

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



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Environment
Agency



Love Your River Cole Green Recovery Challenge Fund Project Final Evaluation

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Executive Summary

The Environment Agency and Tame Valley Wetlands co-funded a Vision for the Valley of the River Cole. This was overseen by a steering group including a wide range of partners. GRCF offered an ideal opportunity for the partnership to turn some of that vision into reality, so an ambitious bid was submitted and was successful in winning £705,000.

The project would be delivered by a partnership made up of the Tame Valley Wetlands team of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT), Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust (BBCWT), Birmingham City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (Solihull MBC), North Warwickshire Borough Council (NWBC), The Prince's Trust, Castle Bromwich Historic Gardens Trust (CBHGT) and B37 Project CIC (B37 Project).

The successful project bid included capital works at four key sites along the valley – Glebe Farm Recreation Ground, Castle Bromwich Parkland, Meriden Park and Cole End Park – in three different local authority areas and across two wildlife trusts. It also included a varied training programme, including 6 one-year long traineeships, a suite of training sessions for 16 to 24 year olds run by The Prince's Trust and a series of accredited and non-accredited training events for staff, volunteers, and the general public. There were a range of events to reconnect local people with the green spaces around them. Finally, there was an aspiration to strengthen the partner organisations to make them more resilient in future, and where possible/appropriate, use the services of local businesses to deliver contracts.

Funding was awarded in late 2020, giving 15 months for delivery of this ambitious programme. An immediate challenge was to recruit the six trainees quickly to ensure they had a full year to achieve their training outcomes – all were in post by the end of March 2021. The trainees were

hosted by WWT (2), BBCWT (1), CBHGT (1) and B37 Project (2).

The Prince's Trust were able to start their suite of training opportunities early in the project. Their first Explore sessions, day long engagement activities, introducing young people to nature and wellbeing among other aspects, had to be delivered online rather than face to face, due to the Covid restrictions in place in early 2021. By July it was possible for these to take place face to face at the Birmingham EcoPark in Small Heath. Overall, 92 young people participated in an Explore day, either online or face to face, and 11 sessions were run overall.

The Prince's Trust also ran a follow-on programme, Get Started in Nature and Conservation, which was made up of a one day taster session, followed by a weeklong programme of outdoor learning and activity. During the week, young people were able to gain real experience of undertaking conservation works and achieve a Level One qualification in Tool Use. During the project, the Get Started programme ran 4 times, and had 32 participants.

The final programme run by The Prince's Trust was the month-long Get Into Woodlands, run at Saltwells Local Nature Reserve. This ran twice and had 20 participants overall, who had the opportunity to gain their Chainsaw Maintenance and Cross-cutting certificate, regarded as a useful entry qualification for outdoor maintenance work. The participants greatly enjoyed the programme and most achieved their chainsaw certificate.

In addition to the two formal training schemes, there were numerous other training opportunities run during LYRiC. There were a number of fauna and flora identification sessions, including a couple demonstrating bird ringing. The identification training sessions helped to build capacity for wildlife audits across the

Cole Valley, and several audits were undertaken, including wildflowers, butterflies, and two BioBlitzes.

A certificated tool maintenance course was run several times, open to trainees, volunteers and staff across all the partners. This was particularly well received by participants and should stand all organisations in good stead going forward. Staff and volunteers will be more knowledgeable about the tools that they use, and better able to maintain them properly, both extending the life of the equipment and also reducing the risk of injury due to poorly maintained tools.

Various events and activities were laid on for the local communities from Easter 2021 through to the end of the funded scheme, with a particular emphasis on school holidays. Events were intended to encourage people to engage with the open spaces local to them and to appreciate the nature around them.

Events ranged from wellness walks to candlelit walks, from a Big Breakfast to family craft sessions, from embracing small group activity to being part of Solihull MBC's Oaks and Shires event. In some events, such as foraging, the distinction between training and activity was very blurred. Overall feedback from events is very positive and shows that they have been successful in getting people to be more appreciative of the open spaces around them.

Although funded activity started in January 2021, the major capital works programmes at Cole End Park, Meriden Park and Glebe Farm had to wait until after the nesting season and were undertaken in the second half of the project timeframe. By contrast, the works at Castle Bromwich Parkland were able to get going more quickly, with the restoration of the acid grassland starting in the summer months. All capital works were complete by March 2022.

Castle Bromwich Parklands had a programme of habitat management and enhancement that ran through the year,

from when a new member of staff dedicated to the Parkland was employed. During the year, there has been work to restore acid grassland, improve the quality of meadow land, restore the historic avenue of trees, improve access through the addition of a raised boardwalk and bridge, as well as clearing paths and installing a nature trail. Works have also been carried out on the wetland areas of the Parkland to improve conditions for wildlife. Feedback from visitors is that the area already feels safer, but it will take a year or two for the habitat improvements to demonstrate their value.

Above its confluence with the River Cole in Meriden Park, Kingshurst Brook was overgrown, had poor water quality due to slow moving water, and was a magnet for shopping trolleys. LYRIC funded works to narrow the watercourse, speeding up the water flow to improve quality and make it a better environment for invertebrates and the fish and other wildlife that live off them. This should make the area more attractive for local people, with a desired impact of reducing anti-social behaviour and litter.

At Cole End Park, there was a mix of work to improve accessibility and add features to the play area, while also undertaking works to improve the woodlands and meadow at the Local Nature Reserve that forms part of the larger park. Local residents were consulted on the plans and kept informed about the works at all stages.

Glebe Farm was the last of the capital projects to be undertaken, in February 2022. Here access was improved through the installation of paths, as well as improvements to the meadow area and the creation of two wetland areas. These were planted up with appropriate plug plants by volunteers, once the contractors were off site.

A desired outcome from LYRIC was that partners would be more resilient, and that inter-partner links would be established and/or improved. This has been achieved to varying extents between different partners. The Prince's Trust in the West

Midlands has been able to demonstrate the value of working with wildlife trusts and both sides are keen to explore working together in the future.

The capital works undertaken have been designed to be relatively self-sustaining, although areas where scrub has been cleared will need maintenance by volunteer work parties over the years, as scrub has a tendency to grow back.

Some partners now have a larger and more diverse pool of volunteers to call on to help with site maintenance and also with events and activities for local communities. The local economy has a number of better qualified and interested individuals able to make a difference to the environment, through volunteer or paid work.

The achievements of the LYRIC project are being shared widely through a series of visual blogs (Vlogs), professionally produced and showcasing the different sites. The short segments about individual projects can also be used by the partners to demonstrate their ability to undertake funded environmental conservation works, both in reaction to bidding rounds and also when proactively seeking external support.

Whether the desired environmental legacy from the capital works will be achieved is hard to say at present. With the majority only just completed, wetlands look raw and unappealing, and as spring arrives, it is only now that the trees at Kingshurst Brook will show whether they have survived the cutting and laying that was done as part of the work to narrow the channel. The capital works will need time to settle in and meet their full potential, supporting a wider range of fauna and flora. There is good reason to believe that this will happen, given time.

All partners are better placed to undertake biodiversity audits at the sites in future, and should aim to publicise whether the works undertaken have achieved the required goals for wildlife.

A number of local organisations have improved their capacity and capabilities with the project. There are direct impacts on the partner organisations, particularly those in the third sector. The Prince's Trust has a new area where it is able to offer opportunities to young people, and they have already teamed up with another West Midlands GRCF project to deliver more Get Started in Nature and Conservation courses. Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust is expanding its staffing, thanks to its involvement in LYRIC. Some local businesses have been able to consolidate their trading status and expand their customer base as a result of working with LYRIC.

All six LYRIC trainees successfully submitted portfolios for their Level 2 City and Guilds qualification which will greatly improve their prospects for employment in this sector.

LYRIC was only ever intended to address part of the vision for the River Cole and future work will be needed to join up the green spaces along the valley.

There have been a number of valuable lessons learned during the LYRIC delivery, as set out below:

- Even with projects where timescales are short and deadlines are tight, ensuring communication flows between all partners is crucial, and not just on funding issues.
- In order to build sound working relationships with new partners, time needs to be set aside to explore and understand each other's aspirations, capacity and capabilities.
- Having trainees work as a team across organisation boundaries improves the learning experience for the trainees and provides them with better support.
- The benefits for partners working across geographical borders is clear and provides a foundation for collaborative work and funding applications.
- Interpretation materials always take longer to produce and put in place than expected.

Overall, the partners have achieved all the outputs they set out in their application for GRCF. It will take time to see whether the longer term outcomes will also be

achieved, particularly around habitat improvements for wildlife and reconnecting local populations with their green spaces.



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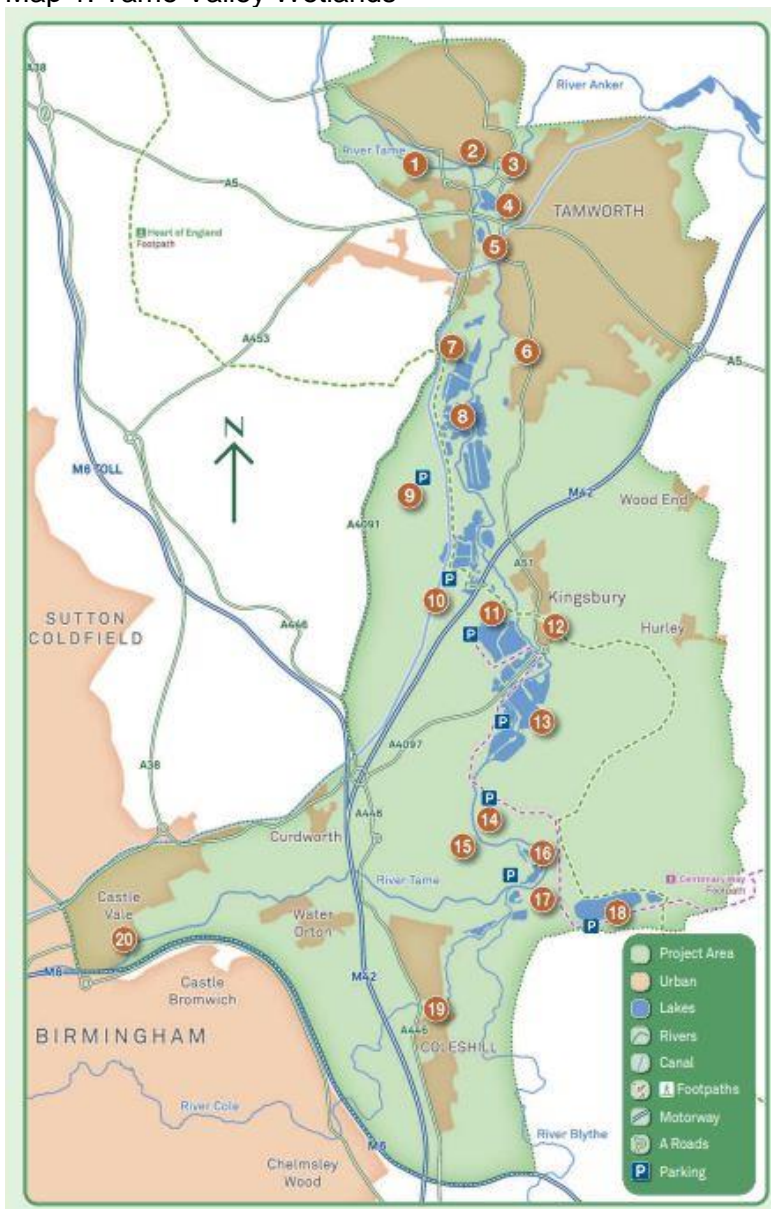
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Introduction

Background

Over the past fifteen years, a partnership of organisations led by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) has worked together to protect an area of North Warwickshire between Birmingham and Tamworth known as Tame Valley Wetlands. The area comprises a chain of lakes, pools and reservoirs that broadly follow the line of the River Tame and is now recognised as a Nature Improvement Area because of the existing value of its landscape and its potential to further improve, and is shown in the map below.

Map 1: Tame Valley Wetlands



Source: Tame Valley Wetlands brochure¹

In 2014, the Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) for a major programme of

¹ [Layout 1 \(tamevalleywetlands.co.uk\)](http://tamevalleywetlands.co.uk)

capital works, heritage conservation, habitat restoration, access improvements and public engagement. The programme was successfully delivered over a four year period to the end of 2018.

Alongside the many achievements of that programme, the relationships between the various partner organisations were cemented by their common cause and they agreed to continue their work to restore and enhance the Nature Improvement Area.

Their vision for the area is encapsulated in “Tame Valley Wetlands: our vision for the future”². The benefit of this approach to the Wetlands is that it sets out a strategy for the medium and long term, to which all partners have subscribed and to which each partner can contribute individually and collectively. The aims of the strategy go well beyond what it might be possible to achieve under any individual funding programme and, in effect, set out a prospectus that can be used to secure commitment and resources from funders and decision makers.

In order to drive forward the practical delivery of the strategy, the partners agreed to maintain the Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership under the auspices of WWT and to resource a small staff team to continue the momentum achieved during the delivery of the LPS. Both of these actions have contributed significant added value to the legacy of the LPS.

The ‘Vision’ is a very high level aspirational plan for the Wetlands. As delivery of the LPS drew to a close, it became apparent to the partners that there was an opportunity to develop their plans for one aspect of the ‘Vision’, namely the development of the corridor of the River Cole, a tributary of the River Tame. With Environment Agency funding (one of the partners), the Partnership was able to commission a specialist consultancy to develop such a strategy, which was published in October 2019.

The launch of the Government’s Green Recovery Challenge Fund in 2020 provided an opportunity for the Partnership to bid for and secure funds to deliver activities that contribute to its plans to restore and invigorate the River Cole corridor.

Vision for the River Cole

The River Cole is a 25 mile – long (34 Km) tributary of the River Tame that flows between East Birmingham, North Solihull and North Warwickshire, traversing the local authority areas of Birmingham City, Solihull Metropolitan Borough and North Warwickshire Borough. The River Cole corridor lies within both the Tame Valley and the Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Areas, and links urbanised inner city Birmingham to the open countryside of North Warwickshire, including Tame Valley Wetlands.

The river provides valuable habitat for a range of flora and fauna. However, the habitat has been degraded by fragmentation caused by development, poor management, invasive species and anti-social behaviour. Water quality is also poor. Under the Water Framework Directive, the river is classified as “Heavily Modified”. The river can rise quickly and flood in times of heavy rainfall and levels can be very low during times of drought.

Nevertheless, the river corridor provides a significant green space for the local urbanised population and has the potential to be a valuable blue and green corridor.

² See: <http://www.tamevalleywetlands.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Advocacy-doc-edited-16.10.2019.pdf>

As the NLHF funded Tame Valley Wetlands LPS drew to a close in 2018, the Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership decided to explore what part it could play in realising the potential of the River Cole corridor. Working with the Environment Agency, it commissioned specialist consultancy Atkins to produce an assessment of the river corridor that included a strategic vision and, importantly, some practical plans for making improvements. Atkins report, entitled “Cole Valley Catchment Vision”³, was published in October 2019 and offers a Masterplan for the corridor. While Atkins produced the report, partners and other stakeholders were given plenty of opportunity to contribute to its findings, so that their respective opinions and priorities are represented.

This report is now cited as best practice in how to “benefit wildlife, heritage and people” in the West Midlands Combined Authority’s “#WM2041 Actions to meet the climate crisis with inclusivity, prosperity and fairness”⁴.

The Cole Valley Catchment Vision sets four high level strategic objectives:

- **Create** a high quality blue/green corridor along the River Cole through East Birmingham, North Solihull and North Warwickshire that can be used as an alternative travel route for local or commuting journeys without the car.
- **Enhance** the natural and historic environment, improve biodiversity and water quality, reduce flood risk and highlight the opportunities for natural capital and environmental net gain.
- **Re-connect** local communities and businesses with their local public open space, help them value what the river provides for them, improving wellbeing and resilience through social prescribing and identifying links between behavioural change and flooding/environmental improvements.
- **Stimulate** partnership working across multiple stakeholders to coordinate approaches to catchment-wide issues, deliver local policy aspirations and unlock multiple funding opportunities.

The Vision document divides the corridor into six geographic action zones, one of which covers the entire corridor. It details the challenges facing each zone and possible interventions that would make progress towards the four strategic objectives. It then identifies so-called “Opportunity Sites” – specific locations within the different zones where one or more improvement projects could take place.

It is clear that the partners intend the Vision to drive practical action, so three case study sites were nominated, one in each local authority area. The proposed improvements on these sites were determined to be deliverable, with a known funding stream, having local stakeholder and community support and offering high visual impact.

The partners cleared the way for work to take place by putting in place the necessary approvals and permissions. Some practical work has also taken place.

The development of the Vision to such a level means that the Partnership has a well-formed and credible plan for this part of its catchment that it can pitch to stakeholders and external funders. The fact that the plan is divided into segments gives it a much greater sense of

³ The report can be viewed at: <http://www.tamevalleywetlands.co.uk/cole-valley-catchment-landscape-vision-report/>

⁴ The document can be viewed at: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4008/wm2041-final-003.pdf>. The case study can be found on P23.

deliverability and means the Partnership can seek funding for particular aspects and/or locations. Delivery in phases will allow progress in a number of locations and those visible improvements should spur on additional action that eventually leads to the delivery of the whole vision.

As a result of this considerable planning activity and investment, the Partnership was well placed to bid to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to continue the process of bringing its plans to fruition.

Green Recovery Challenge Fund

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) is a short term competitive fund, designed to kick-start environmental renewal while creating and retaining a range of jobs in England. There have been two rounds of funding, the first of which was awarded in November 2020, and the second in July 2021.

GRCF was developed by Defra and is managed by NLHF, supported by Natural England and the Environment Agency. It was intended to help restore nature, tackle climate change and connect people with nature. It aims to build back better and greener after the Covid pandemic.

Round 1 distributed around £40 million to 68⁵ projects, including £705,300 to WWT, one of 21 awards of more than £250,000. Awards ranged in size from £68,000 to £3.8 million. The 68 projects planned to plant over 800,000 trees and help restore damaged habitats including moorlands, wetlands, and forests. Round 1 of GRCF is being evaluated at the national level to see how well this ambition has been achieved.

At the headline level, Love Your River Cole (LYRiC) planned to contribute to the strategic vision for the River Cole, by delivering:

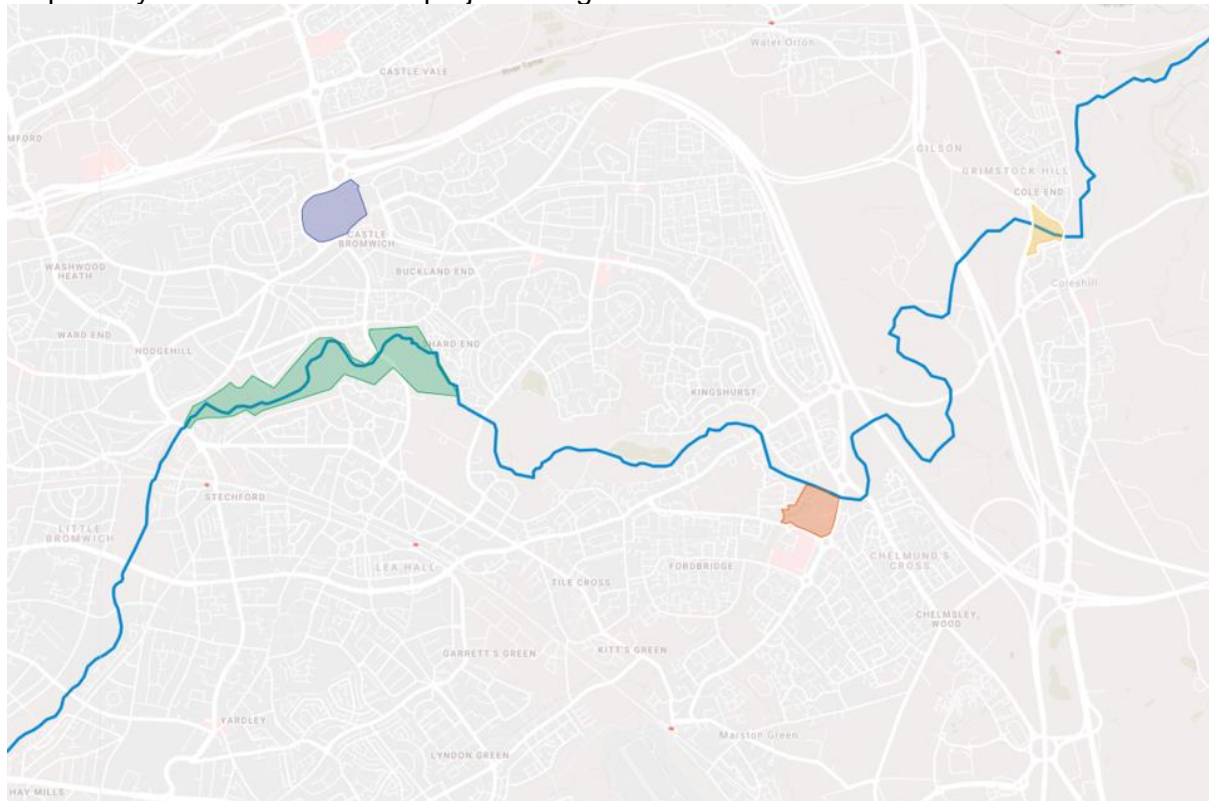
- 7 kilometres of habitat management
- create 2 new roles, 6 traineeships and retain 18 existing roles in the environment sector
- support a further 18 roles in the wider economy
- deliver accredited training, and
- reconnect local communities with nature – through a number of events and volunteering opportunities.

The key partners in LYRiC are WWT, specifically the Tame Valley Wetlands team, North Warwickshire Borough Council (NWBC), Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (Solihull MBC), Castle Bromwich Historic Gardens Trust (CBHGT), The Prince's Trust, B37 Project, Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust (BBCWT), and Birmingham City Council (BCC).

⁵ [Nearly £40million awarded to green regeneration projects in England | The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#)

The key locations worked on are shown on Map 2 below. From east to west, in green is Glebe Farm recreation area, in blue is Castle Bromwich Parkland, in orange is Meriden Park and in yellow is Cole End Park.

Map 2: key areas for the LYRiC project along the River Cole



Source: Tame Valley Wetlands

The remainder of this report details our formal evaluation of the LYRiC project.

The next section tells the story of delivery of LYRiC, before further sections looking in detail at aims, targets, outputs, and outcomes. Finally, we assess the sustainability of the project and its legacy, as well as identifying lessons learned for future activity. The detailed month by month activities and actions are detailed in the Annex.

The Story of Delivering LYRiC

In this section, we look at what activity has taken place, building from a slow start to intense activity through the second half of the funding period.

The full proposal for the LYRiC project was submitted to NLHF in late October 2020 and WWT received notification that the proposal was successful on 30 November 2020. However, work could not start until the suite of 'permission to start' documents had been returned to NLHF and approved. This approval was received before Christmas, enabling the partners to place advertisements for the traineeships before the end of 2020. Finding suitable candidates and getting them started on their programme of learning had been identified as the riskiest part of the LYRiC scheme, not least as there would only be 15 months of funded activity.

It should also be noted that the effective start date of January 2021 was challenging as environmental works are best carried out in the quiet period between September and February, before the main nesting period starts in late March. This has therefore rather forced the back loading of capital works towards the second half of the delivery period.

January 2021 was all about getting things ready, getting systems and agreements in place, and undertaking the recruitment of the new staff and the trainees required for delivery. The Prince's Trust were also actively preparing their delivery plan and actions.

In February, the LYRiC management team developed and issued the Request for Quotation for the evaluation part of the project, which was let in March.

The training programme element of the project was the first to get underway, and in the first quarter of 2021, The Prince's Trust started to recruit for their initial sessions, and to ensure that by working with the Wildlife Trusts, they had suitable materials looking at nature and open spaces. Early Explore sessions were of one day duration and undertaken online, but provided the start point of a learner journey, progressing to a one week course and potentially a month long course for those interested in work in the sector. More details on this are found under Aim 4.

The LYRiC trainees were all in post by the end of March and commenced a yearlong programme of learning and activity working across sites in the Cole Valley managed by the two wildlife trusts and CBHGT, as well as schools and other open spaces.

Through the spring and summer months, the only capital works for habitat improvement took place at Castle Bromwich Parkland, but there were numerous work parties, events, and a number of wildlife audits undertaken along the Cole Valley. Summer is a key time for control of Himalayan Balsam, which was undertaken at a number of sites.



Corporate Himalayan Balsam "bashing" session at Babbs Mill, July 2021. Photo: Tame Valley Wetlands

The progression sessions for The Prince's Trust started in May, and their Explore sessions moved to face to face delivery in July. July and August also saw more events in Meriden Park and Castle Bromwich Parkland for families, taking advantage of the school holidays to work with family groups and children.

By September, the planning and commissioning phases of work started for the capital works at Meriden Park (Kingshurst Brook), Glebe Farm and Cole End Park. While the Meriden Park work was mostly complete before Christmas 2021, the other two sites were not undertaken until the first quarter of 2022. In the autumn and winter, it was possible to do further capital and arboricultural work at Castle Bromwich Parkland, including some additional works that had not been planned.



Works on Kingshurst Brook, October 2021. Source: Tame Valley Wetlands

In the final month of delivery, the trainees were finalising and submitting their portfolios and preparing their next steps, while The Prince's Trust is running their final Explore session as well as their second month-long Get Into Woodlands session. The interpretation panels are being produced and should be installed before the end of the month – some are already in place. A series of Vlogs are also being produced to showcase the project and are available on the Tame Valley Wetlands YouTube channel and other platforms⁶.

The partners are now looking at how they can finance further works, and also maintain the habitat improvements they have already achieved.

The next section looks at how activities have contributed to the Aims of the Cole Valley vision and the GRCF outcomes.

⁶ https://youtu.be/Ukxw_r_hJng

Outputs and Outcomes by Aim

In this section we look at the approved activities and GRCF outcomes by Aim – the four aims are those taken from the Vision for the Cole Valley as all the activities were intended to support the delivery of this vision. The approved purposes and activities are from the bid submitted by WWT, as are the outputs, while the outcomes are those of GRCF.

Aim 1: Create

Much of the activity to support this aim took place at Castle Bromwich, Glebe Farm and Cole End Park and included the use of external contractors. It should be noted that other works under Aim 2 will also contribute to this Aim as well as Aim 2.

Strategic Objective	Approved purposes/Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
Create a high quality blue/green corridor along the River Cole through East Birmingham, North Solihull and North Warwickshire that can be used as an alternative travel route for local or commuting journeys without the car.	C1: Create 1,160 metres of pathways, nature trails and boardwalks and increase accessibility.	1,160 metres of pathways, nature trails and boardwalks. Improved accessibility	The local economy will be boosted
	C2: Run practical habitat improvement work sessions 1-2 days /week including woodland management	create and repair 2km pathways, seeding wildflowers and tree planting	A wider range of people will be involved in heritage

GRCF/NLHF Outcome: The local economy will be boosted

Where possible, local contractors and suppliers have been used, and, in one instance, the contractor is better placed and more able to invest and grow. One partner is also better placed to increase staffing, with recruitment activity underway.

Improving the attractiveness of and access to the Castle Bromwich Parklands will draw in additional visitors to the Estate, generating additional local spend.

The local environment sector has access to more trained people to recruit.

Jobs in the partnership have been maintained during delivery of LYRiC, and with increased skills and experience, the viability of the core partnership team has been improved.

Castle Bromwich Parkland

The Castle Bromwich Hall estate is well known for its 10 acres of formal, Grade II listed, walled garden which was once part of the Earl of Bradford's estate. The 350-year-old early 18th century formal garden has been rescued, nurtured and is now owned by an independent Charitable Trust, the Castle Bromwich Historic Gardens Trust (CBHGT)⁷ whose staff and volunteers are largely keeping to a period relevant style with plant species and heritage fruit from 1680-1760. Less well known, other than perhaps to locals, is the 12ha area of the estate outside the formal garden walls. This area, the Parkland, is also Grade II listed, designated as a local nature reserve (LNR) and the whole Estate is a conservation area. Management of the Parkland has been complicated by the different parts of the Estate being in different and separate ownership. However, the LYRIC project has enabled the owners, managers, and other LYRIC partners to work together on 'The Parkland Project'⁸ to support the important natural and historic aspects of this area.

In carrying out their work on the Parkland, CBHGT has endeavoured to attract new volunteers rather than use those who concentrate on work in the gardens, although some of the latter have worked on also worked in the Parkland. Regular volunteer work parties are advertised around the local area on the Trust's website and on social media to gain interest in a volunteer maintenance group at the Parkland. The offer of training, for example in the use of a scythe, encourages participation and hopefully an interest in returning to help with Parkland management in future. In addition, plans are being developed within the LYRIC partnership to create and develop local volunteer maintenance groups. However, attracting volunteers takes time and numbers are small so far. It is hoped that the improvements to the site will encourage more, new visitors and in time this will hopefully result in more volunteers. The LYRIC funding enabled CBHGT to appoint a manager and a trainee and commission Ashmead Price Ltd to produce an Outline Conservation Management Plan which is now available on request.

Historically, the Trust has concentrated on the formal landscape and has not been involved with the Parkland despite all constituent parts of the Estate being intimately linked and covered by the conservation zone. The Trust has limited resources and had hoped that the owners of the Parkland, Birmingham City Council, would be able to deal with it. Unfortunately, the Council is similarly short of resources and understandably reluctant to take on more responsibility for the site. Participation in LYRIC brought in sufficient financial and human resource to enable the Trust to expand its activities beyond the walls of the formal gardens into the Parkland to carry out restoration work, improve access and encourage wildlife across the whole historic landscape.

In the past, there have been both physical and cultural barriers between the Parkland and the walled garden. The physically enclosed environment of the formal gardens contrasts with the open access of the Parkland, leading to a sense, as has been described, of 'there be monsters', an attitude reinforced by the use of the Parkland for various anti-social or illegal activities. However, CBHGT has been able to open a passageway between the formal and informal spaces. In addition, volunteers working in the two locations have mixed and this has created a positive feeling about the work.

In planning its LYRIC funded work activities, the Trust has endeavoured to make the Parkland a more pleasant place through which to walk. In total, 1.4km of pathways and nature trails have been improved by volunteer groups and trainees and waymarkers installed on the nature trails. Improvements included the build and installation of a short boardwalk across wet ground in woodland, construction and installation of a short bridge across a

⁷ <https://www.castlebromwichhallgardens.org.uk/>

⁸ <https://www.castlebromwichhallgardens.org.uk/the-parkland-project/>

stream, cutting back encroaching brambles and nettles and laying chips. The boardwalk and bridge were constructed and installed by LYRIC trainees. Contractors were used to level some sections of path and reduce the problem of mud in wet weather; however, a public consultation showed a preference for natural pathways which were felt to be more in keeping with the historic setting. Four benches have been installed by volunteers alongside paths. Feedback from visitors emphasises how much safer people feel walking through now the paths have been improved.



Boardwalk over muddy area. Source: CBHGT



Nature trail way marker. Source: CBHGT



Bridge over ditch/stream. Source: MRE



Rustic bench. Source: MRE

Tameforce⁹ volunteers were involved in path clearance and because they were able to use power tools, made a significant contribution. Path and trail improvements provided the opportunity for work party members to acquire a range of tool use skills and gain experience in habitat management. One feature of the Parkland is an historic avenue of mature trees

⁹ A volunteer group managed by Tame Valley Wetlands, who contribute work parties where needed along the Tame Valley

which had suffered from a lack of management. Work parties were organised to clear encroaching brambles etc and also to remove unwanted small trees by using a tree-popping tool¹⁰.

An area of ground was stripped of topsoil, prepared by raking and removing woody debris and seeded with a mix of native grasses and seeded wildflowers, specific to acid grassland, to reinstate this valuable environment.



Acid grassland renewal, November 2021. Source: MRE

The Estate is on the side of the valley, rather than adjacent to the Cole itself and it is separated from the river by extensive areas of housing. There is no direct route between the two and the Parklands project therefore has little direct impact on the creation of a commuting corridor directly alongside the Cole, although it contributes to the area's range of habitats and biodiversity. In particular, the Estate is visited by birders and its wetland habitats provide continuity with the river. Thus, the work carried out on the Parkland has clearly contributed to LYRiC's targets to improve habitats and public accessibility. The staff have worked with local bird-ringers, and this may provide a connection between the two habitats that can be exploited to bring people to the Parkland. Future work might include steps to integrate the Estate with the cycle path along the River Cole, perhaps by providing a signposted route with appropriate information about both ends.

As noted above, the Parkland provided an opportunity for the Trust to recruit and train a new group of volunteers and the opportunity was advertised on their website, along with updates on the work that was being carried out. 18 local volunteer sessions covered a range of tasks from litter picking, path clearance and tree popping to practical habitat activities including wildflower planting and the construction of two hibernacula adjacent to the pond in the formal gardens. In addition, two corporate volunteer sessions were carried out.

The Trust's programme, 'Unplug and Play', uses both the gardens and the Parkland to provide opportunities for young children to get exposure to nature. The LYRiC trainee attached to the Trust took advantage of his training budget to undertake training as a Forest Schools leader and intends to make use of the Estate to run Forest School sessions in

¹⁰ <https://www.castlebromwichhallgardens.org.uk/2021/05/20/tree-popping-in-the-parkland/>

future. Additionally, the improvement in facilities increases the possibility of the Estate being use for local historic and other events.

In addition to these works, paths have been created and improved at Glebe Farm and Cole End Park – these are discussed in more detail under Aim 2.

Use of contractors

A number of projects used Boreal Tree Care¹¹, a specialist arboriculture organisation based in the WWT area, for their tree work. The founder of the organisation had been a volunteer with Tame Valley Wetlands, and after undertaking some training with that scheme, decided to set up his own business. This has grown successfully, so that he does not need to advertise his services, but is invited to tender for work by word of mouth. The works undertaken as part of LYRIC have only helped to increase this and he is now able to turn the organisation into a company and consider taking on premises and employed staff, as opposed to contractors. Working across the various sites along the River Cole has given the organisation a number of useful case studies to use in future tenders and when seeking certification from the Arboricultural Association as a Certified Arborist.

The works at Glebe Farm were undertaken by Sandyfields Ltd, a company based in Wolverhampton and thus within the BBCWT area. They are specialist tree surgery and groundworks contractors, established since 1985.

The main contractor at Meriden Park was Ecosulis¹² – a specialist company working in biodiversity assessment and habitat restoration, based in West London. Established in 2002, it became a cooperative in 2007, and in 2013 set its purpose as accelerating global rewilding. While not local (although the company does have offices in Birmingham), they are considered market leaders in habitat restoration and were able to use learning from other projects to ensure the best outcomes for the Kingshurst Brook. While working on site, their staff team paid for board and lodging in the local area, thus supporting hospitality and catering providers.

L Lynch Ltd, a national plant and transport hire company with a Midlands office in Northamptonshire, provided the machinery for working on site at Meriden Park. As part of their involvement, they asked if there was any other pro bono work that might be useful for the LYRIC project, an opportunity that was snapped up by Castle Bromwich Parkland. They lent an operated 9m Long Reach Excavator, and spent the day clearing a wetland area and creating sloping gradients through each pond section. This work was additional and would not have happened without the support of L Lynch Plant Hire and Haulage Ltd¹³.

Heritage and Sons Warks Ltd¹⁴ installed the signage and interpretation for Castle Bromwich Parkland. They are a business that specialises in fencing and groundworks contracting and are based within the WWT area. GMJ Woodcarving¹⁵ were used to undertake the carving of wooden stumps left after some tree removal works at Castle Bromwich Parkland. Graham Jones is a sculptor working almost exclusively with wood and is based in Birmingham. Willow sculptures were installed at Castle Bromwich Parkland in February 2022, and these were undertaken by Chaz Friend of Wayside Willow¹⁶, who is a willow artist and teacher based in Warwickshire.

¹¹ [Boreal Tree Care | Environmental Management | West Midlands \(borealtrees.co.uk\)](https://borealtrees.co.uk/)

¹² [Kingshurst Brook Natural Flood Management and Restoration \(ecosulis.co.uk\)](https://ecosulis.co.uk/)

¹³ [Lynch restore wetlands for the Castle Bromwich Parklands \(l-lynch.com\)](https://l-lynch.com/)

¹⁴ [Heritage and Sons \(Warks\) Ltd - Home](https://heritageandsons.co.uk/)

¹⁵ [Graham Jones | Woodcarver \(gmjwoodcarving.co.uk\)](https://gmjwoodcarving.co.uk/)

¹⁶ [Willow Workshop teacher | Wayside Willow | England](https://waysidewillow.co.uk/)



Heron carved from tree stump. Source: CBHGT



Installing willow arches on nature trail. Source: CBHGT

The works at Cole End Park were commissioned by North Warwickshire Borough Council, following their procurement rules, and while the arborist they used was local to the River Cole, the contractor used for the paths was J P Landscapes and Construction Ltd of Cannock (West Midlands but not within either wildlife trust catchment). For the play area, a contractor from Milton Keynes was used – Kompan Ltd.

The monitoring and evaluation activity was undertaken by MRE Unlocking Enterprise, a community interest company based in Worcestershire, but with extensive knowledge of the Tame Valley Wetlands.

Aim 2: Enhance

The bulk of the capital works were related to in-channel improvements on Kingshurst Brook, a tributary of the Cole in Meriden Park, wetland creation at Glebe Farm, path creation and woodland management at Cole End Park and Castle Bromwich and meadow creation/management at Cole Bank Park and Glebe Farm. Biodiversity audits were undertaken across the area. As well as the physical on-site interpretation, the partnership agreed to commission a number of Vlogs to provide information to a wider audience.

Strategic Objective	Approved purposes/Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
Enhance the natural and historic environment, improve biodiversity and water quality, reduce flood risk and highlight the opportunities for natural capital and environmental net gain.	E1: Carry out habitat improvement and access works at sites across the valley including 7km of riverbank restoration, 100m of in-channel improvements; 2ha of woodland management; 2ha of wetland creation and 3km of meadow creation.	100m in-channel improvements to the River Cole in Meriden Park 7km riverbank restoration 2ha woodland management at Cole End Park, Meriden Park, Cole Bank Park and Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens 2ha wetland creation at Cole Bank Park and Castle Bromwich Garden 3km meadow creation at Cole Bank Park and Glebe Farm	Heritage will be in better condition
	E2: Carry out biodiversity audits with 50 volunteers	20 biodiversity audits	A wider range of people will be involved in heritage
	E3: Develop interpretation for each park with the support of volunteers.	Engage local people in production of interpretation at Cole End Park, Glebe Farm Recreation Ground, and Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens	A wider range of people will be involved in heritage

GRCF/NLHF outcome: Heritage will be in better condition

Kingshurst Brook above its confluence with the River Cole is narrowed, speeding up the flow of water and thus improving oxygenation for water fauna and flora, to ensure a better wildlife corridor and the potential for salmonid spawning area. The creation of wet benches has also provided additional valuable bankside wetland habitat.

Glebe Farm now has some defined wetland habitat as well as better managed meadowland.

Scrub and non-native invasive species have been better controlled, while trees have been managed appropriately to ensure public safety.

The landscape management of what was the Earl of Bradford's Estate at Castle Bromwich is now being treated more holistically, greatly improving the heritage value of this historic landscape.

Interpretation panels have been created for Glebe Farm, Castle Bromwich Parkland, and Cole End Park, providing information on the improvement works as well as the species that should thrive in those areas.

Cole End Park

The overarching aim of the Vision for the River Cole is to create a blue/green corridor along the length of the river to bring a range of benefits to the people, flora and fauna that live alongside and within it. The Partnership developed two projects for implementation in Cole End Park near Coleshill that will help to further this aim and support both the 'Create' and 'Enhance' aims of the GRCF bid.

Project C1 (Create) has created pathways, trails and boardwalks. As part of this project, 202 m² of 2m wide footpaths with a timber edge were created at Cole End Park, through which the River Cole flows. Project E1 (Enhance) carried out habitat improvement and access works at various sites including the Cole End Park Local Nature Reserve that sits within the larger Cole End Park, where two hectares of woodland management and wildflower planting took place and a variety of play features have been added to the park's play area, making it much more nature-oriented.

Cole End Park is within the catchment of North Warwickshire Borough Council and the freehold of the park is owned by the Council. The Council worked closely with Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership to plan and deliver the improvements and supported extensive community consultation to ensure local people knew what was proposed and had a say in shaping the project plan. The Council has contributed some monies from its capital budget and from Section 106 funding to fund the improvement works.



Map showing works area. Source: NWBC



Works for playground underway. Source: NWBC



Completed pathway. Source: NWBC



Completed pathway. Source: NWBC

Alongside providing work for local contractors, trainees on GRCF funded programmes and volunteers have added valuable person power by removing invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam.

The Council has kept people informed about the work, including understanding what was happening when, and what the access and health and safety implications would be, although access has generally been maintained. As well as information on its website and Community Development Facebook page, an explanatory video is available on YouTube and a letter drop took place for local residents. Feedback on Facebook is wholly positive. The third of the Vlogs commissioned by the Partnership covers the Cole End Park improvements and will help to raise awareness.

The tree work that was necessary was clearly explained¹⁷, given that the public are often of the view that all trees are good for the environment and dislike tree removal. Briefing of Council members also took place to ensure they understood the ways in which the work would increase the biodiversity of the site. The woodland works combined elements to improve public safety as well as increasing diversity and resilience by planting a wider range of species. No timber was extracted, rather the materials were stacked and left on site to provide valuable deadwood as wildlife shelters, as well as food sources for invertebrates, thus encouraging a wide range of wildlife.



Completed woodland work at Cole End Park. Source: Tame Valley Wetlands

¹⁷ [Notice: Tree Works at Cole End Park | Tame Valley Wetlands](#)



Screenshot of publicity for new play area. Source: NWBC

The Borough Council is a longstanding member of the Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership. Working together at Cole End Park has served to further cement that relationship. The results have been mutually beneficial, with significant new facilities for local people and a better environment for wildlife. In effect, the two partners have pooled their resources to bring about these improvements and each has added value to the resources of the other. The collaboration means it has been possible to intensify in one location the contribution that the two projects make to the goal of creating a blue/green corridor with access improvements, better facilities and improved habitat.

Castle Bromwich Parkland

The range of habitats in the Parkland has provided several opportunities for improvement to encourage greater biodiversity. The timing of the project was not hugely advantageous because outdoor works have to be carried out with due regard to the season with the risk of bad weather restricting activities such as the use of heavy machinery. In addition, restraints such as birds nesting have exacerbated delays. However, the Trust is confident it has met its targets. In addition to the path clearance and wildflower work outlined above, restoration work has been carried out on 6445m² of the Parkland's acid grassland. Topsoil was removed by contractors and used to create a bank which was planted with species popular with pollinators. The area was cleared of self-seeded trees and woody detritus before being reseeded with a native mix of grasses and wildflowers. Where necessary, volunteers carried out scything following training.



Volunteers from Avison Young working on the pollinator bank. Source: CBHGT



Scything training. Source: CBHGT

The Estate's ponds, which were becoming dark and overgrown, were improved by clearing willow to let in more light, work carried out by a mixture of contractors and volunteers. Ponds were scraped, cleared of sedge and brambles and areas of open water created. Plant plugs were placed in the surrounding wetland, of which a total of 68m² has been improved by being scraped and seeded. A total of 3,040m² of woodland has been improved by clearance, planting of new saplings as appropriate and where trees have been felled, the cuttings have been used to create dead wood habitat. Volunteers have placed woodland plant plugs in the lower woodland to increase plant diversity and enhance the nature trails.

A number of biodiversity audits have been carried out. In collaboration with the local Warwickshire Botanical Group, the Trust delivered a survey of the Parkland flora, an event attended by 11 individuals. A habitat biodiversity audit has been completed in the Parkland in two phases and used to inform the Parkland Management Plan. A big butterfly count event carried with local people recorded 30 butterflies from 7 different species during two timed counts and a bird identification session recorded 11 different bird species. Data and information on the history of flora and fauna within Parkland has been collected and used to produce the interpretation boards. These were installed but unfortunately one was destroyed by vandals. We understand that they are to be replaced with more robust versions.



Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens

25 February at 18:42 · 🌐

This happened!

Barely a week since installation and some people found pleasure in destroying something many others were finding helpful and enriching. Thank you the 'Parkland Regglers' who reported it & our wonderful public Fire Service who came and made it safe. Think positive! Come to the Parkland Celebration Day 5th March - 11-3 FREE #castlebromwichparkland #tamevalleywetlands #solihull #birmingham #greenspaces #castlebromwichhistoricgardens



Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Facebook post, showing bottom left, the remains of the interpretation panel. Source: Facebook/CBHGT

As noted above, the Trust carried out a public consultation survey to gain understanding of how local people prefer to use the park and how to encourage more local people to access nature.

All aspects of the habitat improvement work provided training opportunities for volunteers. In addition, the LYRIC trainees were able to participate and make use of the activities to provide evidence to include in their City and Guilds Level 2 portfolios.

Meriden Park

A major capital project was the cleaning and narrowing of Kingshurst Brook in Meriden Park. Previous work on the River Cole by Solihull MBC in April 2017 (occasionally known as LYRIC 1) had attempted to restore the disused boating lake by lowering the weir and narrowing the lake. This had not been enough to prevent the lake silting up further or increasing the flow of water. With a very slow flow, the water lacked the oxygen required to maintain healthy wildlife.

WWT commissioned Ecosulis to undertake further works to narrow the brook and speed up the water flow, while creating a variety of habitats for wildlife. As well as clearing the site of rubbish, including over 40 shopping trolleys, the width of the river was halved, using stakes and natural twig bundles, as well as 300 tonnes of gravel. Willow trees lining the original width of the river were felled with hinges to allow speedy regrowth, and as some were mature specimens, this required some novel working to ensure a hinge wasn't broken as the trunk was lowered onto the water. Fish passage was eased over the remaining height of the weir by adding rounded boulders.



Kingshurst Brook before works, with shopping trolley. Source: Solihull MBC



During works, but a section where gravel has been installed, creating riffles. Source: MRE



During works, installing natural twig bundles and gravel. Source: Tame Valley Wetlands



Willows felled with hinges to allow regrowth. Source: MRE

The works were substantial and muddy, but the local community had been warned about the works in advance and contractors and project staff were on hand and able to explain what was happening and why, and what the future benefits would be. A dipping platform is also being installed after the main works completed, to allow learning and monitoring the wildlife

in the river. The works should ensure enhanced biodiversity in the river by creating better functioning habitats for a variety of species. The improved river flow should lead to improved water quality, able to sustain a wider variety of fauna and flora. The area should also be a more pleasing area for local residents to spend time and relax in.

Glebe Farm

While the original concept for the Glebe Farm open space in Birmingham, south of the M6, was identified in the high level vision for the River Cole, it was subject to further consultation after the LYRIC funds were awarded, and this resulted in a revised plan for the area. Instead of woodland work, the revised plan included meadow maintenance, the installation of a reduced length of pathway and the creation of two wetlands. It took a while to get consent from Birmingham City Council, who also have plans for the area, and who are battling other priorities at present. This meant that the works were carried out during the last few weeks of funding.

The illustrations show before, during and after images of the main works undertaken by the contractor, who was inconvenienced by Storms Dudley and Eunice, while plug planting will be done by volunteers later in March. The wetland areas will provide better quality habitat and may also contribute to flood amelioration.



Glebe Farm eastern wetland before works.
Source: BBCWT



Glebe Farm eastern wetland after works
but before planting. Source: BBCWT



Glebe Farm meadowland before mowing.
Source: BBCWT



Glebe Farm western wetland after works
but before planting. Source: BBCWT

Biodiversity audits

There have been at least 11 biodiversity audits undertaken, including ones where training has been a key feature with approximately 100 people taking part, in the main members or volunteers of the wildlife trusts or specialist groups, but some members of the general public as well on sessions such as butterfly counts and Bioblitzes. These have ranged from technical Bryophyte and grassland plant identification sessions to less formal sessions including a Big Butterfly count and two Bioblitzes.

The linked training activity has enabled organisations to have a better informed group of people to work with in future. As ever, the issue with biodiversity audit activity is what to do with the data collected. Those conducted at Castle Bromwich Parkland have been used to inform the development of the acid grassland restoration, enthuse visitors and volunteers about the biodiversity of the area and contribute to the management plan for the site.

Interpretation

Interpretation for sites is often left to the end of a project and yet can be an aspect most susceptible to problems and hold ups. LYRIC is no exception to this, and it is expected that most interpretation will be in place towards the end of March 2022, and therefore after the finalisation of this report.

The interpretation boards for Castle Bromwich Parkland are the exception to this, with artwork completed during 2021 and boards in place. Sadly, the materials used proved to be not up to the task, one board being burnt down in February. This will be replaced with an interpretation panel printed on metal to reduce the risk of a repeat offence.

The artwork for interpretation panels is shown overleaf.

The River Cole at Cole End Park

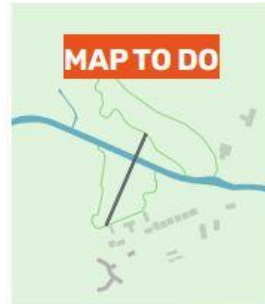
The River Cole is 21 miles (34 km) long and a fantastic 'green corridor' linking the city of Birmingham to open countryside in North Warwickshire. It originates on the Southern side of Birmingham and flows in to the River Blythe shortly downstream of here. The Blythe meets the River Tame which subsequently joins the River Trent and on to the North Sea at the Humber Estuary.

The River Cole is generally shallow except where weirs increase the depth. The river Cole is a notoriously 'flash' river where heavy rain can result in flooding. The Cole flows through very urbanized environment and water runoff from surface drainage in these areas can be very high.

Historically, many rivers within the Midlands, including the Cole, have been drastically altered by human actions. Industry, artificial channelling, canalisation or concreting of banks, dredging, and obstructions of the water have all altered the River. Heavy erosion from farming practices and a slow flow can result in sedimentation and a covering up of the gravel bed that fish use to spawn. Agricultural chemicals, sewage and run off affect water quality too. Weirs can be a barrier to fish movements.

The river provides valuable habitat for a range of flora and fauna including mammals such as otter, bats and amphibians such as great crested newts. Twelve different species of fish have been recorded in the river including grayling, European eel and bullhead.

Unfortunately, wildlife has become increasingly fragmented through development, lack of habitat management, water quality and the presence of invasive species such as Himalayan balsam.



Wildlife and management of Cole End Park

Cole End Park Local Nature Reserve is a patchwork on short grassland, wet and dry woodland and wetland vegetation. It acts as a 'green lung', stores water and is a floodplain for the River Cole. A 'buffer' is an unmown strip of vegetation alongside the River and has several roles. Nettles and common grasses provide cover and food plants for butterflies, for birds and mammals. The buffer discourages people and dogs from entering the water, causing disturbance to plants, mammals and nesting birds such as mallards. The buffer strip is cut once a year in the autumn or winter to prevent it becoming scrub.

Himalayan Balsam

This plant was brought in to the UK in 1839. It's the largest (tallest) annual plant found in the UK and has pink flowers. It spreads quickly through its seed which can be fired up to 4 metres from the parent plant! It is pulled up in May, June and July before it sets seed. It grows at the expense of other more valuable native plants and dies back completely in winter, leaving bare banks that are susceptible to erosion.

Many of the trees at Cole End park are planted. These include willows, sycamore, hawthorn and hybrid black poplars. Gradual thinning of trees creates a woodland with many 'layers', a wide range of species and younger trees to replace the older trees in time.

Wildflowers include red campion, hogweed and cow parsley, creeping buttercup and plantains. Common species of butterflies such as peacock and red admiral use plants such as nettle and grasses such as the Yorkshire Fog, cocksfoot and meadow grasses.

Management

Management of the site is guided by a five-year management plan which aims to maintain and enhance the grassland and woodlands habitats and increase the wildlife in them.



Green Recovery Challenge Fund



Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Designed by Steven Creative Design | www.steven-creative.co.uk

The River Cole at Glebe Farm

Love Your River Cole, a Green Recovery Challenge Funded project was a partnership between Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust, Birmingham City Council, Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Trust, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, The Prince's Trust and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, in 2021.

The project worked to provide opportunities for people to gain skills in nature conservation and improve connectivity and habitat restoration along the whole river Cole corridor. The key sites being Glebe Farm (Birmingham), Kingfisher Country Park and Castle Bromwich Hall Parkland (Solihull), and Cole End Park Local Nature Reserve (North Warwickshire). The works included the re-profiling of the River Cole, river bank restoration, invasive species control,

woodland management, meadow and wetland creation and improved access trails.

Here at Glebe Farm Recreation Ground, the works focus on improving and diversifying the habitat for wildlife and people, while retaining the parkland setting. This included the provision of improved access, large area of wildflower meadow creation and two wetland areas.



Wetland Habitat

The two wetland areas created have been designed along the edge of the River Cole to provide increased food for the local bird and invertebrate populations.

They were created by excavating a shallow hollow between 0.5m to 1m deep where standing water is visible, with the varied edges to create a natural feel. While some areas were left bare to create small patches of open water, much of the wetland area was planted with a wide range of plant species including Branched Bur-reed, Yellow Flag, Marsh Marigold, Purple Loosestrife and Water Mint. Can you find them?

If you watch closely, you should see wildlife using the wetland areas. Look out for Reed Bunting, Reed Warbler and Damselflies.

Wildflower grassland creation

As part of the project, large grassland areas were seeded with a wildflower seed mix designed to improve floristic diversity, aesthetics and provided foraging resources for invertebrate species.

The recreational ground sits on the floodplain of the River Cole, which means as well as potentially flooding periodically, run off from the surrounding area can collect here before going in the River Cole, making the ground quite damp in areas. This meant when choosing the wildflower species to add to the ground, a more bespoke list was chosen to include more uncommon species designed for wetter areas including Meadowsweet and Ragged Robin.

In the summer months you will also see Great Burnet, Field Scabious and Yellow Rattle.

Footpath installation

A new footpath was installed to improve accessibility to the perimeter footpath.



Get involved

We are one of 46 Wildlife Trusts working for nature's recovery across the UK. Our Vision is for a Wilder Birmingham and Black Country with more green and wild spaces where nature thrives, and where everyone has an equal opportunity to access nature in their daily lives.

Donate

Help us preserve special sites with a donation Text **GlebeFarm 5** to **70085** to donate £5*. Donate online at bbcwildlife.org.uk/donate

Join us

Become a member and join a community of wildlife heroes. Join online at bbcwildlife.org.uk/joinus



*Smallest cost your donation amount plus one standard rate message and you'll be opted in to hear more about our work and fundraising via telephone and SMS. If you'd like to give a donation but do not wish to receive marketing communications, text [GlebeFarm02075](https://bbcwildlife.org.uk/donate) 5 to 70085.

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Designed by Steven Creative Design | www.steven-creative.co.uk

Publicising the works undertaken by LYRiC

An innovative way of demonstrating the achievements of LYRiC, and using a more informal method than written reports and press releases, has been the commissioning of a series of Vlogs (or video logs/blogs) showing the outcomes of the project. Simon Watts of Wild Presentations, based in the WWT catchment area, has been filming activities and events, training courses and the green areas of the River Cole, including drone footage, to develop these reviews of what is being done and how it is affecting trainees, participants and the local area. The Vlogs are published on YouTube (on the Tame Valley Wetlands channel) and are shared widely through the social media links of partners and others. Each Vlog is around a quarter of an hour long and covers a number of facets of the LYRiC project. The first edition looked at the works at Meriden Park, the final day of a Get Started in Nature and Conservation session with The Prince's Trust and the Solihull MBC Oaks and Shires event, as well as two species of bird that can be seen on the River Cole.

The second focusses on works at Castle Bromwich Parkland as well as the origins of the name of the River Cole. The third will show the Cole End Park revival, look at the links between Tolkien and the River Cole and Spring on the river. The fourth looks at the history and the nature of the River Cole and will also focus on the work of volunteers, including Tameforce and hedgelaying. The fifth will look at the path of the Cole from source to sea, water birds and three sponsored items. The final Vlog will look at the community along the banks of the river and at kingfishers.

These videos provide a more immersive view of the outcomes of LYRiC than can be gained from a written report and are more accessible for the general public. Short parts of the Vlogs will also be made available for partners to use for communications on their part of the LYRiC project going forward.

The Vlogs can be accessed at [Tame Valley Wetlands - YouTube](#).

Aim 3: Reconnect

This Aim is about finding ways to reconnect people to their local green spaces, in the main through a number of events and communications. The Prince's Trust Explore sessions also contribute to this aim, as they introduce young people to the opportunities as well as the benefits of being outdoors

Strategic Objective	Approved purposes/Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
Re-connect local communities and businesses with their local public open space, help them value what the river provides for them, improving wellbeing and resilience through social prescribing and identifying links between behavioural change and flooding/environmental improvements.	R1: Take proactive measures to be inclusive and access new and diverse audiences with a focus on young people, people from BAME backgrounds, those living in deprived areas and non-graduates. Reaching new audiences of mixed cultures and ages across deprived areas of North Warwickshire, North Solihull and East Birmingham.	Delivering taster training sessions for local people Weekly blogs and social media posts to engage people	A wider range of people will be involved in heritage
	R2: Deliver 12 engagement events using nature for well-being.	12 engagement events explaining wellbeing benefits of nature reaching 60 local people	A wider range of people will be involved in heritage

GRCF/NLHF Outcome – A wider range of people will be involved in heritage

Completed feedback forms show that a substantial number of visitors to events and activities come from the local area, while qualitative feedback shows that people are discovering a new and valuable area, feel safer thanks to works undertaken, and recognise the benefits of being outdoors in green spaces.

More people have come forward to volunteer, including younger people.

For heritage improvements to be sustained, it is essential that they are recognised by local people. This doesn't mean only the stereotypical, middle-class volunteer but individuals of all social classes and from all local communities. To achieve this means that organisations carrying out the heritage restoration and improvement must reach out to their local communities to engage them in the work that is being carried out and the benefits that will accrue to them as a result. In particular, Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups have

long been under-represented in the outdoors¹⁸ and this is a particular concern to organisations operating in an inner-city context. LYRIC's aims reflect this, placing a charge on the partners to deliver events that draw in new audiences and broadcasting news and messages through a variety of channels.

Significant effort appears to have been devoted to achieving this aim. Throughout the project, the website¹⁹ was provided with blogs and, more recently, a series of Vlogs²⁰ are being published online. These cover LYRIC's diverse range of activities and localities, as well as clearly demonstrating the project's progress towards its aims. In addition, the project established a Facebook page²¹ where its activities and events are described. Although LYRIC itself does not have a Twitter account, its partners have published a large number of tweets that feature LYRIC activities and links to relevant press coverage.

LYRIC partners delivered a wide range of events to provide a rich mix of engagement activities and taster training – the full range of activities and locations can be seen in the Annex. The provision of a wide variety of events in different locations maximised the chances of reaching new audiences – outdoor sessions focused on nature art may not, for example appeal to those who are attracted by the idea of a guided walk around the Parkland, or a walk focused on the soundscape of Babb's Mill. Similarly, children's craft workshops focussed on wildflowers and bug hunting at Meriden Park may have a different appeal to the opportunity to go pond dipping at Cole End Park or take part in a Wild Wednesday family event or a Big Wild Breakfast in the Parkland, let alone attending an event focused on using nature for wellbeing and health. By providing a variety of activities like these (and others) in a number of different geographical sites, the partners were able to reach well over 600 individuals.



Family evening Bats v Moths at Castle Bromwich Parkland. Source: CBHGT

In addition to this range of events aimed at the general public, the participation of The Prince's Trust brought the opportunity to engage young people through their programmes of Explore, Get Started and Get Into, which are intended to help young people aged 16-25 into work. The opportunity to participate in LYRIC enabled The Prince's Trust to customise its programme and deliver an introduction to the outdoors, followed by opportunities for deeper

¹⁸ Landscapes review: National Parks and AONBs 2019. <https://bit.ly/gloverrev>

¹⁹ <http://www.tamevalleywetlands.co.uk/love-your-river-cole/>

²⁰ For example, <http://www.tamevalleywetlands.co.uk/lyric-vlog-1/>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/LYRICtamevalleywetlands/>

engagement and the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and experience relevant to a sector in which the participants might otherwise have never considered working. 8 Explore groups were able to take part with LYRiC and, in this way, 67 young people were able to begin to engage with the outdoors, over 50% of whom were BAME.

As can be seen from the month by month activity as part of LYRiC in Annex 2, there have been many and varied events and activities as part of the project. Putting to one side the practical habitat management events run by different organisations, there have been walks, family events, nature art sessions, and wild foraging sessions to name but a few. Overall, we estimate that there have been 27 events for local communities and families, and well over the desired 60 attendees. Events were timed in the main for school holidays and half terms, with no activity in December or January, not least due to Covid as well as bad weather.

It has not been possible to determine exact numbers for all the events, for example the numbers interacting with LYRiC at the Oaks and Shires event, nor has it been possible to garner feedback from all, but the following from feedback forms gives a flavour of the way events have been received:

Always good to be outside in the sun
A wonderful experience learning about plants and their uses
The guide was very well informed
A great new experience in a great new area of open space to me
A super inspiration
Very enlightening to see what's on our doorstep
Very interesting and great to learn more about our local area from informative and friendly guides
Enjoy spending time in nature with my children
The tree hugging and leaf bashing were lovely. The prints from the leaf basing turned out beautiful

For the Oaks and Shires event, WWT used a chart and sticky dot system to find where people had come from and whether they were more connected to nature following their interaction with the LYRiC stand. Figures 1 and 2 show that among those that provided some feedback, the majority were from the postcode areas closest to the River Cole, and that most felt more better, and more connected to nature.

Figure 1

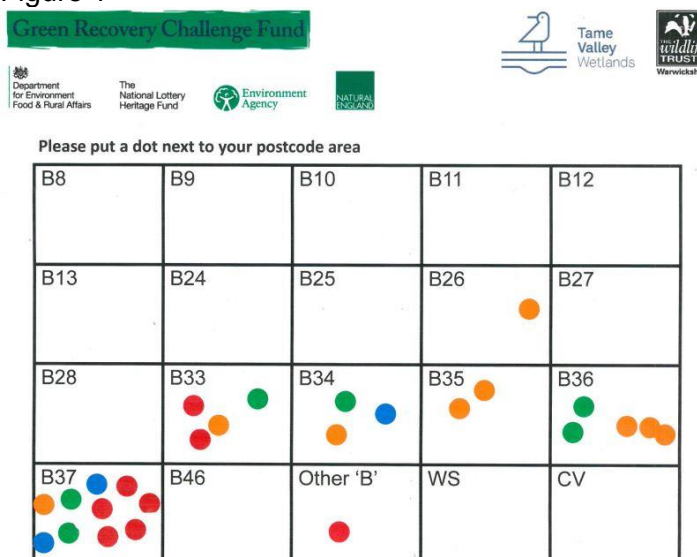
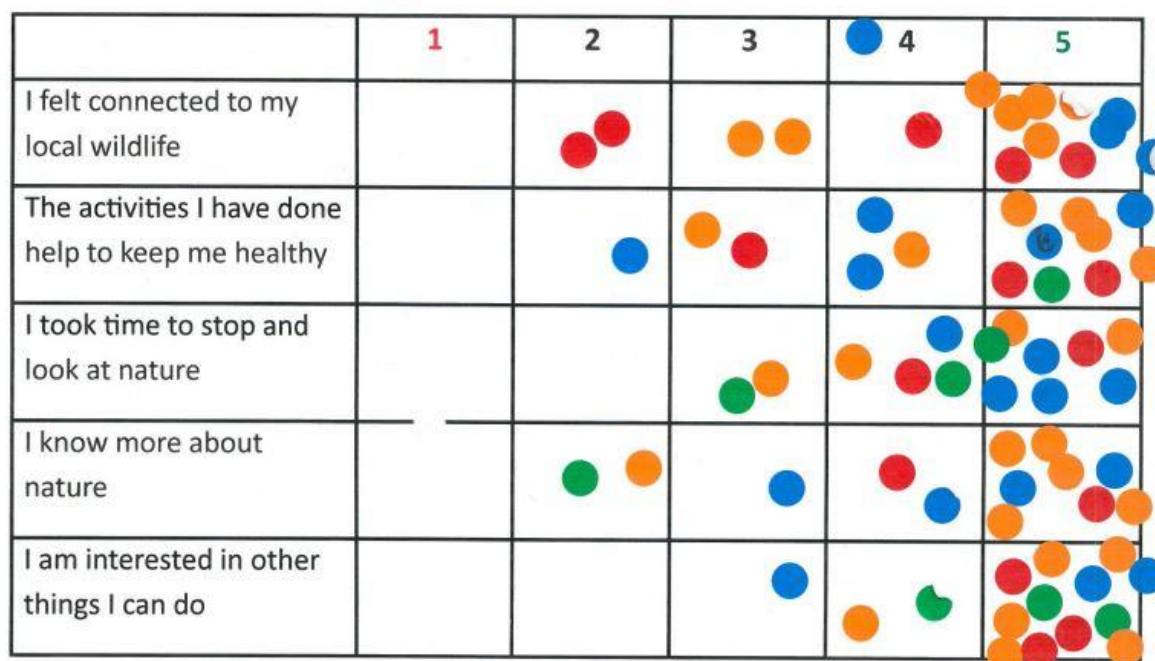


Figure 2

Please let us know how you feel about today's event.

1 = 'no, not at all' and 5 = 'yes, definitely'.



The LYRiC team have used social media extensively to publicise their work. The Tame Valley Wetlands, Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens and B37 have all shared stories on Facebook. Tame Valley Wetlands has 1,225 followers, Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens has 5,495 and B37 Project 1,567, and while there may be some overlap, this still ensures a good reach among Facebook users.

Tame Valley Wetlands have also published numerous blogs on their website, providing information on the progress of the project²². Tame Valley Wetlands has a twitter presence with 1,311 followers, established as part of the Tame Valley Wetlands LPS, which has had the benefit of ensuring that there is an existing audience, rather than trying to build up from nothing. There is also a Tame Valley Wetlands presence on Instagram²³ with many photos of wildlife and of progress and activity on LYRiC. There has also been some press coverage with stories in the Birmingham Mail²⁴ and the Coventry Observer²⁵.

The spring edition of Warwickshire Wildfire Trust Member's Magazine will feature a four page article about the LYRiC project, and this will reach a readership of over 25,000 people.

All these routes support publicity both for the work being undertaken and also encouraging the public to attend events or get out and enjoy green spaces. Some sample Facebook posts are shown below, including the celebration event held at Castle Bromwich Parkland.

²² [Blogging Along The Tame | Tame Valley Wetlands](#)

²³ [Tame Valley Wetlands \(@thetamevalley\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

²⁴ <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/riverside-beauty-spots-solihull-set-19840278>

²⁵ <https://coventryobserver.co.uk/news/love-your-river-cole-plan-will-see-trees-planted-at-nature-site/>



Castle Bromwich celebration event photographs on Facebook. Source: Facebook/CBHGT



Tameforce volunteer balsam pulling at Cole End Park Facebook post. Source: Facebook/Tame Valley Wetlands

Aim 4: Partnership

This Aim focuses on training, trainees and developing the capacity and capability of the partners to be able to maintain the improved habitats once GCRF funding is over. It also provides for the evaluation of the LYRIC project to ensure that lessons learned are captured and shared and that good practice can be demonstrated to funders.

Strategic Objective	Approved purposes/Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
Stimulate partnership working across multiple stakeholders to coordinate approaches to catchment-wide issues, deliver local policy aspirations and unlock multiple funding opportunities.	P1: Provide accredited and practical training in conservation work for 48 young people and informal learning opportunities for 144 young people.	Delivering training opportunities with The Princes Trust – 144 Explore opportunities, 48 Get Started places. 48 young people will gain OCN and C and G qualification at level of 1 and 2, feeding into 6 traineeships at level 2 They will gain knowledge and confidence to apply for jobs Specific skills gained will include certificated chainsaw and brushcutter courses, First Aid, first qualification for some trainees	People will have developed skills
	P2: Create 50 certificated training opportunities	50 training opportunities for existing staff, community groups and delivery partners. Provide engagement/ learning opportunities for members of B37.	A wider range of people will be involved in heritage People will have developed skills
	P3: Develop local maintenance groups; improve the management of invasive species, trees and shrubs and update management plans.	Reaching new audiences of mixed cultures and ages across deprived areas of North Warwickshire, North Solihull and East Birmingham Delivering taster training sessions for local people Run practical habitat improvement work sessions 1-2 days /week for local trainees and volunteers	A wider range of people will be involved in heritage
	P4: Create 2 full-time roles and 6 paid traineeships and retain 8.8fte at risk roles across the partnership.	New posts – Senior Training Officer at WTBBC and Park Ranger at Castle Bromwich Hall and Gardens Trust. Create 6 new traineeships	

	P5: Retention of 18 key posts in WWT and TVW including fundraising roles	Retained capacity to deliver community engagement, education, training and accreditation. New partnerships sharing skills to deliver natural heritage improvements	The funded organisation will be more resilient
	P6: Evaluate the project and draw up a legacy plan to feed into the West Midlands National Park and the Cole Valley Vision.	Evaluation report including recommendations and materials for future use	The funded organisation will be more resilient

GRCF/NLHF Outcome: People will have developed skills

The six trainees have all gained extensive experience as well as City and Guilds qualifications.

The participants on Get Started in Nature and Conservation achieved Level 1 OCN qualifications in tool use, as well as developing softer skills to support them in their future employment.

The participants on Get Into Woodland have had the opportunity to gain their NPTC chainsaw maintenance and cross cutting qualification, which enables them to work on public sites with a chainsaw. 18 achieved the qualification and four are progressing to the next level.

A large number of people have improved their knowledge and skills through soft training opportunities.

A number of volunteers have achieved their brushcutter user qualification, enabling them to use these during habitat management sessions and ensuring that such sessions can achieve more than before.

GRCF/NLHF Outcome: People will have learnt about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions

The well attended events run across the area have given people the chance to learn about their local environment and the fauna and flora around them.

Feedback forms indicate that people feel better and more connected to nature following sessions run by LYRIC.

Local people have been made more aware of the green space resource around them, with some going on to volunteer to maintain those open spaces.

GRCF/NLHF Outcome: The funded organisation will be more resilient

Partner staff have improved their skills, to enable them to do more and better in future.

Partners have concrete evidence of their capabilities to manage complex environmental projects, to support future funding bids and to proactively seek funding from local authorities and other relevant organisations.

Partners have a better appreciation of what they can all do, facilitating better collaborative working in future.

Extended Partnership

In the past, the membership of Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership has tended to centre on different levels of local Government – Parish, Borough, Metropolitan and County Councils – plus the Wildlife Trust itself.

Delivery of the GRCF contract has expanded the Partnership's experience of working with other third sector organisations. The partners involved were very different in nature – Prince's Trust, a respected national charity with a sub-regional infrastructure and extensive staff team and, by contrast, Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Trust and B37 Project. Both of the latter organisations are small in size, and B37 Project is entirely run by volunteers.

The relationships with each of the three organisations has been fruitful. Collaboration with The Prince's Trust has laid the way for more joint working and bidding and has strengthened the Partnership's capability in relation to education and training with a viable route for recruiting young people and young adults to its courses. The Prince's Trust has benefitted too, with a reliable partner for the provision of nature-based work placements/work experience placements.

Collaboration with locally-based smaller charities operating in urban areas has further embedded the Partnership's links in the local community, and provided enhanced volunteering capacity and opportunities, as well as training. Solihull MBC was particularly satisfied with the partnership working, a representative saying *"The great success for me has been having complete confidence in the team. They have been great people to work with, always available and delivery has been achieved to the letter. For me, it's been as stress free as it could be and that has enabled me to concentrate on other work."*

Whilst the experience has been a generally positive one, there have been some challenges. The short timeframe of GRCF meant that both the bidding and start-up phases of the contract were relatively short. With more time, the Partnership could have explored in greater detail the precise role, expectations, capacity, and capability of the smaller organisations. Reportedly, communication has sometimes been a little sporadic. With any new partner, particularly a small organisation, it should be remembered that they may not have the same level of experience of formal contract delivery, so ongoing information and clarification is important, especially if changes to the original agreement become necessary.

Nevertheless, all the parties involved appear to have benefitted from collaboration and will be happy to consider working together again in the future. It should also be noted that all the partner organisations have benefitted from the programme, not least because it has allowed work to be done that could not otherwise have happened at this time, fulfilling the

individual ambitions of the partners as well as that of the collective Partnership. In addition, the involvement of two adjacent and quite different Wildlife Trusts has provided a much broader range of habitats in which to provide training.

Learning

A search for 'environment' on the Prospects website, which provides information on graduate careers, opens with the statement, "With the government planning to increase the number of green jobs, the demand for graduates with the skills and passion to protect and preserve the environment has never been higher". However, a study by the Policy Exchange in 2017²⁶ revealed that 'environment professionals' were the second least diverse profession in the UK. This depressing view was reinforced by research published in 2018, which focused on students²⁷, and reported that from figures available at the time, the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs included only 16% of staff who identified as an ethnic minority²⁸ whilst only 3.85% of Environment Agency staff also did so. Within Natural England at the time, the situation was worse, with less than 2% declaring they were from BAME groups. The authors also contacted a small sample of environmental professional organisations regarding the ethnic profile of their workforce, and this revealed representation of 10% or less of Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic groups within their staff.

However, this study provided some useful insights. BAME respondents were significantly less likely to select 'Conservation and environment' sector as their preferred sector to work and suggested that a significant factor in their choice was a prior lack of awareness of the role of the sector. Respondents also clearly indicated that they were discouraged by the lack of diversity of BAME groups in organisations working in the environment sector. They suggested that in order to improve inclusivity across the sector, organisations should engage in more detail with people in all levels of education to raise awareness of opportunities, including improving perceptions of the reality of working within the sector. Whilst this research was focused on BAME students, it seems likely that many of the issues it revealed would also apply to white people from socially disadvantaged groups.

As a result of the Government's focus on the green economy the availability of jobs in the sector should be increasing and LYRIC's proposal to provide opportunities for local people from a diverse audience to engage with the outdoors and undertake practical training, explicitly addressed the conclusions of this study. LYRIC has provided opportunities for people to become engaged with the outdoors, to acquire confidence and skills in this setting and thus provide a potential route into employment for individuals who may not previously have considered working in the sector.

This offer had three facets – the provision of bursaries to support the appointment of 6 trainees, participation with The Prince's Trust to provide conservation related experiences, including accredited training, and training for volunteers from the local community.

²⁶ The Policy Exchange, (2017), The two sides of diversity: Which are the most ethnically diverse occupations?

<https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/the-two-sides-of-diversity/>

²⁷

https://www.sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk/files/20181206_nus_race_inclusivity_and_environmental_sustainability_report.pdf

²⁸ Little seems to have changed for the better. The most recent data from the Annual Civil Service Employment Survey (NOMIS) shows that for Defra, less than 10% of all staff in the Department and its agencies self-declare as BAME (3% as white, 58% did not declare)

LYRiC traineeships

The LYRiC proposal included provision for 6 traineeships which would enable the post holders to acquire a City & Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Work-based Environmental Conservation. Many organisations consider this to be the minimum qualification for employment in this sector. The timing of approval for the start of the project, just before Christmas, was not propitious for recruitment but adverts were placed for four posts, two at WWT, one at BBCWT and one at CBHGT. In addition, one shared bursary was offered to two individuals from the local environmental group, B37. The recruitment process was completed and all trainees in were post by March 2021.



The LYRiC trainees at the start of their traineeships. Source: Tame Valley Wetlands

The offer of a bursary to B37 explicitly ensured that local people had a chance to take up traineeships and was intended to support two individuals who both had existing part-time paid work. Unfortunately, this was not necessarily clear at the outset to the individuals concerned and their engagement on a different basis to the other trainees was accompanied by some confusion. This confusion may have arisen because the recruitment process was far less formal than the others, or perhaps it was due to pressure of time which created a strong focus on progressing practical tasks, rather than ensuring that any misunderstandings were addressed immediately.

Completion of the City and Guilds Diploma requires 342 guided learning hours and the submission of a portfolio. The part-time engagement of B37's trainees created a number of challenges in terms of ensuring that they were able to complete sufficient practical tasks in the same timescale as the others. There were also some initial misunderstandings regarding assessment. It was the responsibility of each host organisation to assess their trainees. Whilst the two Wildlife Trusts and CBHGT has assessors who were accredited to assess all units of the course, B37 did not. This created some confusion which was resolved when it was made clear that assessment would be completed by an assessor from one of the other project partners, thus ensuring that all 6 trainees will have achieved the Level 2 qualification.

The trainees came from diverse employment backgrounds, but all had a strong interest in the outdoors and conservation, and several had worked as volunteers. Although the bursaries were not intended as living wages, they provided the financial security for some to make a complete career change which otherwise would not have been possible. For others, the bursary provided the opportunity to gain the range of practical experiences they lacked as well as competence in the use of the requisite tools and techniques. For all of them, it has provided the opportunity to gain a qualification that many organisations see as essential. Indeed, one partner observed that whilst graduates have relevant academic knowledge, they often don't have the skills that make them immediately useful – not only practical skills but soft skills like the confidence to engage with public groups, to organise events and to manage volunteers. By contrast with many graduates therefore, LYRIC's six trainees are employment ready.

In addition to the elements of training necessary for the Diploma, each trainee was allocated a personal training budget to enable them to pursue other relevant interests. This was used, for example, to become a Forest Schools leader, to learn to drive a tractor, to undertake adult education training.

It was clear from speaking to the trainees that although they were based with different host organisations, they had become a confident, close and mutually supportive group. This may simply have been a product of the characters of the 6 individuals; however, it may well have been structural, resulting from them following a programme that required them to work together and share experiences and knowledge. The partnership nature of LYRIC offered a huge training advantage because all the trainees had opportunities to undertake a full range of tasks on different sites. Without the partnership, they might have been restricted to a more limited geographical area within which opportunities would be more restricted.

For the wildlife trusts, the traineeships have been an important outcome, with one member of staff saying: *"Can I keep all my trainees, please? To see the trainees' progression has been fantastic. For me, the whole point of the traineeship was to help people become employable in this sector. To know we've facilitated that is absolutely awesome."*

The Prince's Trust programmes

The aim of The Prince's Trust (TPT) is to help 11- to 30-year-olds to find the tools and confidence to try free courses and start careers. Working in partnership with TPT enabled LYRIC to reach a highly diverse audience of young people, many of whom would have had little experience of the outdoors and consequently no awareness of possible employment or volunteering opportunities.

TPT's Explore²⁹ programme provided this entry point. Explore is described as offering 16- to 25-year-olds *"a mix of group activities and one-to-one support to develop the skills and confidence you need to move forward"*. The programme starts with a five-day Access course, providing the chance to do outdoor adventurous activities, as well as take part in a residential trip. Once that's complete, the participants can *"choose from lots of different activities from sports to drama and photography to cooking"*, LYRIC partnership enabled TPT to offer a chance to experience outdoor work.

Similarly, that outdoor experience was also made available to participants on the Get Started³⁰ programme, which involves *"a week of activities with help from inspirational experts. Working with partners, you'll work towards a group challenge while developing your skills and confidence"*.

²⁹ <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/try-something-new>

³⁰ <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/unlock-your-potential/discover-new-talents>



Tackling undergrowth, Get Started in Nature and Conservation. Source: The Prince's Trust



Wild fruits, Get Started in Nature and Conservation. Source: The Prince's Trust

The final opportunity provided by TPT was for individuals taking part in a Get Into³¹ programme, which offers its participants the opportunity of *“improving your CV and interview techniques. You will meet new people and learn what it takes to get your foot in the door”*.

Unfortunately, constraints imposed as a result of Covid-19 meant that the first five Explore sessions with LYRIC, between February and June 2021, had to be delivered online. Whilst these undoubtedly provided some exposure to the type of activities that are carried out by environmental groups, they will have missed the reality of working outdoors. Subsequent Explore sessions were delivered face to face using the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust's facilities at Birmingham EcoPark and at Ham's Hall. In total, 9 Explore sessions have taken place involving 77 individuals with a participant BAME ratio of approximately 47%.

By contrast, TPT's week-long Get Started programmes were all run outdoors at Birmingham EcoPark³². In the course of 4 programmes, 32 young people took part, with a similar participant BAME ratio to Explore. These sessions clearly helped young people to build their self-confidence, and the short interviews with participants in the first Vlog demonstrate the enjoyment and the pride in what they had done.

Saltwells Local Nature Reserve (LNR) at Dudley provided the venue for TPT's four-week programmes, Get Into Woodlands. Two of these were run, with a total of 20 trainees taking part and a BAME ratio of 18%. It is interesting to reflect on the contrast with the BAME ratio for the other programmes. The findings of the 2017 Policy Exchange research³³ indicated that participation in environmental work was inhibited by lack of awareness of the outdoors, of roles in the sector and a lack of role models. Explore and Get Started provided opportunities to address the lack of awareness but in the limited time frame available through LYRIC this may not yet have been sufficient to generate an equivalent proportion of BAME individuals who are interested in pursuing employment in the sector. Hopefully this will change with time as more BAME individuals have experience of the sector and begin to work in it, providing that these opportunities continue to be made available.

³¹ <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/get-job/get-experience>

³² <https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/EcoPark>

³³ Op cit



Get Into Woodlands chainsaw maintenance training. Source: The Prince's Trust



Get Into Woodlands less formal aspects. Source: The Prince's Trust

Trainee feedback from the first Get Into course was very positive, including the following points on what went well:

*Positive environment, lots of practical work, great teachers- very supportive and made me feel comfortable
Chainsaw course was great
Super friendly staff (Saltwells & PT), always open to questions and share knowledge.
Enjoyable and useful experiences*

Refunding of travel money was good, great experience and knowledge gained, great people all round
Reimbursement has been useful for us all
The Prince's Trust have supported me including moral support and 121s
Saltwells, Prince's Trust and Chainsaw trainers were all encouraging, friendly, approachable, helpful, informative, and willing to share/grow skills
Great selection of activities
Friendly staff- able to explain things in an interesting way
Increase knowledge of why we do certain activities e.g., potential work links and explanation to wider conservation intent
Flexibility in allowing us to try new things

As this was a new course, there were obviously learning aspects for The Prince's Trust and others, as evidenced from a sample of the comments under what could be improved:

Wider range of practical skills
Recognition of other elements we learnt about (certificate)
Allow dogs to accompany us
Bigger variety of tool use and allow us to help choose the tools for the task
More wildlife interaction knowledge
Longer course
In depth geology talks to be done outside
Lunch/snacks provided- some of us travelled far and would become hungry but there isn't anywhere local to go and get food
Chainsaw PPE for smaller bodies
Add more qualifications e.g., first aid, woodland management
Some of the days were heavy chunks of information to process, perhaps there could be more of a balance between powerpoints and working outside
Reinforcing people's memory- I'd forgotten quite a lot by the end

These have been considered when putting together the second Get Into course, which completed in March 2022. There has also been wider recognition of the work, as is evidenced by the quote below from a Dudley councillor.

Councillor Karen Shakespeare, cabinet member for public realm, said:

"The LYRIC Green Recovery Challenge Fund has been the catalyst for developing Dudley Council's and the Prince's Trust partnership programme Get into Woodlands. The programme offers young people a chance to gain first-hand experience of managing a National Nature Reserve site. One group of young people has completed the programme and it was a great success with eight young people gaining chainsaw qualifications and five signing up to become new volunteers at the reserve. We look forward to welcoming the next group of young people soon."

In total, The Prince's Trust ran 11 Explore sessions (5 were online) with 92 participants, four Get Started courses with 32 participants and 2 Get Into courses with 20 participants. Follow up from Get Started and Get Into indicates that some participants are volunteering with local nature reserves or the wildlife trusts, while from the Get Into participants, at least two have job offers in the conservation sector and five others have applied for jobs in the sector.

Local community volunteer training

The LYRiC partnership, embracing two Wildlife Trusts and the Castle Bromwich gardens, offers a wide variety of habitats, from moving water to static ponds, wet woodland to grassland, all of which will need long term management to ensure continued access and the retention and further improvement of biodiversity. To do this effectively will require sufficient capacity in terms of personnel and skills. LYRiC's engagement activities were intended to draw in new volunteers and its programme of events provided opportunities for local volunteers and LYRiC's trainees to acquire practical skills. Furthermore, in the case of the trainees, these events and courses counted towards the necessary guided learning hours and were documented to provide evidence for inclusion in the portfolios that were needed to achieve the Diploma.

A wide range of skills training was covered, including formal Level 1 qualifications in the safe use of tools and their maintenance and, for the trainees, a three-day First Aid at Work course. Some events focused on species identification, including for example, small mammals, grassland plants, and birds; many were focused on practical techniques including tree-popping, planting plugs and trees, scything, the construction and installation of boardwalks, bridges and benches, and the establishment of a hibernaculum; some were focused on techniques such as water quality sampling, or species surveys. The LYRiC trainees were also able to acquire and practise a range of soft skills including the organisation of events, working with volunteers, safe working with young children and ways to use the outdoors to encourage health and wellbeing.

Volunteers appreciated the training opportunities available to them, with the following statements from their feedback sheets on the tool maintenance course as an example:

*(Enjoyed most) learning a new skill which will be useful for my volunteering
Practical, learned lots of useful skills and enjoyable
Just learning to sharpen my tools and going home with a sharp pair of shears
Informative, engaging and well structured
Relevant to what I do with WWT and other organisations
Fabulous, I learnt loads
The opportunity to bring our own tools and learn exactly how to tailor what we've learnt to what we need
Learning and practicing new skills, social side
It has been extremely interesting and informative. It was also a nice sized group.
Very informal.*

Activities such as this are useful for all partners who run volunteer practical sessions, ensuring that their teams are better equipped, better able to look after and prolong the life of tools, and also do more, and more effectively.

Other informal training sessions have revolved around identification skills, including birds, grassland plants and bryophytes (mosses and lichens). For those running volunteer sessions, mental health and safety, and first aid sessions will have been very useful, and again will contribute to partner capacity and resilience going forward.

Sustainability, Legacy and Lessons Learned

Sustainability

Many of the capital works funded should be sustainable in the short to medium term, but will need ongoing maintenance over time, not least as scrub and non-native invasive species have a tendency to grow back. The funding has also enabled extensive training of volunteers, so they are better placed to provide at least some of that maintenance activity, although arboriculture and heavy duty maintenance is likely to need funded contractors.

The works on Kingshurst Brook in Meriden Park should not need much maintenance in the short term, while in the longer term reeds and willows will need to be controlled, so that they do not choke the river over time. People using the river as a dumping ground for shopping trolleys and similar is likely to remain a problem, although it is hoped that further community engagement events and activities might help to limit such antisocial behaviour.

GRCF has made a practical contribution to the sustainability of the Partnership's core team by supporting some elements of its running costs and providing additional resources, such as a vehicle. Individual partner organisations have also benefitted directly or indirectly because work has been carried out in their respective local areas that would otherwise not have taken place yet or at all.

Funding has also supported partnership development and improved understanding between organisations which should be maintained given the mutual interest in the Cole Valley.

In addition to these direct benefits to the Partnership, the grant has also added to the viability of local businesses who received contracts, including local capital works contractors.

Legacy

GRCF has helped to further cement an already strong partnership. The continuation of the partnership is, itself, a strong legacy from the earlier Tame Valley LPS. Throughout delivery of TVWLPS, it was apparent that the partnership was not just delivery-focused but also had a strong commitment to developing a strategic and pragmatic approach to the conservation needs of their area. This is evidenced in their interest in the development of a West Midlands National Park and in their collaboration with the Environment Agency to produce the Vision for the River Cole.

Now GRCF has helped them to realise part of their aspiration for the River Cole. It has enabled some aspects of that work to be implemented and thus, spurred on the partners to identify/bid for other resources that will fund complementary improvements to join up with the GRCF-funded sites. This has catalysed the vision of an enhanced corridor for people and wildlife along the length of the river.

As the GRCF work draws to a close, the partnership is already thinking about 'what next'. It is important that their future plans should take a two-pronged approach, firstly continuing to seek resources to complete their intentions for the River Cole and secondly developing their strategy for their wider catchment. The Partnership has further strengthened its track record and should continue to build relations with key funders and decision makers to realise its plans. It should now feel confident to look at the strategies and plans of key agencies, such as WMCA's Environment Plan and proactively promote itself to show that it can play a role in delivering such plans.

As described earlier, the Partnership has grown its relations with community organisations via GRCF. Working with this type of organisation is important to extend community buy-in to its work, so work should take place to cement the relations with those organisations beyond GRCF and to expand the number with which it is actively engaged. Ensuring those relationships are mutually beneficial will be time well spent.

The works on Kingshurst Brook should provide a legacy of better habitat and increased biodiversity. The improvements were also undertaken with flood prevention in mind, and should reduce downstream flood risks.

The works at Glebe Farm will improve the variety of habitats and also make walking through the area more pleasant, ideally increasing the use of the area for health and wellbeing.

A number of volunteers have received training in a number of skills including use of equipment, tool maintenance and various identification skills. All these will improve the capacity of the partners in the short to medium term to undertake habitat maintenance work and to prolong the life of the tools they own or have access to. In addition, a number of participants in The Prince's Trust programmes have taken up volunteering opportunities across Birmingham and the Black County.

Lessons learned

The partners have gained experience in relation to widening out the Partnership to include other third sector organisations, some with less of an environmental focus than that of the wildlife trusts. The short length of this programme made it more challenging for relationship building, so it probably needed more investment at the outset in understanding and agreeing each other's priorities, capabilities, and operational style.

The recruitment of both LYRIC trainees and The Prince's Trust Get Started and Get Into programmes has shown different recruitment routes for conservation trainees that may have relevance in capacity building the sector. Rather than targeting graduates from environmental science type courses, the trainees have come from a wider background and non-traditional routes into conservation. They will have a different skillset on completion of their training, but just as relevant. The LYRIC trainees may have less subject knowledge, but do have the practical skills to undertake practical conservation tasks and lead volunteer work parties. They are therefore able to contribute to the work of new employers quickly.

Having trainees working together across related organisations as a team has been a really good idea – the trainees feel less isolated and have a peer group to relate to, they also get a wider range of learning and experience opportunities. Where partners are taking on trainees in future, seeing if they can work as a team again would enhance the trainee experience, we feel.

It is never too early to start working on interpretation and materials used need to be considered, particularly in areas where anti-social behaviour may be an issue.

The short timescale of the funding and tight deadlines meant that the team were very task focussed, ensuring that everything in the bid document was achieved as far as possible. While laudable, it did mean that some of the softer aspects of project management received less attention than they might. At the Steering Group meeting in May 2021, it was proposed to have a sort of regular group update for example, but with the pressures to do and to achieve, this fell by the wayside, and the focus was more on external communication. These

communications do help to smooth partnership working, and need to be added into new projects more effectively.

When integrating new organisations into an existing partnership, it is important to explore each other's expectations and capabilities, to avoid confusion or misunderstandings later on.

Annex - Detailed history of activity

In this annex, we look at what activity has taken place, building from a slow start to intense activity through the second half of the funding period. Approval for the project was given on 30th November 2020, but work could not start until the suite of 'permission to start' documents had been returned to NLHF and approved. This approval was received before Christmas 2020, enabling the partners to place advertisements for the traineeships before the end of 2020. Finding suitable candidates and getting them started on their programme of learning had been identified as the riskiest part of the LYRiC scheme, not least as the GRCF contract agreed only permits 15 months of funding activity.

The following sections set out the recorded activity over the 15 months, up to the point of delivery of this report.

January to March 2021

January was all about getting things ready, getting systems and agreements in place, and undertaking the recruitment of the new staff and the trainees required for delivery. The Prince's Trust were also actively preparing their delivery plan and actions.

In February, LYRiC management developed and issued the Request for Quotation for the evaluation part of the project. The Prince's Trust started to recruit for their first session, and to ensure that, by working with the Wildlife Trusts, they had materials for it that focused on nature and open spaces.

During March the Castle Bromwich Historic Gardens Trust (CBHGT) project manager was recruited and started in post. In addition, the LYRiC trainees were all recruited and started in post.

In addition:

February 24th – The Prince's Trust Explore session ran online

March 10th and 24th – The Prince's Trust Explore sessions ran online

March 15th – Evaluation commissioned

April 2021

As part of the evaluation and monitoring activity, a logic model was developed which helped to identify what information needed to be captured. The management team decided to use it as a key monitoring and communication tool.

Trainees undertook a three day First Aid at Work training course.

With staff and trainees in place, activity began in earnest:

6th – tree planting and wetland creation, Hams Hall

8th - Senior training officer started in post for BBCWT

8th – tree planting, Hams Hall

12th – Langley Brook, work party

14th and 15th – Parkland public consultation event, Castle Bromwich

14th, 15th and 21st – Hibernaculum work at Castle Bromwich

21st – litter picking and plant give away at Meriden Park with B37 Project

22nd – water quality sampling, Hams Hall

26th – general habitat management, EcoPark, Birmingham

27th – hedgehog and reptile survey, Castle Bromwich

28th – The Prince's Trust Explore session ran online

May 2021

Practical events were undertaken at Castle Bromwich Parkland and High Meadow School, while The Prince's Trust's first progression session – Get Started in Nature and Conservation – was run at the EcoPark in Birmingham.

Detailed activities included:

- 5th – habitat work at Castle Bromwich
- 10th, 11th and 12th – Tree popping practical event at Castle Bromwich
- 13th – Project Steering Group meeting, including presentation of logic model for evaluation
- 13th, 20th and 27th – building rain garden at High Meadow School
- 18th – The Prince's Trust Get Started in Nature and Conservation, EcoPark in Birmingham
- 21st – two 'nature art' sessions delivered by B37
- 29th – bird survey with BTO local group at Castle Bromwich

June 2021

Practical sessions for volunteers and trainees included Himalayan balsam pulling and tree and plug plant planting. There was work with schools and a major botanical survey undertaken at Castle Bromwich Parkland.

Detailed activities included:

- 1st – Big Wild Breakfast at Castle Bromwich
- 1st – Himalayan balsam pulling, Cole End Park
- 4th – Local Wildlife Site resurvey at Castle Bromwich
- 7th – Dairy Farm, plug planting
- 11th – tree planting and school engagement, Water Orton Primary School
- 14th, 15th, 17th – rain garden, High Meadow School
- 16th – The Prince's Trust Explore session ran online
- 16th – practical path work at Castle Bromwich
- 17th and 24th – volunteer practical taster session, Castle Bromwich
- 21st – pond life kit and plants giveaway with Tribal Junior Rangers Group
- 21st and 28th – balsam pulling at Babbs Mill
- 22nd – Tameforce and trainee practical session Castle Bromwich
- 24th – litter pick and tour, Hodge Hill Group at Castle Bromwich
- 25th – Flora botanical group at Castle Bromwich, 109 species recorded

July 2021

The proposals and plan for Glebe Farm were redrafted following consultation with local communities. Work started on restoring the acid grassland at Castle Bromwich and there were community engagement events and guided walks.

The detailed activities included:

- 2nd to 8th July – acid grassland improvement works at Castle Bromwich
- 7th – 8th – pond scrapes undertaken, and 700 plug plants planted at Castle Bromwich
- 8th – practical session for volunteers at Castle Bromwich
- 8th and 13th – balsam pulling at Babbs Mill
- 15th – Project Steering Group meeting
- 19th – trainees working at the EcoPark

- 20th – balsam pulling at Cole End Park
- 20th – corporate volunteer group at Babbs Mill pulling balsam
- 21st – big butterfly count at Castle Bromwich
- 22nd – Grassland plant ID course at Castle Bromwich
- 26th – trainees undertook balsam pulling at Babbs Mill
- 27th – Kids Craft Workshop/dragonflies and moths workshop at Meriden Park with B37
- 28th – Wild Wednesdays for local families, Castle Bromwich
- 29th – Love Parks guided walks at Castle Bromwich

August 2021

With the school holidays, there were a number of events laid on to amuse and inform families and children, but The Prince's Trust and the volunteer groups also maintained momentum in learning and in habitat conservation and maintenance.

Detailed activities included:

- 3rd – Kids Craft workshop/wildflowers and bug hunting, Meriden Park with B37
- 4th – The Prince's Trust Explore session ran face to face at Birmingham EcoPark
- 5th and 19th – practical sessions for volunteers at Castle Bromwich
- 6th – WWT working with a local school
- 8th – pond dipping and bird spotting at Babbs Mill
- 10th – Tameforce balsam pulling at Babbs Mill
- 11th and 18th – Wild Wednesdays for local families, Castle Bromwich
- 12th – path work at Castle Bromwich
- 13th – volunteer day at Cole Bank Park run by B37 doing balsam bashing
- 15th and 19th – volunteer work parties on path clearance, Castle Bromwich
- 16th – 20th – The Prince's Trust Get Started with nature and conservation ran at Birmingham EcoPark
- 24th and 26th – nature and wellbeing sessions with WWT at Meriden Park
- 25th – scything at Castle Bromwich
- 25th – nature play clay session at Castle Bromwich
- 26th – bird identification session at Castle Bromwich
- 26th – two wildlife walks, Castle Bromwich
- 31st – Soundwalk with a local community group and B37, Babbs Mill

September 2021

The plans for Glebe Farm were finalised and approved, allowing planning to start for the anticipated works. There were more work parties as school holidays ended

Detailed activities included:

- 2nd, 9th, 23rd and 30th – practical sessions for volunteers at Castle Bromwich
- 11th – pond dipping at Cole Bank Park
- 13th, 14th and 15th – trainees learned about how and then built bridge and board walk at Castle Bromwich
- 16th – practical work party at Castle Bromwich
- 19th – parakeets and bats event at Shard End Lake
- 20th – Project Steering Group meeting
- 22nd – Bounty at Your Feet session at Castle Bromwich
- 23rd – woodland planting working party at Castle Bromwich
- 29th and 30th – volunteer working groups including corporate group, work on pollinator bank at Castle Bromwich

October 2021

Contractors started work on site at Meriden Park on the major project to speed up the flow in Kingshurst Brook. There were training sessions on brushcutters and first aid. There were a number of events too, including participation in the Solihull MBC 'Oaks and Shires' event and candlelit walks at Castle Bromwich.

Detailed activities included:

- 1st – Bats v Moths night with B37 Tribal at Castle Bromwich
- 6th – Corporate volunteer group at Castle Bromwich
- 6th – LYRiC trainees health and wellbeing training
- 7th – small mammal identification training for LYRiC trainees and volunteers at Hams Hall
- 12th – open training session on scything at Castle Bromwich
- 18th, 19th and 28th – practical sessions for volunteers at Castle Bromwich
- 19th – 29th – The Prince's Trust Get Started in Nature and Conservation ran at Birmingham EcoPark
- 23rd – Solihull MBC Oaks and Shires Event
- 26th and 28th – Enchanted Candlelit Walk at Castle Bromwich
- 27th – Brilliant Birds event at Castle Bromwich

November 2021

Among the capital activities, there was arboriculture work undertaken at Castle Bromwich and the contractors finished the works at Meriden Park. The LYRiC trainees installed four rustic benches at Castle Bromwich. The first Prince's Trust Get Into Woodlands course ran at Saltwells LNR and there were several tools maintenance training sessions, which were greatly appreciated.

Detailed activities included:

- 1st – 26th – The Prince's Trust Get Into Woodlands programme ran at Saltwells LNR, Dudley
- 4th – The Prince's Trust Explore session ran at Birmingham EcoPark
- 5th – corporate volunteer group at Castle Bromwich
- 8th, 9th, 18th and 24th – tools maintenance training sessions
- 8th to 12th – arboriculture work at Castle Bromwich
- 18th – practical session for volunteers at Castle Bromwich
- 25th – Project Steering Group Meeting

December 2021

Weather conditions were not particularly kind so a number of planned activities had to be cancelled, but a small number of activities were noted:

- 8th – The Prince's Trust Explore session ran at Birmingham EcoPark
- 8th – tree carving work starts at Castle Bromwich
- 9th – tree planting at Water Orton Primary School and learning to work with KS2 pupils

January 2022

There were many more work parties this month and also contractors on site at Castle Bromwich. There was also a winter bird survey and ringing session at Castle Bromwich Parkland. The first in a series of Vlogs communicating the achievements of the LYRiC project and the natural ecology of the River Cole was published, and willow art was installed at Castle Bromwich.

The detailed list of activities includes:

- 6th – Castle Bromwich, volunteer work party
- 11th – Tameforce at Hawkswell, working group
- 12th – The Prince's Trust Explore session, Hams Hall
- 12th – coppicing and habitat management at Birmingham EcoPark
- 13th – Bryophytes training course, Hams Hall
- 17th and 18th – arboriculture work at Castle Bromwich for wetland willow removal
- 18th – Tameforce at Castle Bromwich
- 19th – The Prince's Trust virtual Explore wellbeing in Nature session
- 19th – habitat management at Birmingham EcoPark
- 20th – Woodgate Valley habitat management
- 20th – first Vlog published on YouTube, focus on the Meriden Park works, a Get Started session and Oaks and Shires event
- 20th – woodcarving activity at Castle Bromwich
- 21st – Bryophytes training course, Hams Hall
- 25th – Tameforce, Cole End Park, habitat management
- 26th – habitat management at Birmingham Ecopark
- 26th – winter bird survey and ringing, Castle Bromwich
- 27th – Project Steering Group Meeting
- 27th – online training – Dealing with Challenging Situations

February 2022

The Glebe Farm works were undertaken this month, with just some final snagging going into March. The Prince's Trust ran more courses including its second Get Into Woodlands month-long course. There were a number of community engagement activities and events, which also required the LYRIC trainees to demonstrate their learning on running such events.

The detailed activities included:

- 1st – Ladywalk, Tameforce, habitat management
- 2nd – trainees at Castle Bromwich, winter tree identification and habitat work
- 8th – observation of trainees leading volunteer group, Tameforce
- 15th – Castle Bromwich parkland, habitat management and willow working
- 16th – Meriden Park, Wellbeing Walk
- 17th – Meriden Park, Wellbeing Walk
- 17th – volunteer work party, Castle Bromwich parkland, installing waymarkers
- 17th – local company installs interpretation panels at Castle Bromwich
- 21st – site and habitat management, Hams Hall
- 22nd – Southfields Farm, hedgelaying course
- 23rd – Community engagement activity led by trainees as part of assessment
- 23rd – Meriden Park, habitat management taster session
- 24th – Community engagement activity led by trainees as part of assessment
- 24th – Meriden Park, habitat management taster session
- 24th – tree planting at Castle Bromwich
- 28th – online, Mental Health First Aid course

March 2022

As the scheme was in the final month of delivery, there was a natural tailing off of works, while the trainees worked to complete and submit their portfolios. The evaluation report was submitted before the end of the month, so the full detail of activities was not possible. The second Vlog was published. Acid grassland mowing at Castle Bromwich was moved to March in the hope of better weather conditions.

Detailed activities reported before finalisation of the report:

1st – online, Mental Health First Aid course

1st – hedgelaying course at Hams Hall

3rd – Project Steering Group Meeting

4th – L Lynch plant hire company undertook pro bono wetland restoration work at Castle Bromwich

14th – second Vlog planned publication date, focus on Castle Bromwich (publication delayed)

17th – The Prince's Trust final Explore session at the EcoPark

24th – second Vlog published