

Case Study

Heathlands Reunited, an example of successful fundraising

Background

The Heathlands Reunited (HeRe) project aims to cultivate a bigger, better, joined up heathland that people know about, care about and use responsibly and sustainably. The project has successfully secured funding of over two million pounds to help achieve its vision; this case study tells the story of how this was achieved.

Lowland heathland is a national priority habitat that is of great importance for its biodiversity, landscape, cultural heritage, access, and recreation value. Over the past 200 years 85% of the South Downs National Park's (SDNP) heathland has been lost due to development, intensification of agriculture, afforestation, and other human pressures. 1,544ha of heathland remains in the SDNP, covering 1% of the total area.

In response to this devastating loss the South Downs Heathland Partnership (SDHP) created the vision for a project named HeRe. The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) lead on the development of this project and funded a fixed-term Heathland Project Manager to develop, with partners, a funding bid to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The successful development phase application was submitted in November 2013 under the 'Heritage Grants' stream. The total budget was £71,000, HLF awarded a development stage grant of £48,300 and the SDNPA provided the remainder. Heritage Grants applications go through a two-round process. The development stage is the time to develop the more detailed second-round application (for stage 2, when the project activities are delivered).



The project

The development stage of the project ran from April 2014 to August 2015.

Key objectives of the development stage were to:

- Carry out further stakeholder engagement work to inform and shape the stage 2 application
- Commission further data and evidence work to plug gaps and to use this information to refine proposed project activities
- Work with partners to review the project's vision, aims and objectives
- Make the project more strategic and geographically-focused
- Write and submit an inspirational, high-quality, fit-for-purpose stage 2 application to HLF in the required timeframe.

As a partnership project it was vital that all project partners felt valued, had effective mechanisms to contribute and were also accountable for their agreed inputs and resources. All of this was achieved through regular meetings and workshops with the project partners, one-to-one visits with the Heathland Project Manager, prompt circulation of project documents, and regular review of progress at quarterly meetings of the SDHP.

Partners and supporters included; Forestry Commission; Natural England; Ministry of Defence; Hampshire County Council; East Hampshire District Council; West Sussex County Council; National Trust; Sussex Wildlife Trust; Hampshire Wildlife Trust; RSPB; Butterfly Conservation; Amphibian and Reptile Conservation; Lynchmere Society and South Downs Land Managers Group.

“We decided to work together as partners because to make a genuine difference to this complex landscape of heathland sites and audiences across the area, it required a mix of skills, contacts and approaches that couldn't be delivered by any one organisation”

Partner, third sector organisation, July 2015

The outcome

The development stage of the project has been successfully completed. A range of work packages were successfully delivered together with commissioning independent consultants to carry out a number of research projects and stakeholder engagement events, such as researching the potential of using heather as a biomass fuel and developing methods of engaging with dog walkers around how to use the heath sites responsibly and sustainably.

The allocation of a dedicated full-time Project Manager to manage the development stage worked well and the appointment of specialist consultants enabled the project to benefit from the input of local and national experts. Furthermore the team worked closely with HLF throughout, taking on board the advice from the HLF case officer and adviser, which resulted in the development of a much stronger stage 2 application that was submitted to HLF in July 2015.

HeRe is an ambitious partnership project and the collaborative approach adopted strengthened the quality of the stage 2 application. There was a strong understanding amongst partners of the reasons why they were working together and many partners experienced a multitude of benefits from engaging in the partnership including; gaining useful knowledge about other services, programmes and/or people in the community; developing valuable relationships; and the ability to have a greater impact than one could on one's own.

The HeRe development stage was completed on budget. The successful stage 2 application secured additional funding of £2.37 million for the HeRe delivery stage, representing a significant return on investment.

Learning has been gained from the evaluative process that can be taken into future projects and programmes:

- It is important to build in robust, consistent, and timely opportunities for communication and consultation with colleagues, (both internal and external) thereby nurturing healthy relationships, building trust and a sense of shared responsibility. All of which encourages creativity and the development of new ways of working to increase overall project efficiency.
- It is important to build in regular opportunities for the project team to 'step back,' to reflect, and carry out a series of health checks on the project.

The future

In December 2015 HLF announced that the stage 2 application was successful.

The second stage of the Heathlands Reunited project will run for five years, from April 2016 –March 2021. The SDNPA will lead the project, working with 10 key partners.

Key deliverables will include: Working on 34 sites to restore and re-create 648ha of heathland and 9km of heathland corridors; working with community groups, including under-represented audiences such as disabled people; training and supporting 300 volunteers who will contribute at least 5,700 days to heathland conservation; and training two apprentices in heathland management skills.

The total project value is £2.37m, of which HLF has awarded £1.44m. Partners will provide the remainder in cash and in-kind match funding. The SDNPA has allocated £150,000 in cash match funding to the delivery of this project.

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