches reprofiled/enhanced	650m		925m
TameFest Attendees	780		4,870
Volunteer work parties	86		229
New boardwalk installed	70m		740m
New visitor platforms/hides	3		7

Some activities were not included in the set of targets but, as the work progressed, the Partnership team found different and more meaningful ways of measuring their work. These provide extra evidence



**'Wilding the Tame' –
riverbank reprofiling at
Kingsbury Water Park**



**'Taming the Tame' – new
island in Tameside Local
Nature Reserve**



**'Bringing a Boom to the Tame' –
improvements at RSPB Middleton Lakes**



**'Turret Restoration' -
improve the condition and
appearance of the Drayton
Turret Footbridge**

Aim One Highlights



**Creation of new Sand Martin
nesting bank in Kingsbury's
Community Wetlands**



**'Ban on Balsam' - methods
to try to reduce invasive
non-native species**



**Creation of new hide in
Kingsbury's Community
Wetlands**



**Creation of new Wetland area
at Kingsbury Water Park**

that the Scheme was delivered successfully. For example, there was no target set for the number of plug plants planted but the Partnership actually planted over 28,500 in the course of the Scheme. The Review found that there were numerous instances of genuine additional activity, for example, the installation of four willow sculptures at Kingsbury Community Wetlands. This demonstrates that, when



resources allowed, the Partnership team did not simply stop when they hit the set target but carried on making additional improvements.

When all the activity that took place is considered, it is clear that a great many improvements have been made on the majority of wildlife sites in the area and that the Scheme has succeeded in engaging with and involving people of different ages and backgrounds. A

sample of photographic evidence is provided in this Summary to illustrate the range of projects that were undertaken for each of the Aims. Some of the key achievements for each aim are shown on the infographic below.



Figure 3: Key Achievements for each Aim



BBC TV's Countryfile film
'Ratty's Return' work to
reintroduce water voles



Mayor of Tamworth visits
TameFest conservation event



Construction of new Iron Age
style roundhouse at Hams Hall
Environmental Centre

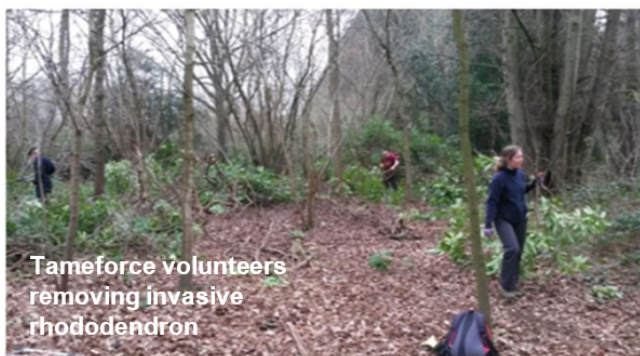


Hedgerow laying at
Kingsbury Water Park

Aim Two Highlights



'Restore' project
participants at
Middleton Lakes Park



Tameforce volunteers
removing invasive
rhododendron



Students bridge building for the
John Muir environmental award

Making a success of the Scheme

The Review found that a number of factors had contributed to the success of the Scheme:

- The staff team had worked well together, led by a Scheme Manager, who was universally praised;
- The team's base at Hams Hall Environmental Centre helped to strengthen local ties;
- Volunteers had played a major part, giving over 7,000 hours of their time and the volunteer group formed as part of the Scheme – TameForce – made a significant contribution and will continue after the Scheme closed;
- Partner engagement and commitment was particularly strong and was rewarded when the Partnership won a UK Rivers prize in 2018 for its collaborative practice;
- The Partnership applied for and was awarded Nature Improvement Area status for Tame Valley Wetlands, providing additional long-term protection and seeking to protect a slightly bigger geographic area;
- Early in the Scheme, a professional agency was employed to design the brand and brand guidelines. The partners were all involved in selecting the design. It has been widely used on printed matter, interpretation boards and on web pages and its use will continue.

Transition towards self-sufficiency

HLF funding enabled the Partnership to make many improvements and get people involved in a way that could not have happened without it. Nevertheless, the Partnership existed before the funding was awarded and shows a clear intent to continue its work when HLF funding ceased. It has demonstrated strong strategic vision throughout the Scheme, not least by commissioning a leading expert to compile a long-term vision document that could influence and catalyse partners, funders and other decision-makers. By Spring 2018, armed with the experience of which activities had worked well, and which it would like to continue beyond the LPS Scheme, the Partnership negotiated a so-called 'Transition and Addendum Plan' with HLF. This allowed it to make best use of a small amount of funds that had not been spent and to re-allocate monies from the only project that did not proceed because a partner withdrew. As a result, it still met its target of restoring two heritage structures. Partners also contributed some of their own funds to the Transition Plan, which extended activities until February 2019. The funding also supported the extension of some staff contracts, enabling the partners to develop their plans to maintain a permanent team of staff, albeit slightly smaller than during the LPS contract.

The evaluation found that the Transition and Addendum Plan had also been delivered successfully, bringing even greater benefits to the area through more cost effective use of resources, by extending valuable activities such as the removal of non-native invasive plant species and by funding a range of small projects that strengthened ties with local communities. Most importantly, the Transition Plan has eased the Partnership's passage into a new operating model, in which it is generating income and becoming increasingly self-funding, for example, through the sale of conservation workshop sessions to schools, by winning further funding bids and winning contracts for delivering green infrastructure.

What did people think?

One of the four aims of the Scheme was to build relationships with local people to increase their understanding about the importance of the Tame Valley Wetlands, to make it easier for them to access the Wetlands, make them better equipped in terms of skills and get them more involved in conservation work. The Review Team spoke to staff from partner organisations, community organisations and to local people to hear their opinions about the activities organised by the Partnership. The feedback was almost universally positive. Below is a sample of their views.

"Now the new platform has been installed, the Forest School Leader can start using this area of the site again to build children's esteem and personal skills!"

Schoolteacher

"The Friends of the Lakes in Tamworth greatly appreciated the input from the TameForce volunteers. They were keen, skilled and well led(and) had access to and training for equipment that we could not use."

*"Hi Rita
I'm writing to thank you and TVW for your time and support for the event yesterday. This was the 7th time this event has been held and I think it was our busiest ever."*

Fiona, Friends of Kingsbury Water Park

"Tamefest (2017) was a fantastic free event which really showcased some of the good work that goes on in areas, such as our Local Nature Reserves."

Mayor of Tamworth

"Hello Tim, just a short note to express my personal appreciation for the work that TVW are involved in. "... I have attended several events organised by your team... every one of them has been a rewarding and fulfilling experience."

Volunteer

Challenges

In a Scheme of this size and complexity, where much of the work took place outdoors, one would expect to find obstacles along the way. Projects that dealt with groundworks and construction sometimes encountered difficulties with poor weather and ground conditions.

The evaluation noted two major problems that affected the delivery of the Scheme, albeit with a short-term impact:

Firstly, a delay was created by not being able to recruit a team member with the right skills to deliver the access projects. This was only fixed towards the end of the Scheme's life span and meant that walks and routes opened up by the Scheme have only recently become available for use by the general public;



New interpretation boards for nature reserves throughout the Wetlands



Ten circular walks laid out to help visitors enjoy the area, supported by interpretation boards, printed leaflets and downloadable maps



Improved facilities at Kingsbury Water Park Visitor Centre to create a new gateway for visitors to TVW



Finger posts and way markers showing the route of the new Tame Way and other trails and walks

Aim Three Highlights



New interpretation for heritage sites



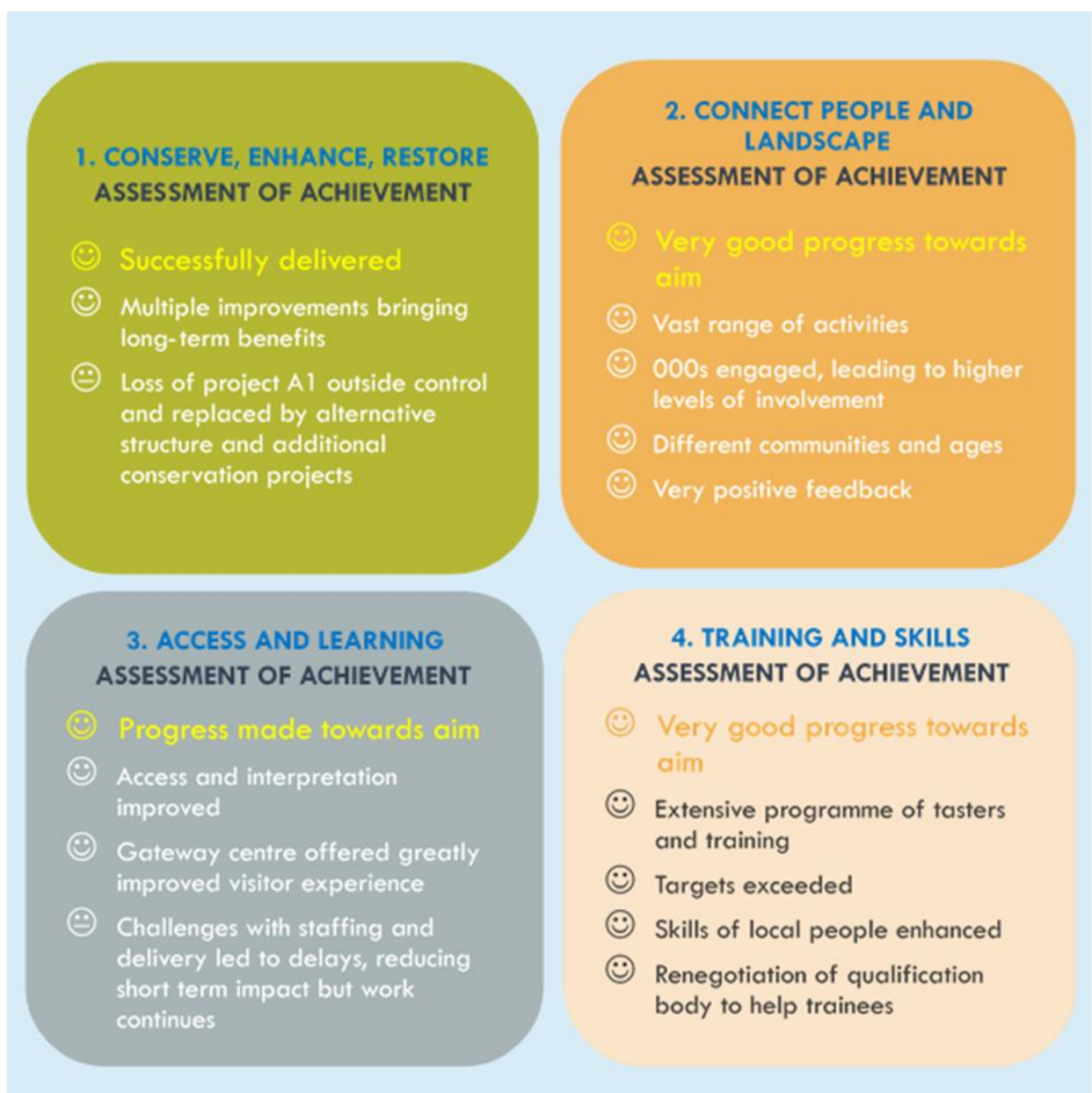
Clear and consistent branding for different types of attractions and activities

Secondly, the loss of a major flagship project to repair paving in Curdworth Tunnel, due to the loss of funding and person power expected from Canal & River Trust. This was beyond the control of the Partnership and it took a long time to categorically confirm that the project could not proceed. Nevertheless, the Partnership was determined to deliver its targets in relation to heritage structures and so substituted the restoration of Lea Ford Cottage, in the grounds of its offices, which has been transformed into a useful and attractive training facility.

Assessing the difference made by the Scheme

The Review team used all the evidence from statistical reports, site visits, attendance at events, consultation with the staff, with the Board, partners and with beneficiaries of the Scheme to draw conclusions about whether the Partnership had achieved each of its four Aims. The team's assessment is summarised in the infographic below.

Figure 4: Assessment of extent of achievements for Partnership's four key aims





Birdsong identification training – one of many topics covered by taster and training sessions



Learning how to coppice – conservation skills training



Small mammal monitoring

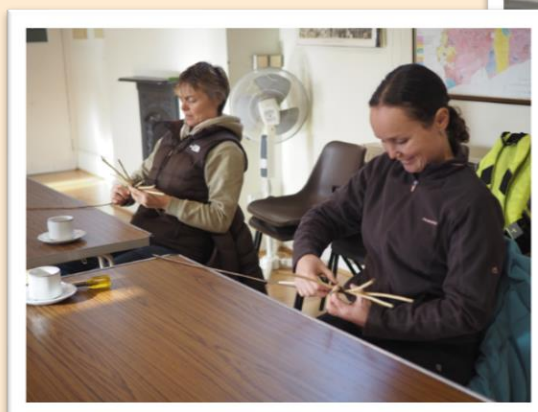


Training towards formal conservation qualifications



Training topics helped to protect historic heritage as well as nature sites

Aim Four Highlights



Stone carving and basket weaving were two of many heritage skills taught

The evidence clearly shows that the Partnership's delivery of the projects in the Scheme has made many improvements to the wetland areas and green spaces in Tame Valley that will help nature to thrive.

Although there is no hard statistical proof that local people know more about wetlands than before the Scheme started, the evidence does show that thousands of people have attended events, participating in workshops, taken guided walks and looked at the Tame Valley website, so it is reasonable to conclude that there is also now a greater awareness of the wetlands. The access works that have taken place are only recently completed but they will give everyone more places to walk in the local countryside for years ahead, with options to follow planned routes and plenty of interpretation material to help explain landscape and historic features along the way. The Review has satisfied the evaluators that the Partnership has successfully delivered the Scheme.

Managing the Scheme

As well as looking at *what* has been delivered, understanding *how* the Partnership has worked together to achieve these results is another important part of the review process. The table below lays out the different aspects of collaboration and management that were considered and offers a view about what went well and any improvements that might have helped to deliver the Scheme even more effectively.

Table 3: Good practice and learning points for managing an LPS scheme

Aspect	What worked well	Learning Points
Governance and Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership structure suitable for purpose and cross-boundary Independent Chair of Board worked well Strong commitment of partners and WWT Clear strategic thinking and planning Clear and consistent branding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a robust approach to programme management as demonstrated by the Board in the last two years of Scheme.
Scheme Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for projects was well evidenced Ambitious but deliverable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid over-prescription and complication
Management and staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team worked well together Effective Scheme Manager Forward planning for staffing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure flexibility to recruit skills needed without delaying projects
Scheme delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility to change direction, both to tackle challenges and take opportunities Transition plan has underpinned value of scheme overall - strength 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid early recruitment problems that could hamper delivery
Achievement of Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many positives, lots of over-delivery, additional unplanned activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid over-complicating targets
Achievement of Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant benefit to the catchment Positive signs of community engagement Forward planning to underpin work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start with a manageable framework of evidence requirements

What lessons would the Partnership offer to other HLF projects?

The Review highlighted the Partnership's approach to sustainability and strategic planning as a particular area of strength, potentially a model of good practice, with the following characteristics from which others might learn:

- Strong, long-term strategic vision from outset and updated to maintain relevance
- Strong branding
- Outward looking
- Partner commitment
- Sound relationship building for the long-term
- LPS was a springboard, not an end in itself – enabling, building credibility
- Engagement with key authorities, local influencers, decision-makers and acknowledged experts
- Keeping Partnership structure manageable and relevant.

Other lessons that may be useful

- Work to make the scheme part of the local community from the outset
- Set up an evaluation framework at the outset – keep it manageable and practical
- The use of more delegated project delivery can help to achieve targets in a timely manner
- Keep plans flexible regarding staff job designation and skill sets
- Give due resource to marketing work
- Keep systems simple – they should be a tool, not a burden.

Guide to Photographs

Front Cover: Top Row L to R: TameForce volunteers hedge laying; Ladywalk Nature Reserve; 'Wild Wednesdays' bug hunting family event. Middle row: River Tame; xx; Drayton Turret Footbridge. Bottom row: Kingsbury Community Wetlands; riverbank reprofiling and planting at Kingsbury; TVW branding; John Muir award students. All courtesy of TVW.

'Aim' photos: Courtesy of TVW, T Doherty, C Harris, RSPB, J Holland.

Back cover: All courtesy of TVW.

TameForce volunteers	TameForce volunteers	Tame Way Path laying before and after
TameForce volunteers	TVW Star shade exhibition stand	Lamppost signage at Whitacre Heath SSSI
Ladywalk Nature Reserve	TameForce volunteers	
John Muir students	Wild Wednesdays family events	TameForce volunteers
Flyer for poetry walks at different wildlife sites	Flyer for John Muir award	Upgraded Kingsbury Water Park Gateway Visitor Centre
Flyer and leaflet	John Muir award students laying reed bed	Flyer for community gathering
		Student workshop facilitated by TVW marketing apprentice

