

Allen Valleys

Landscape Partnership Scheme

Legacy Report



Allen Valleys Landscape Partnership

Scheme Legacy

Background

The Allen Valleys Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) has now achieved the purposes originally set out and approved by our funders – Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Since the planning and development stages, the North Pennines AONB Partnership has been mindful of the need to sustain the work of the LPS beyond the life of HLF funding.

The Scheme staff have (as noted in the Final Evaluation Report) taken a community development approach to the scheme's development, and this has led to a number of new and reinvigorated local groups that now have an increased, and increasing, capacity to take work forward.

We think we have been most successful in securing a future for projects and assets beyond the scheme where we have managed to successfully combine three important factors – low maintenance, skills development, and enthusiastic ownership.

Where possible, projects within the Scheme were designed to minimise physical maintenance, and those heritage assets that require ongoing maintenance are now in the hands of third parties. There is a separate and detailed Maintenance Plan with appendices showing the various agreements, schedules and insurances in place for physical heritage assets requiring maintenance.

The development of skills is not something which was easy to prescribe at the beginning of the scheme, and we have been helped enormously by HLF's flexibility over our training outputs. This has allowed us to arrange bespoke training as and when needed, not just for the general audiences, but sometimes for key individuals and small groups who will be responsible for future work. See the Allen Smelt Mill volunteers below for a good example.

Enthusiastic ownership cannot, of course, be taken for granted, but it is an essential part of a successful legacy. Communities of interest do come together around new projects, and the Allen Valleys Folk Festival and the Local History Group are both good examples of that. Sometimes those communities of interest struggle to reach critical mass and leaders do not step forward, as we have seen with the Red Squirrel Volunteers. Although in the end we found a good sustainable solution for the Electric Bike Network, initially our efforts to bring a community of business interests together did not work.

Scope of the report

This report describes the thinking behind project design, and the work which was been undertaken to support local community organisations and groups to help them conserve, develop and exploit the heritage assets of the Allen Valleys for the future.

Not all projects are reflected in the report, and project titles here are often combinations of projects where natural links were developed rather than the original individual outputs.

The examples below show where we tried to embed sustainability into a project, and where it has worked and where it has not. Further work is required to ensure that the enthusiastic groups currently taking the projects forward are as robust and resilient as we can make them. To this end, we have applied to HLF for a Resilient Heritage Grant to support multiple new and existing community organisations.

Allen Smelt Mill volunteers

Project origins & plans

Our original objectives were to employ specialist contractors to uncover and then conserve a central portion of a previously demolished scheduled monument. The site was important, and complex, and most of it was hidden under vegetation and rubble, so it was hard to estimate the costs involved. However it was clear that our budget was only ever going to be able to tackle a portion of the site consolidation. In the development stage we learnt that Historic England were not able to match fund HLF, and so our ambitions were constrained further.

Allen Smelt Mill has an enthusiastic and knowledgeable owner who had been attempting the Sisyphean task of controlling the encroaching vegetation that had overcome the site, with occasional grant aid from English Heritage for maintenance. However, the vegetation was winning this battle and every year more of the visible structure crumbled, and more of the underground structure suffered collapses, opening up dangerous holes on the surface.

Legacy objectives

Our long term plan was to secure the monument, remove it from the 'Heritage at risk' register, encourage people to visit and learn, and to reduce the maintenance task for the site owner.

What actually happened

An initial call out to volunteers to help us clear vegetation on the site was enthusiastically answered. In particular a group of volunteers with significant experience of working on other mining structures turned up at this series of events, and were keen to continue their involvement.

This core of volunteers continued to meet on site, invited by the site owner, and started to uncover and consolidate more archaeology outside of the area chosen for work by contractors.

Alerted to the continued activity of these volunteers on site, we decided to ensure that they, and the site owner, were fully supported and that their work was integrated into the project as a whole.

We provided professional H&S and insurance advice to the group and the landowner, and went on to arrange for training in first aid, archaeological recording, and working on site with bats. We also paid for the site owner to qualify in the use of a pesticide sprayer, so that he could carry out the basic maintenance of the site once the work was complete.

The volunteers' ambition included restoring a large additional element of the site (the Bingsteads). There was sufficient momentum behind the group to allow a separate application to Historic England for this work using the volunteer time as match, and as part of this new project we arranged a series of very popular lime mortar training events run by the main contractor.

The lime mortar training events allowed us to recruit a few more volunteers, but the main core of volunteers worked alongside the main site contractors to complete this work. Co-operation with the contractors was superb, and work was divided so that the contractors undertook the scaffolding work, and the major and more dangerous elements of consolidation, while the volunteers undertook the vast majority of the pointing.

The end result has been a wonderful collaboration between architect, built heritage contractor, site owners, volunteers, Historic England and ourselves. This collaboration has allowed us to uncover and consolidate at least twice the area of site than was originally envisaged, and has left a dedicated group of volunteers working in close partnership with the site owner to continue their archaeological and consolidation work, as well as the ongoing maintenance. Allen Smelt Mill has been taken off the 'Heritage at risk' register.

Collaboration with these volunteers and other historic environment experts has also led to the production of award-winning interpretation on site, and the shortlisting of the volunteer group for a Heritage Angels award.

What will happen next

The Allen Smelt Mill volunteers will continue to meet on site regularly to progress the work on the waterwheel and other projects. The scope of work on the site is vast.

The landowner will continue to be responsible for maintenance of the site. This is now considerably easier than it was. The land-owner is now assisted by an excellent relationship with the volunteers.

The volunteers are partly dependent on free accommodation that has been provided by the landowner, but this is no longer available. In the long term, a solution needs to be found to provide secure accommodation and tool storage. The Allen Mill Volunteers are part of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys.

Learning points

The volunteers came from a community of interest rather than a community of place, despite our initial attempts at local recruitment.

It was important to ensure that the ambitions of the volunteers and the landowner were integrated into the Scheme so that there were no conflicts with the contractors, so that the landowner understood his liability and so that everyone was working safely and in a way that did not damage archaeology or ecology. Regular steering group meetings of all parties, including reps from Historic England, the county archaeologist, the architect and contractors, helped make this work.

The flexibility within an LPS to move staff and other resources from one project to another is a key factor in success. This quickly became a much larger project than initially envisaged.

The confidence of the project staff to commit these resources immediately, knowing that they would have the backing of the advisory board and of HLF was also a key factor in success.

Allenheads and Allenheads Trust

Project origins & plans

A number of projects were focussed on Allenheads – a well-preserved mining village in the East Allen valley. These included the development of new signage and orientation to encourage visitors to stop and explore further, and the consolidation of parts of the Allenheads Ore Works (mineyard) scheduled monument.

Allendale Estate, who also own most of the properties in the village, owns the mineyard and scheduled monument. Allenheads Trust is a small but active charity who work to conserve and promote the village, and who lease or own some buildings in the centre of the village.

Legacy objectives

Our long-term plan was to remove the scheduled monument from the ‘at risk’ register, to secure public access to the mineyard site, to improve signage and interpretation in the village as a whole to encourage more visitors to Allenheads. We planned to work alongside the Allenheads Trust so that all the new infrastructure being developed would become part of their normal maintenance schedule for the village.

What actually happened

Largely these projects proceeded as planned. The scheduled monument was removed from the ‘Heritage at risk’ register at the end of the consolidation work, public access to the mineyard site was secured through a permissive access agreement with the estate, and signage and interpretation has been improved significantly. Allenheads Trust was involved in all the improvements, and has taken ownership of the signage and access elements of the projects.

The signage and interpretive elements of the project (including a major new orientation panel, directional signage, interpretive panels and digital interpretation) took significantly longer than planned, and changes to two other projects which were planned for Allenheads (see Electric Bike Scheme, and Micro-hydro), and delays to the Observatory project in Allenheads meant that there was very little to see in the village until towards the end of the Scheme.

What will happen next

The consolidation works on the scheduled ancient monument will not need any maintenance for many decades. The new permissive access, and the new signage and interpretation will require some caretaking. Allenheads Trust have agreed to keep an eye on these assets as part of their existing maintenance responsibilities in the village.

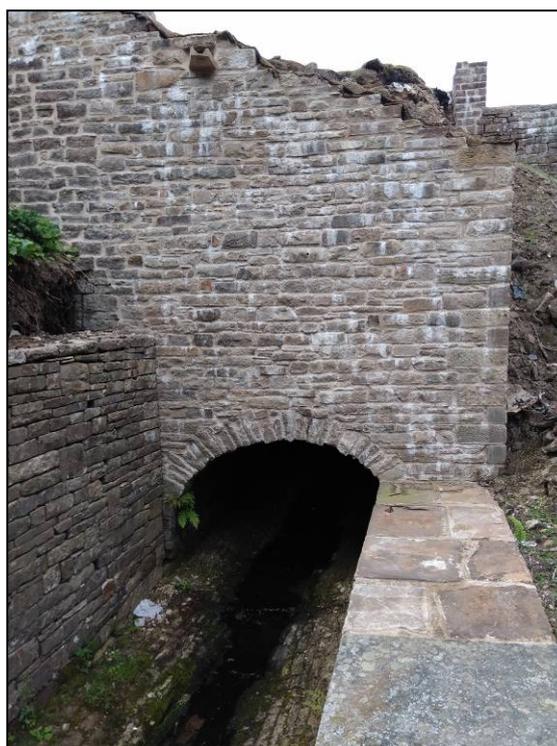
Allenheads Trust are in a pivotal position for the development and management of heritage assets in Allenheads Village and the mineyard. They need further support to develop other key assets with income generating potential in the village, and with business planning and marketing, to secure their future.

Allenheads Trust is part of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys.

Learning points

Although these projects did what they planned to do, the timescale meant that there was little to see on the ground for the first three years of the project. It was important to retain a presence in Allenheads during this time, using venues for meetings, dropping in to the café to pass on news, attending Allenheads Trust meetings and holding public meetings to update on progress.

The involvement of Allenheads Trust on the Advisory Board for the LPS was important for continued communication of our progress. However, as a community organisation for a cluster of projects in the LPS, we perhaps relied too heavily, at times, on our board representative to communicate on our behalf. The chair of the Allenheads Trust (and our board representative) sadly passed away during the Scheme. It would have been good to have had a broader relationship with the Trust.



Barney Craig

Project origins & plans

Barney Craig is the largest extant mineshop in the North Pennines, part of a scheduled monument on the 'at risk' register. In 2013 it was close to collapse, having already lost most of its roof. The owners, Allendale Estate, had no use for the building and had failed to find a buyer for this crumbling property.

Legacy objectives

Our long-term aim was simply to save the building and interpret its past. In the LCAP there was also an aspiration that the repair works could be extended to fully refurbish the building so that it could be used as a base for a community hall, classroom base or other facility, although this was an aspiration beyond the scope and budget of the LPS.

What actually happened

Early on in the Scheme, we set up a social enterprise called Allen Valleys Enterprise Ltd (AVEL). Although its purpose originally related to another project (Micro-hydro), it became clear that if we could secure funding to make the Barney Craig useable, then one solution to help secure its future might be to ask for an asset transfer from the site owner to AVEL.

We did secure further funding from Historic England and Northumberland County Council to allow the development of the first floor into a simple camping barn structure. Operation of a camping barn by AVEL would allow for a small income stream to pay for insurances and caretaking.

AVEL agreed to take on the asset transfer, and Allendale Estate agreed to provide it. We found a pro bono solicitor for AVEL to help with the legals.

We had kept the local community (village of Carrshield) in touch with developments during the project, although delays to funding and then the asset transfer meant that this was one of the last projects in the Scheme to get underway.

What will happen next

AVEL now owns the building. The local Carrshield community is more involved in the next stage of the project, which will develop the operational side of the camping barn and attempt to raise funds to convert another part of the building for use as a community space.

Historic England will now consider whether the scheduled monument can be taken off the 'Heritage at risk' register. Barney Craig mineshop is only part of a much larger monument at risk

AVEL will continue business planning for the camping barn, and to raise funds for further development of the building. Continued support for AVEL is now important. AVEL do not have the income stream they expected they might have from Micro-Hydro, and assets such as this are likely to require a lot more development and marketing before we can be certain that they will provide sufficient income to cover costs.

AVEL is part of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys

Learning points

Our relationship with Allendale Estate, and the attitude of its agent, was crucial to the asset transfer, and under other circumstances this may not have been possible. It was helpful that the Allendale Estate agent already sat on our advisory board to represent larger landowners, but was obviously able to represent this particular estate in this case.

The establishment of a social enterprise to take on the management and development of projects beyond the life of HLF funding was the key factor in securing the future for this building.

At one point, this structure was taken out of the LPS delivery because we had not secured sufficient funding. Our relationship with Historic England (and again, their presence on our advisory board) was crucial in allowing us to secure the funds to continue with this work.



Deneholme Wood

Project origins & plans

The development and use of Deneholme Wood was identified very early in the Scheme's development and was well supported locally. The LCAP stated that we would restore the grounds of Deneholme, an Edwardian Country House on the outskirts of Allendale Village, as an attractive woodland garden with access for the public, paying particular attention to access, biodiversity and historic landscape features. We would create new permissive footpaths between Deneholme, the village and the riverside to encourage visitors to the garden, and the woodland would be available as a resource for experiential learning and for training in woodland management.

These objectives differed slightly from the original bid, which focussed more on the formal Edwardian garden than on the informal woodland that had developed from it. In the development stage it became clear that although landowner and tenant were keen to see public access and for improvements to take place, their capacity for management and maintenance was limited. We therefore focussed on establishing a sound woodland management plan and on developing public access through it in such a way that it required limited maintenance.

Legacy objectives

To establish permissive access through the woodland, including on new routes. To ensure the routes were safe and well used, so that they would be looked after by the community at large. To secure the future for the woodland by creating a comprehensive management plan, and training those responsible for it in its implementation.

What actually happened

All the objectives of the LCAP were realised, including the development of a new woodland management plan, all the initial felling works as part of that plan, an asset transfer to allow for a new bridge, new paths and bridge, restored paths, and permissive agreements to allow access to the path network.

The Wood is adjacent to the school, pre-school and village hall and the new access created a circular route through the village. The newly opened Deneholme Wood proved immediately popular with the public, and was used by dog walkers, families and by children on their way to school, as well as visitors to the area.

Many events were organised in the woods, including guided walks and volunteer maintenance tasks, and the grounds are now used by other groups for training and social events.

Out of the volunteer tasks emerged a regular group of volunteers who now meet regularly, and independently, to follow the woodland management and maintenance plan and to socialise in the Wood.

We have established the Deneholme Wood volunteers' relationship with the landowner (Fawside), and have supported Fawside in understanding their responsibilities and liabilities as landowners.

We have provided the group with training in first aid, tool use and maintenance, invasive species management, helped the group to understand the comprehensive management plan for the woodland, and supported the group to take on the practical works within the plan.

What will happen next

The group now meets every month to carry out vital tasks such as footpath maintenance, coppicing and invasive species removal. The volunteers have already carried out their first annual management survey to plan the work needed in the year ahead, have run two woodland events for local scouts groups in the woods, and have been assisting contractors on a new section of path.

The group is now fully independent, but like all small community groups, would benefit from occasional support with further capacity building, governance and recruitment over time.

Deneholme Wood volunteers are part of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys.

Learning points

Development of assets like this open up liabilities for landowners, and design needs to ensure that liabilities are limited. For example, we designed new steps on a very steep slope and decided not to install handrails, as these would be a maintenance liability for the future. We have had complaints from more elderly people about the difficulty of using the steps but have resisted the calls for handrails for this reason.

The Deneholme volunteer group and their relationship with the landowner (Fawside) will be crucial to the future of the woodland. The group is active but will require further support. In particular, they need some independent shelter and tool storage space.



Electric Bike Network

Project origins & plans

The project objectives as written in the LCAP were

- To develop a 'green' transport option/opportunity for visitors
- To market the electric bike network as an additional visitor attraction for the Allen Valleys
- To create a sustainable electric bike hire business (or network of businesses) for the Allen Valleys
- To trial an electric bike hire network model which could be rolled out across the North Pennines

Legacy objectives

Our long-term aims were to create a sustainable bike hire business across the North Pennines

What actually happened

In the end, we have supported an existing business to establish a sustainable bike hire scheme across the North Pennines. The journey to this point, however, was far from straightforward.

Our original model involved recruiting businesses in the Allen Valleys to become hire points for bikes owned by the North Pennines AONB Partnership and leased (with a heavy but tapering subsidy) to the individual businesses. We developed a brand, marketing material and a website. Businesses and their staff were trained in use, hire and maintenance of the bikes. There was a contracted breakdown and recovery service.

In the second year the model expanded to Weardale, South Tynedale and Teesdale in order to get a geographic spread and to avoid competition within the same settlements. However very few businesses even broke even, despite the subsidy on the lease and it was clear that this model was not going to work for everyone. There were exceptions to this, proving that it could be made to work for some. However, these limited successes relied on individuals who really understood the market and were enthusiastic about the bikes.

In the third year we ran a soft marketing exercise through the County Council's procurement department to ask any businesses whether they would like to take on the hire network as a whole in the North Pennines. Eventually we offered the network to a business in the Derwent Valley (adjacent to the Allen Valleys, in the North Pennines).

Dave Hull, who owns Edmundbyers Village Shop, Blanchland Post Office and has a franchise at the Derwent Reservoir Sailing club, took on all the existing stock of bikes, and has now replaced all the bikes with new stock. Dave also owns the branding for the network and the website, and the transfer of assets took place subject to an agreement that ensures that Dave and representatives of the AONB Partnership will meet regularly to ensure that the brand standard is being followed and to take opportunities to help promote or develop the network.

What will happen next

Dave Hull will continue to run the North Pennines Electric Bike Hire Network. Dave is now a registered KTM distributor, from whom he has bought replacement bikes. This has helped his business model considerably. Dave has two successful seasons under his belt and this business has every chance of continuing for years to come.

The North Pennines AONB Partnership will continue (as part of agreement with Dave) to monitor the scheme, including the use of the brand and the brand standard as experienced by users. We will also help with promotion of the hire network within the North Pennines as part of this agreement. Our Responsible Tourism officer meets regularly with Dave to discuss these issues.

Learning points

Bike hire is unlikely to work as part of an existing business unless the person on the premises understands bikes and is enthusiastic about hiring them. Some of the reasons our businesses failed to grasp the opportunity are as follows:

- The owner was enthusiastic, but the staff were not
- Staff were unconfident about bike use, never mind electric bike use, and so avoided hire conversations where possible
- Bike hire times interfered with busiest times for the core business (e.g. café breakfast)
- Businesses only had two (occasionally 4) bikes, and when more were requested, did not take advantage of inter-business arrangements for transport of bikes. These arrangements, seen as time consuming and not worth the effort, although discussed, never became established.

Getting businesses to work together for a joint purpose is difficult. Joint marketing and co-ordination requires time out of already busy schedules.

A short cut to the outcome we achieved would be to tender the work of establishing and running a bike hire network which met the objectives of the scheme.

Folk Festival

Project origins & plans

The origins of this project are somewhat obscure, and by the time the development period started, no-one in the Allen Valleys could remember where this idea had originated! However, a publicised get-together in a local pub soon established that there was a massive appetite to run a music event with a link to the folk culture of Northumberland and the Allen Valleys, and the Allen Valleys Folk Festival was born.

Legacy objectives

The LCAP objectives including making an annual Folk Festival a sustainable proposition after the end of Scheme funding.

What actually happened

In the development phase there was so much energy behind this idea that all the acts for the first festival in Oct 2014 had been confirmed subject to contract before we had confirmed funding from HLF for the delivery phase of the LPS!

An informal committee delivered the first festival, with insurance and liability underwritten by a local organisation called the Allendale Lions, with which the committee had a number of members in common. This arrangement was reinforced with a written agreement between the Lions and the AONB Partnership, but proved only adequate, rather than satisfactory, due to very different attitudes to financial, and other, risk. We spent a great deal of time on conflict resolution at this point. However, in the end the festival was a great success, and the group's confidence was enhanced enormously as a result.

Before the second festival we had enlisted help from Northumberland County Council's Social Enterprise Advisor to help the informal group to constitute an appropriate organisation, and Allen Valleys Promotions was formed – a company limited by guarantee.

The company (and the Lions in the first year) received a subsidy of £10,000 annually for the first four years of the scheme, and ran a festival with an approximate turnover of £17-20,000

Further help from Northumberland County Council steered the group towards more forward business planning and helped with issues around conflict of interest.

Project staff were heavily involved in the festival in the first years, but by the fourth festival we had been able to withdraw to the point that we were volunteers and paying ticket-holders, and no longer attending the festival meetings. The 2017 festival was widely acclaimed as the best so far!

What will happen next

In September 2018 Allen Valleys Promotions will hold the 5th Allen Valleys Folk Festival, having carried forward sufficient funds, and reduced costs sufficiently, to do so. It remains to be seen whether AVP can reduce the ongoing expenditure and increase revenue sufficiently to make this a sustainable annual festival.

There is a small structural deficit in the annual budget, which needs to be bridged. Further help with the development of merchandise, event marketing for a festival 'fringe', business planning and cost reduction will all be needed to make the festival sustainable.

Allen Valleys Promotions are part of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys.

Learning points

This project tapped into 'an idea which was waiting to happen', and subsequently there was immediate ownership. In fact, ownership by different factions almost became the festival's downfall leading, as it did, to passionate differences of opinion amongst board members.

Loss of a few key members of the board after festival two was not the problem it could have been because there was significant local support for the festival by this stage, and many new, and younger, board members were recruited immediately after the second festival.

Robust systems are needed for flagging up conflicts of interest in local groups that are commissioning paid work.

External advice for community organisations running big projects is essential at key points in their life. We were lucky to be able to draw on the free services of Northumberland County Council's Social Enterprise Advisor.

It was hard to get the group to focus on long term financial planning in order to secure the festival for the future.



Growing Together

Project origins & plans

The original project concept was to develop some unused land in or around Allendale village as a community resource for growing food and safe exploration of the natural world by young children and their families. We envisaged exploring the development of a nursery of native species for restoration projects.

We identified land that had potential for this kind of use, as well as some willing partners, in the development stage but there were still many unknowns regarding the eventual ownership and management of the land when we submitted the LCAP. It would be fair to say that the route-map that led to a fully functioning and community-owned growing space was not clear.

Legacy objectives

We aimed to have developed a community resource that was valued, and therefore managed, by local residents and one of their representative groups, e.g., the adjacent primary school, or a new garden management group.

What actually happened

In the end our new social enterprise – Allen Valleys Enterprise Ltd – has taken on a 35 year lease on the former playing field of the former Allendale First School. They sub-let the site in its entirety to another social enterprise called Higher Ground. Higher Ground are developing a garden for horticultural therapy, and aim to become self-financing through client fees, course fees, and produce. Another HLF funded project run by the North Pennines AONB called ‘Plugging the Gaps’ is using part of the site as a native wildflower nursery which is managed, in part, by local volunteers.

Getting to this point, however, was far from straightforward. At first, the former first school field was ruled out as a site because it was subject to an asset transfer that included the buildings of the former school, and the community were already in discussion with the County Council about this. This was predicted to take at least three years and therefore beyond our timetable.

We then spent some time, and money, working with the adjacent primary school on some of their land, with a view to this becoming some kind of shared community space.

More than a year into the Scheme, we persuaded the County Council to split the former school into separate assets, so that the former playing field could be transferred separately. By this time we had set up Allen Valleys Enterprise and could see a possible solution to the long term management of the site by the community. AVEL were happy to take on the asset transfer and so we started the application process, and had to withdraw from our work on the adjacent site with the primary school.

The asset transfer took far longer than expected – over 18 months – although the initial decision in principle came quite quickly. By this time we had identified Higher Ground as a potential delivery partner on the ground and they had raised significant funds to be spent on site, and were forced to ask for grant extensions on virtually all their grants because of the delays to the asset transfer.

Working with Northumberland County Council to expedite the asset transfer was frustrating for a number of reasons: Inadequate staffing in their properties department; Poor internal

communication within the Council that lengthened many processes; inexperienced staff; poor communication with us about the process and what was required when.

The final asset transfer came through with only 6 months of staff time left on the Scheme. Despite the frustrations, we had managed to keep everyone on board, and so progress on the ground has been rapid, but has left very little time to establish the garden and oversee its development and management.

What will happen next

AVEL will hold the lease for 35 years, and have overall responsibility for insurance and maintenance. An annual agreement with Higher Ground will provide maintenance for the whole grounds, and allow for the development of a new horticultural therapy project within the site. It is hoped that the wildflower nursery established under the HLF funded Plugging The Gaps project will have a secure future managed by volunteers.

Both AVEL and Higher Ground need further help to build their capacity and to develop their business plans. Both are part of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys.

Learning points

It is important to have internal advocates in these kinds of transactions with a local authority. We did not have a Northumberland County Council representative on our advisory board. However, one member of staff in the County Council acted as our advocate and helped accelerate conversations and decisions and facilitate meetings - the Social Enterprise Advisor who had helped with the formation of both Allen Valleys Enterprise Ltd and Higher Ground. The local councillor also intervened on our behalf at times. These interventions helped enormously and without them we may never have reached the finish line before the end of the Scheme.

Although we used our local councillor at an early stage of discussions, we could, perhaps, have kept him involved more regularly as things stalled.

It was difficult to keep the wider community involved in this project due to the timescales involved, but occasional open days as the asset transfer appeared closer, certainly helped.

Regular meetings between the two social enterprises and ourselves were a key element in ensuring that no-one gave up on this project during the frustrating 18 months of the asset transfer.

We should have taken planning advice at an earlier stage on this project. We were caught out by the need for planning permission as a result simply of the asset being split into two, and therefore creating a new planning unit. This caused an additional delay to the project.

Ninebanks & Isaac's Tea Trail

Project origins & plans

One of the four buildings chosen as part of our Conserving and Restoring the Built Environment was Ninebanks Hearse House. It was selected largely because of the advocacy of one individual who persuaded us of its importance to the social history of the West Allen valley, and because of its potential to add something to our local long distance walking trail – Isaac's Tea Trail.

Legacy objectives

Our aims were to restore the Hearse House, which had a collapsing roof and rear wall, and to turn it into a walker's shelter and interpretation point on Isaac's Tea Trail. We also aimed to develop and promote self-guided trails, and to ensure key routes were appropriately signed and in good condition – Isaac's Tea Trail being one such route. We expect that the Hearse House will require little maintenance, but that the landowner and the local community would take on any care-taking necessary.

What actually happened

At the start of the project it was not clear who owned the Hearse House. The Parochial Church Council agreed that it was probably theirs and agreed to go through the legal process of establishing ownership and then signing our landowner agreement. This took over a year to complete, but we started on site in any case, having the support both of the local community and the PCC.

We restored the Hearse House and installed interpretation panels inside. We, and the local community, have used the building since then for several Heritage Open Day events, and it has become a focal part of Isaac's Tea Trail. We made several route and signage improvements to Isaac's Tea Trail and promoted the route via an ongoing blog by retired journalist Anne Leuchars and a slot on Claire Balding's Ramblings programme on BBCR4.

What will happen next

Anecdotally, footfall on the trail has increased considerably. The local youth hostel reports a five-fold increase in visitors who state they are walking the trail. We expect this to continue to grow through word of mouth, and the various spontaneous social media posts/blogs and vlogs from those who have walked the trail.

The Hearse House is insured by the PCC and now requires little or no maintenance other than a regular check for damage. It is being looked after by local people, and also by the key individual – Roger Morris - who lobbied for the building's inclusion in the Scheme in the first place. Roger is a tireless promoter of the Tea Trail and guardian of the Hearse House.

Learning points

Early and regular community meetings were crucial in allaying fears of local residents (about increased traffic, vandalism etc.), and in encouraging a feeling of 'ownership'. We involved the church, the architect and the contractor in all these early meetings.

Even if a landowner takes on formal responsibility for a structure, it is important to establish community ownership. Local residents will be the people keeping an eye on the Hearse House from now on

An ongoing relationship with the community is important in cementing the feeling of 'ownership'. We did this by encouraging and supporting local residents to host events such as Heritage Open Days.



North Pennines Observatory

Project origins & plans

The aspiration to develop an observatory facility in the Allen Valleys was designed to develop a dark skies education base for local residents, visitors and local and regional astronomers. It would also help develop out of season visits to support the visitor economy.

By the time the development phase had been completed we had chosen Allenheads Old School House as the best place for a new observatory structure.

Legacy objectives

We aimed to build an observatory that would be cared for and run by a new group who would control access and organise and promote events.

What actually happened

We now have a beautiful and working observatory in Allenheads. It is being managed by Allen Valleys Enterprise Ltd, and there is a small North Pennines Astronomy Group who co-ordinate events. The observatory has had its first season and the events have been well attended.

Getting to this point, however, has not been straightforward.

We ran a design competition for the observatory at Allenheads in 2015, co-ordinated by an architect with links to two university architecture departments. The design entries were judged by a panel made up of the local hosts (Allenheads Contemporary Arts), local residents, design experts (architect), astronomy experts (Durham University), Allen Valleys Enterprise Ltd and ourselves.

By this point AVEL had agreed in principle to take on the operation of the observatory with help from a group of amateur astronomers.

The winning design formed the basis of the architect's plans, and we tendered the work to construct the observatory. We only received one tender for the building contract, and appointed. Issues of poor work quality and poor communication between the builders and their subcontractors and the architect dogged the build stage. As a result, we had to delay the launch of the observatory twice.

What will happen next

AVEL now own the observatory and are responsible for its insurance and maintenance, and that of the mobile planetarium. They have recently recruited a new board member with responsibility for development of the observatory and the events programme.

Further work is needed by AVEL to develop the business and marketing plans, and with the new Astronomy Group to develop their capacity for event management.

AVEL and the North Pennines Astronomy Group are part of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys.

Learning points

Low budget, but highly specific, building contracts do not attract much interest from experienced contractors.

We should, perhaps, have spent more time looking for experienced contractors, and reality-checking the design and budget, before going out to tender. A soft marketing questionnaire at this point would have added a few months to the process, and several tens of thousands of pounds to the budget, but might have saved up to a year on the project timeline as a whole.

We weren't able to build the capacity of the social enterprise sufficiently to take this project on initially. It is a challenge to recruit volunteers with specialist interests and the time commitment for a leadership role in an area with a sparse population.



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Red Squirrel Volunteers

Project origins & plans

Envisaged as a partnership with Red Squirrels Northern England (RSNE), this project aimed to secure the red squirrel range in the Allen Valleys for the future.

Legacy objectives

Our project aims were to secure the red squirrel range in the Allen Valleys by ensuring good woodland management and bringing together land managers, gamekeepers and volunteers to protect red squirrels in the future.

What actually happened

RSNE delivered a number of community events and co-ordinated red squirrel monitoring and grey squirrel tapping for the first two years of the project. They then withdrew due to a lack of staff capacity and Scheme staff took the work back in house.

We were successful in securing the red squirrel range during the lifetime of the project. Red squirrels were spotted in Allendale for the first time in a decade, there were many volunteers recording red and grey squirrel sightings, and a system was developed for passing on information to contractors who were dispatching grey squirrels.

We attempted to link our local group with other neighbouring groups, and we contracted one of the neighbouring group co-coordinators to recruit and manage our volunteers, with a view to establishing a self-sustaining group. We were, however, never able to successfully hand over the co-ordination work to a community group.

What will happen next

Our two contracts for controlling grey squirrels and for promoting community red squirrel conservation ended in autumn 2017. Both contractors continue to work as volunteers to secure additional funding and community support in order to continue their efforts to protect red squirrels in the Allen Valleys.

Learning points

There was not a sufficient critical mass of people involved in red squirrel conservation in the Allen Valleys, and leaders did not emerge naturally from this group.

Trying to enlarge this group by recruiting local volunteers had limited success because there are limited numbers of sufficiently interested people. Largely these tend to be landowners or people living remotely.

Trying to enlarge this group by working alongside neighbouring groups failed because there was insufficient interest in sharing the workload over a larger area.

Red squirrel conservation requires ongoing support for volunteers from national and regional bodies.

Visit Allen Valleys

Project origins & plans

In our Training and Skills Programme we planned to work with our small tourism businesses to provide them with the skills to help promote the heritage of the Allen Valleys, and to run events to do so. During our development phase the existing tourism network for the area ceased to operate, and so we decided to establish a new one to help us meet our objectives.

Legacy objectives

We aimed to establish a local tourism network which would promote Allen Valleys heritage beyond the life of the Scheme. We hoped that an increased awareness and understanding of Allen Valleys heritage by tourism providers would lead to a better experience for visitors and to more repeat and longer visits. We also hoped that this self-interest for businesses could sustain the mutual work of keeping a network going.

What actually happened

We established Visit Allen Valleys (VAV) early on in the project as an informal network of visitor businesses and social enterprises. It proved to be an essential meeting place for ideas around heritage promotion, and for us to keep businesses up to date with the progress of the Scheme.

The meetings have been well attended and network members have welcomed the attendance by Northumberland Tourism, Northumberland County Council and the North Pennines AONB Partnership's Tourism officer, which we have facilitated.

Several events, including training, Heritage Open Days and Familiarisation Events have been organised alongside the VAV network and its members, and we have trained its members in the use of social media, and developed content for business websites.

What will happen next

While the Scheme staff were in post, the VAV network members were content to allow the staff to run the network meetings, and volunteers were not forthcoming when staff attempted to stand back.

As the Scheme nears completion and staff have withdrawn, the VAV network is taking on the challenge of registering the Allen Valleys as a 'Walkers are Welcome' destination. The group has also discussed taking on management of the AllenValleys.com website. This implies that the network members still see some mileage in the continuation of the network.

The future of the group is currently under discussion and it is unclear whether the network will continue beyond the next year.

Learning points

Businesses are interested in working together and see the benefits to their own businesses of joint working to promote the area.

Local tourism businesses are as likely as those outside the area to want to learn more about the heritage.

Even when this is the case, we found it hard to find leaders who would willingly take on the co-ordination of the network. Business owners are busy people, and there may also be a reluctance to put in much additional work if it is likely to benefit competitors' businesses as much as, or more than, their own.



Legacy organisations

From the outset, in the development period in 2013, we were thinking about the need for a body or bodies to continue and capitalise on some of the work that would come out of the LPS. It was during this period that we first started to talk to interested parties about the formation of a new group – which became Allen Valleys Enterprise Ltd (AVEL). We created and supported several other new groups with more specialist interests during the delivery period (2014-2018), but we saw AVEL as the organisation that would take a broader view of Allen Valleys’ heritage and of the opportunities arising from the LPS.

We conceived of AVEL as an organisation that might take advantage of income generated through the development of micro-hydro electricity generation in the two valleys. This would give it a foundation of income on which to build other projects.

The purpose of the organisation led to the structure, and a small board created AVEL as a Community Benefit Society. This form of social enterprise allows for the development of a share offer to members to raise money for capital works such as micro-hydro schemes. The North Pennines AONB Partnership have a place on the board, and the articles of the organisation ensure that there is representation from both East and West Allen communities.

Work on feasibility for micro-hydro took place throughout the development and delivery period but unfortunately, one by one, each of the proposed schemes was found to be either technically or financially unfeasible.

This was a long process over several years, and as the scheme developed, other opportunities emerged that needed a social enterprise partner with a long-term interest in the area. AVEL subsequently agreed to take on three projects which had been developed by the AONB Partnership through the LPS. These are:

- The North Pennines Observatory
- The Allendale Growing Together project
- Barney Craig (scheduled ancient monument and now camping barn)

The work to create a legacy for these projects is reflected in the project descriptions above.

Like all the organisations created or supported through this LPS, AVEL requires further support to develop its capacity to manage and develop these projects. The board are a group of dedicated and talented people, but will need help with additional skills and time to make the most of these opportunities and ensure that these projects become assets rather than liabilities. To this end AVEL are the main focus of a Resilient Heritage application to HLF that aims to build the capacity of community organisations taking on the management of heritage assets in the Allen Valleys

Andy Lees

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