



Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Evaluation Report

This is a summary of the Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Evaluation Report that was produced by Wingspan Consulting.

Read the full [Evaluation Report](#).

Introduction

The Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Scheme was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and consisted of a wide range of environmental, heritage and community projects.

The Scheme aimed to bring nature, people and heritage together. Its vision was for a healthier, better-connected landscape where nature can thrive, heritage is protected and shared, and people feel a stronger knowledge of and connection to the landscape, with all the benefits that this provides.

The programme had three main areas of work:

- Natural Landscape – improving biodiversity and access to nature
- Historic Landscape – protecting archaeology and sharing local history
- Cultural Landscape – celebrating local culture, arts, stories and communities

More than 20 individual projects were delivered across the Scheme.

Thousands of people took part in events, workshops and volunteer days. Many had never engaged with this landscape before.

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About the Scheme

About the area

The Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Scheme focuses on a distinctive part of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, notable for its rich natural, historic and cultural heritage. The area features chalk downlands, ancient woodlands and the River Ebble, a rare chalk stream, supporting diverse and rare wildlife. Its landscapes have remained largely unchanged due to its history as a royal hunting ground.

The region is archaeologically significant, with around 250 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, including remains from prehistoric to medieval times, shaped by historic practices like coppicing and hunting. Culturally, it embodies traditional rural England, with vibrant villages, historic architecture, dark skies and a strong sense of tranquillity.

The projects

[The projects](#) were clustered into three programmes:

- **Natural Landscape projects** focused on natural heritage, biodiversity and landscape (e.g. conservation work, surveys and work on the ground).
- **Heritage Landscape projects** related to historic and archaeological elements of the landscape (e.g. work on Roman roads or ancient monuments).
- **Cultural Landscape projects** addressed cultural heritage, arts and community engagement (e.g. poetry festivals, artist residencies).

Delivery team

The Scheme was delivered by a team of staff, employed formally by Wiltshire County Council, and line-managed by the National Landscape team and Linda Nunn, its director. The team members included a Heritage and Community Engagement Officer, a Ranger and Volunteer Coordinator, a Communications and Digital Engagement Officer, a Scheme Manager and a Support Officer.

Partners

Partners played a vital role in the Scheme. Their involvement strengthened the Scheme's reach, impact and sustainability. Many organisations contributed, from contractors to community groups, and some had more formal partnerships with the Scheme. The lead partners can be found on [our website](#).

Evaluating the Landscape Partnership Scheme

From the start, the Scheme included a structured monitoring and evaluation plan, developed with input from staff, partners and the community, in line with National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) guidance.

The evaluation served four main purposes: to showcase achievements, especially regarding NLHF and Scheme outcomes; to assist in Scheme management and governance; to guide legacy planning; and to capture lessons learned. The review also aimed to assess accomplishments, highlight successes, offer insights for partner organisations, identify areas for improvement, and support legacy planning.

Approach

The review drew on research from 2024–2025 and included data from the midterm review.

The evaluation was based on information from:

- surveys (including a web survey with 164 responses in 2024)
- interviews and focus groups with staff, partners and volunteers
- site visits
- data from volunteer and event management systems (Better Impact and Eventbrite)
- reviews of documents, videos and other outputs.

Findings

The Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Scheme was set to launch in spring 2019 but faced early delays. The team was only established in January 2020, coinciding with the emergence of COVID-19. The UK entered lockdown in March 2020, with restrictions continuing intermittently for 18 months. Despite these setbacks, the Scheme progressed and eventually achieved broad success.

Community engagement and volunteering

One of the Scheme's biggest successes was the level of community engagement and volunteer participation. Prior to Chase & Chalke, the National Landscape had no dedicated volunteer network. By the Scheme's conclusion:

- 699 people had signed up to volunteer
- 456 actively volunteered, contributing over 26,000 hours
- 57 volunteered over 100 hours; one exceeded 1,400 hours

The Scheme provided volunteers with diverse opportunities:

- Conservation work (scrub clearance, seed planting, boundary maintenance)
- Ecological and archaeological surveys (pollinators, hedgerows, riverfly, LiDAR analysis)
- Cultural and educational roles (event support, oral history, arts projects)
- Development of community-led initiatives and ongoing groups

Skills development and connection to landscape

Skills and knowledge acquisition

The Scheme delivered over **200 training courses**, attended 2,500 times. Training topics included:

- Professional development for educators
- Practical skills (chainsaw use, brushcutting, hedge laying)
- Heritage-focused training (archaeology, LiDAR analysis, species identification)
- Oral history and app-based data collection

Impact:

- 78% of respondents planned to use their new skills
- 58% intended to continue volunteering on conservation projects
- 66% planned to remain active in conservation groups

Training also supported employment pathways, with some volunteers gaining experience relevant to careers in environmental science and engineering.

Sense of place and landscape appreciation

Initially, many participants lacked awareness of Cranborne Chase's significance. Following involvement in the Scheme:

- 82% felt more connected to the area
- 83% said they valued the landscape more

Participants developed a wide appreciation – historical, ecological, artistic – through projects like guided walks, art workshops, archaeological digs and storytelling. Over 1,000 events were held, with 20,000 recorded attendances. Some events attracted over 100 participants, despite the rural setting.

Inclusion, access and heritage recording

Inclusive engagement with communities and youth

Recognising the challenge of engaging diverse demographics, the Scheme reached out beyond its typical volunteer base (older, rural residents). Notable outreach projects included:

- **Silk flag project** (children and dementia groups)
- **Chatterboxes** (disabled youth action group)
- **Edible Ebble** (young people from deprived areas in Salisbury)
- **Seeds4Success** (NEET youth trained in practical and creative skills)

These efforts improved accessibility and skill-building. Online participation options, such as archaeology from home, helped people with time or mobility constraints engage meaningfully. Business engagement was more limited, with minor involvement from local tourism-related enterprises and landowners.

Improving access to heritage

The Scheme significantly enhanced both physical and intellectual access to the landscape. Survey responses indicated:

- 77% were more motivated to protect the heritage
- 56% used the area more frequently

Initiatives included:

- Footpath and bridleway improvements
- Creation of interpretive materials (apps, leaflets, boards)
- Events linking art, history and nature (e.g. dark sky observations, pigment painting, foraging)

Volunteers reported a transformed understanding – describing the landscape as a living historical document they could now ‘read’.

Legacy of knowledge and environmental challenges

Recording and preserving the landscape

The Scheme made significant contributions to environmental and historical records:

- 5,000+ biodiversity records (pollinators, mammals, wildflowers)
- 1,500+ chalk downland species records
- 12 woodland audits
- 200+ dark sky measurements
- 1,360 new historic landscape features and 7,800+ field boundaries
- 29 oral histories, 47 folk songs and 500,000+ camera trap images

These records are now stored in accessible databases and used in education, research and local decision-making, ensuring long-term value.

Landscape restoration and challenges

Ambitious goals were set to restore and improve key habitats:

- Improve 250ha of habitat
- Enhance 22km of the River Ebbles and 15km of riverbanks
- Actively manage 40ha of woodland
- Safeguard 350ha of Martin Down National Nature Reserve

However, delivery was constrained by:

- Need for private landowner cooperation
- Complex national agricultural policy shifts post-Brexit
- Competition from better-funded national schemes like FiPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes)

Despite limited large-scale habitat change, some local successes (especially at Martin Down) were achieved. The Scheme also created scalable case studies, showcasing effective conservation models for future replication.

Land management

The Scheme had three high level aims for land management: protect key species and heritage, promote sustainable land use, and manage the landscape for multiple benefits.

Outcomes:

- Limited direct change to land management or species due to constraints.
- Significant knowledge gains: e.g. over 1,000 new archaeological records likely to influence future decisions.
- Major impact on people: increased awareness, community engagement and a sense of ownership over the landscape.

Understanding and relationships between communities

There were significant achievements for the Scheme:

- Strong partnerships with landowners enabling access for events and surveys.
- Volunteer involvement built new social networks and support structures.
- Arts and cultural projects helped reach underrepresented communities.
- Seeds4Success empowered young people with skills and confidence, some starting businesses.

There were also some challenges:

- Limited engagement with local businesses (e.g. underutilised tourism potential).
- Sustainability of these relationships is a concern post-Scheme.

Collaboration on interpretation and celebration

Interpretation and celebration of the landscape were key strengths of the Scheme, whether volunteering by individuals or through communities and groups.

For example:

- Music charity La Folia, youth project Chatterboxes, silk flag-making with schools, artist residencies and festivals.
- Informal groups (e.g. walking clubs, podcasters) have emerged and continue to operate.

These activities helped foster long-term appreciation and shared understanding of the area.

Project management

The Scheme was managed by a core team reporting to a multi-agency board; Wiltshire Council acted as the host and accountable body.

- Better Impact and Eventbrite were used to manage volunteers and public events effectively.
- Faced early delays (legal issues, COVID), causing midterm lag.
- Recovered impressively with extension from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), thanks to team effort.

There was mixed feedback on governance:

- Stakeholder group felt underutilised.
- Governance seen as more reactive than participatory.
- Planning documents were often too technical and inaccessible.
- NLHF provided useful flexibility but had complex reporting requirements.

Legacy

The Scheme made significant contributions in **community engagement, knowledge creation and cultural enrichment**, despite some limitations in direct land management change. Its most lasting legacy is the **empowerment and connection of people to their landscape**, which will influence the region long after the Scheme ends.

- **Tangible legacies:** restored footpaths, wildflower planting, signage and physical infrastructure that enhance public access and biodiversity.
- **Data legacies:** archaeological records, LiDAR scans, biological surveys – all now in public databases to inform future planning.
- **Creative outputs:** songbooks, scripts, field guides and NHS poetry packs continue to be used.
- **People-focused legacy:**
 - Long-term volunteer groups, ongoing citizen science, podcasts and walking clubs.
 - Increased sense of **place, pride and connection** among participants.

Some initiatives were not realised, but unexpected successes emerged. These include:

- a regular volunteer-led podcast
- continuing work on the National Hedgehog Monitoring Programme
- the Nurturing Nature Project becoming a successful template for how to deliver Citizen Science.

“It has given me a purpose... to meet people and be part of a team again... mind, body and soul.” –
Volunteer testimony

Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Scheme – conclusions

The Chase & Chalke Scheme **connected people with nature, heritage, and each other**, building a strong base for the long-term care and celebration of the Cranborne Chase area, even if some land-use and business engagement goals were not fully achieved.

Despite early delays (especially due to COVID-19), the Scheme **successfully delivered a wide range of impactful projects** in the Cranborne Chase National Landscape.

Community involvement was a major success:

- 699 people registered, with nearly 500 active volunteers contributing over 24,000 hours.
- Activities included wildlife and archaeological surveys, arts, walk leading and oral history.
- Volunteering improved skills, wellbeing and career aspirations.
- The Scheme significantly enhanced public understanding and appreciation of the area's heritage and landscape, especially through arts and cultural projects that engaged diverse audiences with modest budgets.
- Inclusion efforts were strong, reaching young people, disabled individuals and lower-income groups through creative, accessible projects.
- While there was limited direct impact on land management practices, the Scheme:
 - Supported habitat improvements (e.g. chalk streams, woodland audits).
 - Produced valuable case studies for future conservation.
- A key legacy is the extensive data gathered (species, habitats, archaeology, dark skies), now in public databases for future planning and protection.
- Other lasting resources include educational materials, interpretation boards, artwork and a planned mobile information vehicle.
- Above all, the Scheme deeply impacted individuals – changing how they view and use the landscape, fostering new groups (e.g. walkers, podcasters), and creating lasting community connections.

Lessons and recommendations

The Scheme provides lessons and recommendations for funders and similar projects, as well as those who continue to manage the Cranborne Chase landscape.

For funders and similar projects

- **Support for vulnerable participants:**
Projects aimed at improving wellbeing must include **exit strategies** (e.g. linking people to ongoing support or volunteering). Health professionals should be involved if connected to social prescribing.
- **Skills and career pathways:**
Encourage **formal apprenticeships** and **informal work experience** for volunteers to build skills and confidence toward environmental careers.
- **Project continuity issues:**
Gaps between development and delivery phases cause staff loss and disruption. Funders (e.g. NLHF) should **support continuity of staffing** between phases.
- **Better funder guidance:**
NLHF should provide **formal induction/training** for project managers covering reporting, financial rules, change processes and peer support.
- **Volunteering metrics may skew inclusivity:**
Relying on traditional volunteer demographics for match funding may reduce inclusion. Funders should **incentivise engagement with underrepresented groups** (e.g. using postcode-weighted match values).
- **Cost-effective digital resources:**
Instead of bespoke websites or apps, use **public platforms** (e.g. Wikipedia, Bloomberg Connects) for sharing information. Volunteers can help contribute content.
- **Landowner data access:**
The **Rural Payments Agency** should consider sharing landownership data with national landscape schemes to reduce administrative burdens.
- **Volunteer resources:**
Budget for **clothing, protective gear and branding** to increase visibility, safety and identity of project volunteers.
- **Regular project reviews:**
Long-term projects should have **annual reviews** to engage stakeholders, assess progress, adapt plans and communicate success.

For Cranborne Chase organisations

Volunteer engagement

- Create a **permanent volunteer coordinator role** to continue activities and build on the Scheme's success.
- Maintain **regular communication** with past volunteers about opportunities and events.
- Ensure volunteers are **recognisable** through branded gear and protective equipment; use signage (e.g. A-boards) to explain work.

Community and arts legacy

- Catalogue and clarify the ownership of creative outputs (flags, poems, music) and **redistribute or repurpose** them (e.g. on websites, with community groups).
- Continue engagement with community groups by mapping past activity, assessing appetite for more and resolving barriers to participation.

Infrastructure and events

- Work with local authorities to **maintain paths and sites** improved by the Scheme.

- Organise an **annual walking festival**, led by volunteers and supported by staff or partners. Charge for events to help fund them.

Landowner relationships

- Thank landowners, **share survey results** and gather feedback.
- Explore further collaboration opportunities (e.g. repeat surveys, archaeological digs, woodland management).
- Follow up on **woodland audit work** and engage volunteers in future conservation tasks.

Youth engagement

- Partner again with **Seeds4Success** to continue **training for young people**, particularly in woodland and machinery use.
- Identify funding to make this a **recurring opportunity** as more youth reach training age.

Digital resource review

- **Do not continue** investing in the **Time Travellers app**, despite some positive feedback.

Key takeaway

The Scheme offers valuable guidance for both funders and delivery bodies: to ensure continuity, foster inclusion, provide career pathways, maximise legacy value and build lasting community and landowner relationships.