

# OPOF Final Evaluation Summary

## 22 January 2021

*Note: Based on the draft final evaluation report from R4C. Final report due in February 2021.*

### 1. Aims of the Final Evaluation

The aims of the final evaluation:

- To meet the evaluation requirements of NLHF.
- To build up a body of evidence to demonstrate to partners, funders, and others what works, to inform work elsewhere and future work in the New Forest.

The Scheme's team will report on the final financial spend and achievement of targets.

The report by Resources for Change focuses on providing additional information with the intention of providing qualitative data to 'tell the story' behind the quantitative reporting. The report presents the findings, analysis, and recommendations, the latter are summarised in this paper.

### 2. Key Findings

- Achieved its **output targets and outcome aspirations** in relation to heritage, people, and communities.
- Various **individual project legacies** are in place e.g., management and maintenance plans for restored heritage assets, host organisation taking on the ongoing maintenance responsibility etc. Project Change Statements set out the legacy of each project and what must happen next to maintain this legacy. This will be summarised in a final Scheme-wide legacy report.
- Increased the **depth of engagement** (rather than necessarily the breadth) with 'New Forest resident' audience i.e., a greater understanding and respect for the New Forest heritage which can be reflected in their more appropriate behaviours.
- Range and scope of **volunteering** achieved across the Forest. Significant rewards in terms of volunteer hours contributed, the work carried out and the range of benefits for volunteers, including making a difference to the Forest, increased wellbeing from being active and having increased social contact. Successes are the central coordination function, range of opportunities and the way the volunteers have been trained, supported, and managed.

- Created a culture of **landscape-scale collaboration** across the New Forest through successful **partnership working** i.e., the trust, joint commitment, and communication which has developed between key organisations working in the Forest through OPOF. It is recognised that the value of the partnership has been to get everyone aligned, focussing on what is best for the Forest. There are 5 key factors that provide a recipe for creating a culture of collaborative working i.e.: commitment, coordination, communication, connectivity, and continuity.
- Considerable improvement in **relationships between organisations**. Working relationships with the commoning community have improved through the life of OPOF. This is a view that has come from both commoners and other partnership members, both of whom recognise that there is now a greater understanding of the role of commoning and all are seeing the benefit of being more open and working with others.
- **Leadership** - NFNPA have done a good job in leading this scheme and leading it in a way that fostered collaboration and a strong partnership. The result is that the NFNPA is more trusted than it was at the start of the Scheme, and if this continues it will be very beneficial for the New Forest.

### 3. Key strategic legacy challenges for the future

- Maintaining the **holistic approach to heritage**; linking natural, historic, and cultural/social heritage.
- Reaching out to audiences beyond the Forest boundary i.e., **the New Forest neighbours** and hard to reach audiences i.e., young people, ethnic backgrounds or those with 'special needs'.
- Continuation of the range and level of **volunteering** across the Forest. Whilst there are some opportunities within individual organisations, it will be important not to lose the value of the centrally coordinated approach, providing support to partners and the many people who increasingly see themselves as New Forest volunteers.
- Continued **partnership working**, more can be achieved through collaboration than can be achieved separately. Effective partnership working can provide a structure through which complexity can be managed, relationships improved, and priorities aligned.
- Nurture **collaborative culture** and ensure that people and organisations don't revert to 'old ways'. This will require leadership and continued cooperation of a

wider range of organisations across the Forest. Creating a culture of collaboration so it becomes 'the way we do things in the New Forest'.

- Build on **successful relationships** between commoners and key Forest organisations including the NFNPA and building a wide variety of stakeholders' awareness and understanding about commoning.

## Annex

### Worked well:

- collaborative ethos - sharing and communicating a common purpose
- communication - keeping people informed
- synergies between projects
- sharing project resources
- strong leadership and coordination
- constructive attitude to solving issues
- reporting process
- flexibility
- volunteering (Providing a central 'organising function' for volunteering across the Scheme is seen as a key element of this success, allowing for shared promotion of opportunities, the sharing of volunteers across projects and sites, and access to a wider range of opportunities for the volunteers themselves)
- continuity of staff (build better relationships)
- personal learning about behaviour change
- engagement of 'New Forest residents (passive and active)'
- outputs for heritage – habitat and landscape improvements, changes in Land management practices
- outcomes for people – increased understanding of the NF heritage, increased enjoyment, people trained in variety of areas
- outcomes for community– bringing communities closer together (bigger picture of their place or their interest in the wider context of the Forest and has created connections between them)
- changing attitudes - a more caring attitude towards the Forest, respect for different groups within the community (leading to improved relationships and more collaboration)
- individual project legacy planning

### Could have worked better:

- sourcing the matched funding
- challenges between personalities, differences of opinion, people coming and going
- doubling up on work areas

- 'reinventing the wheel'
- existing resource constraints and priorities within organisations.
- changing rules on contingency
- more public outreach in the first year
- practical tools and tangible outcomes in relation to behaviour change (earlier development of the toolkit)
- engagement of 'New Forest neighbours' (young people, those from ethnic communities, and people with special needs)
- strategic legacy planning (could be started earlier)