



EVALUATION SUMMARY



Wingspan Consulting

About the Breaking New Ground Landscape Partnership Scheme

Breaking New Ground (BNG) was a Landscape Partnership Scheme in the Brecks – an area which straddles Suffolk and Norfolk and is distinctive for its sandy soils, ancient heathland, low levels of rainfall and, more recently, as home to some of the largest conifer plantations in the country. With significant funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the scheme was planned in 2012 and 2013, and delivered in the three years from May 2014 to its completion date in December 2017.

From its conception, BNG was designed and delivered as a partnership scheme. Suffolk County Council were the accountable body, but the scheme, and its projects, were designed and delivered by nearly 30 partner organisations. Some of these were local authorities and government agencies, but the majority of the partner organisations came from the third sector and community groups in the area. This working together in partnership, sometimes partnerships created for the first time, has been one of the more impressive features of the scheme.

The scheme's aims were to:

1. enhance, conserve and promote the natural and historic landscape, its archaeology, built heritage, wildlife and geodiversity and demonstrate their connectivity
2. improve accessibility by overcoming physical, social, cultural and intellectual barriers to enable everyone to understand, enjoy and value this special area and to engage with its future
3. develop a skilled and sustainable volunteer base through training and volunteering opportunities
4. provide training and promote those skills necessary to record, manage and enhance the Brecks landscape
5. engage with schools and young people to create active future custodians of the landscape
6. enable residents and visitors to make a positive and sustainable contribution to the local economy
7. engender pride and a 'sense of place' in the Brecks for residents and visitors alike



Pine Line in the Brecks

In achieving these aims, BNG also sought to deliver HLF's outcomes:

- for heritage (being better managed, in better condition and better identified and recorded)
- for people (developing skills, delivering learning and engaging volunteers) and
- for communities (reducing negative environmental impacts, having more and a wider range of people engaging with the heritage, and making the Brecks a better place to live, work or visit)

BNG delivered 37 individual projects, supported by a central team who were responsible for managing the scheme and for much of the communication activity. These projects were divided into 4 programmes:

- Programme A: Doing the Groundwork: Conserving or restoring the built and natural features
- Programme B: Finding Common Ground: Developing Participation
- Programme C: Feet on the Ground: Connecting With Communities
- Programme D: On Solid Ground: Providing for Sustainability

The evaluation

This evaluation has been carried out by Wingspan Consulting. To gather the evidence for this report (which builds on the report we carried out at the midterm of the scheme) we reviewed project documents, interviewed the team responsible for the scheme overall, and many of the partners delivering individual projects, and carried out a survey of people who had taken part in many of the scheme's activities (as trainees, or volunteers, or participants in other ways). We then followed up this survey with individual interviews of these scheme participants to explore the impact of the scheme on them, and changes to the way they saw, and interacted with, their local landscape.

This report sets out our findings – on the individual projects, and on the scheme overall, includes some case studies to illustrate key points or achievements of the scheme, and contains some recommendations. We hope that the recommendations may prove useful to people planning similar schemes or projects in the future, and also to HLF as they consider the development of their landscape partnership programme across the country.

The findings

Breaking New Ground was a highly successful landscape partnership. The vast majority of the projects (94% of them as set out in the table below) achieved or exceeded most or all of their targets. In turn, the scheme as a whole significantly exceeded the majority of the output targets set out in its original plan (the Landscape Conservation Action Plan).

| Programme | Number of projects which: | | | |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| | Significantly failed to achieve outputs & outcomes | Achieved or exceeded some outputs & outcomes | Achieved or exceeded most outputs & outcomes | Achieved or exceeded all outputs & outcomes |
| Programme A – Doing the Groundwork: Conserving or restoring the built and natural features | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Programme B – Finding Common Ground: Developing Participation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Programme C - Feet on the Ground: Connecting With Communities | 0 | 2 | 3 | 14 |
| Programme D - On Solid Ground: Providing for Sustainability | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 9 | 26 |
| | 0% | 6% | 24% | 70% |

Some of the achievements were remarkable for a scheme of this type. For example, the scheme managed to recruit nearly 1000 volunteers, and provided training for the majority of them alongside other training programmes it delivered. Over 5000 schoolchildren were also engaged. The scope of the work ranged from small grant schemes which allowed communities to work on the heritage of features in local villages, to a major refurbishment of a derelict building at Brandon Country Park.

Feedback from those involved in the scheme was similarly positive. People enjoyed themselves, they learned new skills and gained new knowledge. Many of those we spoke to reported a greater sense of appreciation and value of the Brecks and its special qualities, and a stronger commitment to continuing to work to look after the area.

Much of the work creates a strong legacy for the future. Not only have elements of the heritage been restored (including the reintroduction of a species of frog that had gone extinct in the late 20th century), or placed under improved management, but people involved in the scheme now know more about their area, what is valuable and how to look after it. This learning has been captured in a variety of ways – from film to academic journals, LiDAR images which allowed the scheme to see beneath the canopy of Thetford Forest, to improved historical records. Much of the information gathered as part of the work of the scheme has been used to create interpretation boards, or published in books, to share the message about what is important, valuable and fragile in the area and its heritage.



Pool frog. Extinct in the UK, this species was reintroduced as part of the scheme

Not everything has gone as planned. There were delays to some of the projects (which has in turn provided valuable lessons for some project teams), the scheme found it difficult to engage with less traditional audiences despite valiant efforts, and as the scheme progressed it became clear that some of the aims were perhaps described less clearly than they might have been, so success would not be easy to demonstrate. Again, these challenges provide lessons for the future.

Overall this scheme has been a success. Well designed, well managed, and well lead, it can be seen as a strong example of a landscape partnership scheme, and we congratulate the people responsible for it.