

South Downs National Park Authority

Heathlands Reunited

Internal Evaluation Report – Year 2

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1. Executive summary

This review covers Year 1 and Year 2 of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funded Heathlands Reunited project, up to the end of June 2018. The purpose of this review is to analyse the data gathered through three tailored surveys sent out to partnership members, volunteers and Steering Group members and explore changes that can reasonably be made to improve the performance of the project. This review highlights lessons learnt and offers recommendations for the partnership to take forward.

The survey response rate from each group was as follows:

- 11 people responded to the Partnership survey (22% response rate)
- 10 people responded to the volunteering survey (17% response rate)
- 4 people responded to the Steering Group survey (31% response rate)

It should be highlighted that the response rates to the survey were quite low, particularly the volunteering survey. This means that, although suggestions, recommendations and opinions have been drawn out from the responses, they are not completely representative of each group. The responses do, however, give an insight into how some respondents are feeling, which are still valid and should not be overlooked.

Following the review and analysis of the data it can be concluded that, although there were delays to the delivery of the project quite early on, project oversight and governance do seem to be back on track now. Staff changes have been attributed to the cause of delays, as well as creating a lack of partnership 'feel'. Since the new project manager has been in place there have been huge improvements in these areas. The responses acknowledge that both project delivery and communication has improved and some respondents report that the project is now proceeding according to plan.

This review outlines the project successes and challenges drawn from the data from each of the three groups surveyed. Each group feels that they are benefitting from the project in some way, whether it be the new skills they are learning or the connections they are making.

24 recommendations have been suggested that have come out of the surveys to be taken forward for enhanced performance. The key recommendations relate to getting the partnership to better understand their organisation's role and responsibilities, bringing the partners together in a more cohesive way and revisiting how the Portal is being used.

Recommendations relating to the partnership:

1. The Project Manager to think about how to get the partners to clearly understand their organisation's roles and responsibilities.
2. Ensure all partners are aware of their commitments and have organisational plans/targets
3. Include more partner updates in meetings and encourage partners to take the lead on some agenda items.
4. Identify the community engagement elements of the project and communicate it with partners for them to deliver it.
5. Revisit how the portal is being used, by whom, for what purpose, and how can engagement be improved.

6. Project team to revisit the partnership communication plan and evaluation plan
7. As a group, revisit the organisational commitments to stakeholder engagement
8. Explore how improvements can be made to how the partnership communicates with stakeholders (local residents, landowners and businesses)
9. Bring partners together in a more cohesive way so that it feels like one project owned by the partnership, for example:
 - a. Find a better way to get partners to deliver different aspects of the project as a team
 - b. Hold regular planning meetings with partners
 - c. Continue to share training events, forums and partnership meetings.
10. Start work on new habitat corridors
11. The branding of the project should be the project logo, not the SDNPA logo.
12. Provide practical support to project events as well as event promotion including social media messages

Recommendations relating to the volunteers:

13. Explore other, more effective methods to find out about volunteer experiences.
14. Look at ways to improve follow-up/communication from the project team on volunteering opportunities and project activities
15. Look into scheduling a species recognition training course and communicate them effectively to the volunteers.
16. Organise a social event for HeRe staff and volunteers
17. Utilise social media for volunteers to share their experiences and communicate with each other

Recommendations relating to the Steering Group:

18. The Project Manager to explore an alternative method of measuring the health/success of the Steering Group.
19. Look into how the Steering group address key challenges faced with the project.
20. Project Manager to continue to give overview, and improve clarity of budgets/income/expenditure in Steering Group meetings.
21. Spend half a day on a heathland site together as a group with the HeRe team
22. Look into membership of the Steering Group to ensure that all partners are represented and that all stakeholders have a voice
23. Encourage all Steering Group members to attend some of the events
24. Create some time in Steering group meeting for key partners to brief the group on their work and contributions

2. Introduction

2.1 Project background

The Heathlands Reunited (HeRe) project, which is led by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), has come to the end of the second year of a five year project. The project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), and is working in partnership with the following organisations:

- South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC)
- Forestry Commission (FC)
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT)
- Hampshire County Council (HCC)
- Ministry of Defence (MOD)
- National Trust (NT)
- Natural England (NE)
- RSPB
- Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT)
- The Lynchmere Society

The purpose of the project is to address the various threats to heathland habitat within the National Park:

- Fragmentation of habitat
- Uncontrolled and extensive wildfires
- Lack of appropriate management
- General loss of heathland habitat
- Lack of awareness and understanding- public and land managers
- Human (and dog and cat!) pressures
- Climate Change- shifting natural range but not soils

This is to be achieved through the *Heathlands Reunited* project aims, which fall under two categories: *Heritage aims*:

- Manage 340ha of existing heathland habitat to maintain good condition (equivalent to Natural England's 'favourable conservation status' for heathland SSSIs).
- Restore 582ha of existing heathland habitat to achieve good condition (equivalent to Natural England's 'favourable conservation status' for heathland SSSIs).
- Increase/re-create 66 ha of new heathland habitat
- Reconnect heathland sites in the project area by creating 9 km of wildlife corridors.
- Improve habitat for key heathland species by creating patches of bare ground.
- Creation and implementation of a legacy plan for heathlands in the project area.

People and community aims:

- Inform people and local communities about the heathland heritage.
- Engage people and local communities with the heathland heritage.
- Involve people and local communities with the heathland heritage

2.2 Purpose of this review

This review will look at the data gathered through the three tailored surveys and explore changes that can reasonably be made to improve the performance of the partnership working, project governance and volunteer experience.

Objectives for the review:

- To capture and provide the evidence of good project and partnership working and volunteer experience (since the beginning of the project until the end of Year 2)
- To capture key lessons from the HeRe project (since the beginning of the project)
- To make recommendations for the partnership to take forward for the project

2.3 Scope of the review

This report covers Year 1 and Year 2 of the project, up to the end of June 2018. This review only analyses the results from surveys sent out to partnership members, volunteers and Steering Group members. It does not review the Monitoring & Evaluation plan for the project or evaluate the performance of project activities or capital works. A more thorough evaluation of Year 1 (and early Year 2) of the project was carried out by external evaluators, Collingwood Environmental in September 2017 ([Appendix 1](#)). Collingwood Environmental will carry out two further full evaluations for Year 3 and Year 5 of the project, as outlined in the HeRe project plan and Table 1.

Year	Data collection
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of monitoring data • Facilitated review session
Year 2	<i>(Internal, light touch review carried out by SDNPA)</i>
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of monitoring data • Facilitated review session • Facilitated focus group within a community setting
Year 4	<i>(Internal, light touch review carried out by SDNPA)</i>
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of monitoring data • Facilitated review session with volunteers • Facilitated review session with partners and project staff • Facilitated focus group within a community setting

Table 1 - Monitoring and evaluation of the HeRe project

2.4 Product/output

The output of this review is a written report which outlines the results and analysis of the survey results, including any lessons and recommendations that the partnership could take forward. This report will be available on the HeRe portal and presented to members of the HeRe partnership and Steering Group for discussion at a future meeting.

2.5 Audience

The audience for this review includes:

- HeRe Partnership, Steering Group and project team: to take forward any learnings / recommendations
- SDNPA management: to demonstrate and evidence that the project is performing well.

3. Methodology

A set of evaluation questions were devised by Collingwood in their evaluation of year 1 ([Appendix 1](#)), so for continuity, the same evaluation questions have been used for this review. The only relevant evaluation indicator relates to how well the project has been managed, which is what this review will explore (Table 2).

Key indicator	Evaluation questions
Project has been well-managed	1. Has the project proceeded according to plan?
	2. What is working well in the Partnership?
	3. What is working less well in the Partnership?
	4. What lessons are there for improved performance?
	5. Have key challenges of the project been addressed and how?

Table 2 – key indicator and evaluation questions

Data collection with respect to the evaluation questions were achieved through responses from three tailored surveys sent out via email using Survey Monkey to Partnership members, Volunteers and Steering Group members (see [Appendix 2](#) for the survey questions, and [Appendix 3](#) for the full survey results). Each survey was tailored to the different groups as follows:

- The Partnership members were asked questions about the 'health of the partnership'. They were invited to think about how well members of the HeRe partnership are working together to deliver the capital works programme and the community activity plan.
- The project volunteers were asked questions about their experience of volunteering with the HeRe project, with a view to help identify what is going well and why, and what can be done differently.
- The HeRe project Steering Group members were asked questions about the 'health of the Steering Group', and were invited to think about how well members are working together to oversee the co-ordination and monitoring of the project.

The participants were given 1 month to respond to the survey. All responses to the survey are anonymous. The response rate to the surveys were as follows:

- Partnership – sent out to 51 people (11 responses back; 22% response rate)
- Volunteers – sent out to 60 people (10 responses back; 17% response rate)
- Steering Group – sent out to 13 people (4 responses back; 31% response rate)

4. Survey results and analysis

4.1 Partnership survey

There was a 22% response rate to the partnership survey, with representation from 7 out of the 11 organisations in the partnership.

Partnership purpose

Overall, Partnership members do seem to have a good grasp on the purpose and responsibilities within the HeRe project. When asked whether all members share a common understanding of the

Recommendation 1: The Project Manager to think about how to get the partners to clearly understand their organisation's roles and responsibilities.

purpose of the HeRe partnership, all of the respondents (100%) said that they either strongly agree or agree with this. 80% of respondents strongly agree or agree that all members are clear about their organisation's roles and responsibilities with the HeRe partnership (20% said 'don't know' or 'neither agree or disagree'). This also means that 1/5 of respondents do not have a clear idea of their organisation's role, which indicates that responsibilities need to be clarified.

When asked whether they think that together, members have identified strategic goals and objectives for the partnership, 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this (10% said 'neither'). When asked whether they agreed that the work of the partnership reflects the partnership goals, 80% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this, but 10% disagreed (10% said 'neither').

Where the respondents have chosen 'neither', 'don't know' or 'disagree', most of the comments tend to stem around staff changes early on in the project, but they note that things are back on track now:

"I think that due to the change in staff from application to delivery, some of the momentum was lost and some of the projects that would have been picked up by partners have become SDNP projects"

"I think there has been some drift in the partnership and the partnership does not feel as cohesive as a result of the change in project manager. It was the way the change was implemented rather than a reflection on either of the individuals involved. The partnership is now starting to come together again."

"Going forward I would like to see an emphasis on the partnership side of the project, there have been occasions in the past year when it has felt like a SDNP project."

The Partnership members were asked whether they thought the overall achievements of the partnership were worth their time and effort, 100% of respondents said 'yes', which is a very positive result. Quotes included:

"I think they will be as I understand more how to combine the projects aims and resources with our current plans and resources."

"The overall aims of HeRe link with our org aim of linking habitats together."

Partnership performance

When asked whether members are working together to achieve the partnership goals, 90% of the respondents said they strongly agree or agree with this (10% said 'neither'). One person made a comment that the *"overall partnership performance is very positive"*. 80% of respondents agree or strongly agree that members are adding value to each other's work, but 10% of respondents disagree with this. One respondent quoted that *"not all partners are as engaged as others"*, and another quoted that there is a *"lack of partnership feel and buy-in at the moment"*.

Recommendation 3: Include more partner updates in meetings and encourage partners to take the lead on some agenda items.

When asked whether they think members are creating new knowledge or insights together, 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this (20% said 'neither' or 'don't know'). One person said that they have *"made useful links"*. 70% of respondents believe that members are fulfilling their commitments to the partnership, but 10% said that they disagreed with this (20% said 'neither'). The following quotes offer some insight where the respondents do not agree with these statements:

"I guess I feel things can sometimes drag a little with the need to go through quite a few hoops before they can actually be delivered"

"There are some members that are not delivering as much community engagement elements as required in their agreement."

"I would like to see practical works take place which link across project partner boundaries, making the restoration work along the lines identified in the Lawton report, bigger, better, more joined up..."

Recommendation 4: Identify the community engagement elements of the project and communicate it with partners for them to deliver it.

Partnership communication

90% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that meetings are used to disseminate key information and decisions relevant to the membership, which is very positive (10% said 'don't know'). One person quoted *"the good comms encourage partners to work together, including outside of the meetings"*. There were mixed responses when they were asked about whether the online partners' portal is easy to use and helps to share information: 50% said they agreed or strongly agreed and 50% of respondents selected 'neither'. One respondent said that the portal is *"a good resource but my impression is that it is one that is not particularly heavily used by members?"*. Another said that they are *"still getting to grips with portal and communication is improving in leaps and bounds"*.

Recommendation 5: Revisit how the portal is being used, by whom, for what purpose, and how can engagement be improved.

There were really mixed responses when asked whether the way the partnership communicates with stakeholders, including local residents, landowners and businesses, builds support for the HeRe project: 40% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this, 30% selected 'neither', 20% selected 'don't know' and 10% skipped the question all together. This indicates that there could be some improvement in the way the partnership communicates with stakeholders. This may also be an indication that this area has not been monitored or evaluated appropriately.

Recommendation 6: Project team to revisit the partnership communication plan and evaluation plan.

Recommendation 7: As a group, revisit the organisational commitments to stakeholder engagement

Recommendation 8: Explore how improvements can be made to how the partnership communicates with stakeholders (local residents, landowners and businesses)

Partnership processes and procedures

There were mixed responses when partnership members were asked whether they agreed that decision making processes encourage members to contribute and collaborate: 70% said they agreed or strongly agreed, but 20% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed (10% selected 'neither'). One respondent gave insight as to why they disagreed with this:

"There was no discussion with the partnership about the change in project manager - some late communication was sent out but not to all partners. I think as a result of the changes and the way they were implemented many partners stepped back from the partnership. I think the partners are now starting to come back together and the end result could be a much stronger partnership provided that a more open dialogue is maintained."

Another respondent, who selected 'strongly disagree', commented:

"I'm reflecting on the past year, but see some signs of change and so am hopeful for the project overall, as long as it remembers it is a partnership."

70% of respondents agreed with the statement that all members are contributing time and resources to the partnership (30% said 'neither'). 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the work of the partnership is attuned to other calls on members' time and adjusts demands accordingly (20% said 'neither' and 10% said 'don't know').

There were mixed views about whether the partnership addressed conflict with it arises: 40% said they agreed or strongly agreed with this, 30% said 'neither' and 30% said 'don't know'. The respondents were also split over their views as to whether the members reflect on the partnership experience and adjust practice accordingly: 50% said they agree or strongly agree and 50% said either 'don't know' or 'neither'. The responses relating to whether the partnership has mechanisms in place to promote accountability among members were more positive: 60% said they agreed or strongly agreed with this (30% said 'neither' and 10% said 'don't know'). All these responses demonstrate that the partnership is in agreement with project aims and outcomes but struggle with the dynamics of working as a partnership.

Partnership capacity

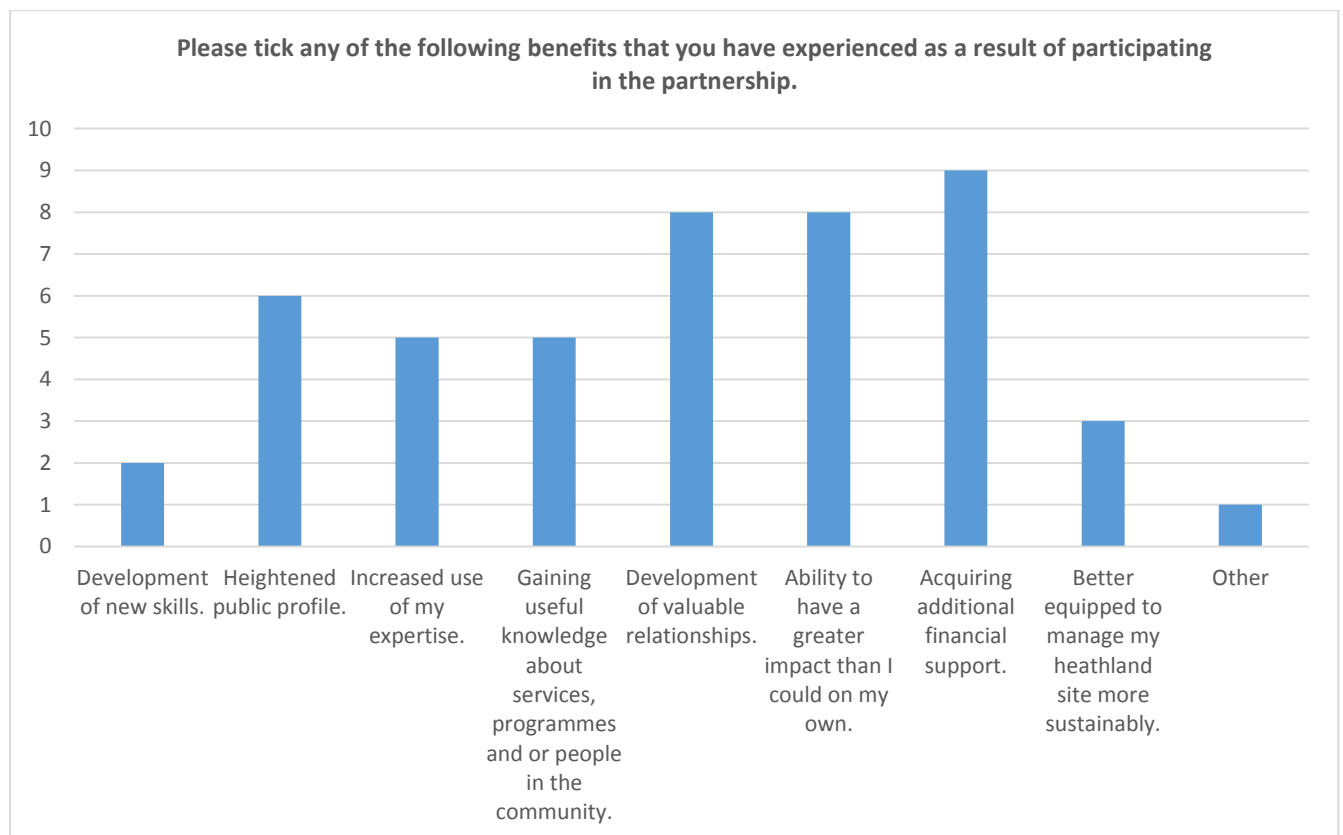
The responses around partnership capacity were generally really positive. 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a partnership, members have the material resources needed to achieve partnership goals (20% said 'neither' or 'don't know'). When asked whether, as a partnership, members have the skills they need to achieve partnership goals, 90% of respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed with this (10% said 'don't know'). 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a partnership, members have the connections they need to achieve partnership goals (20% said 'neither or 'don't know'). One person raised a concern in this area:

"Concern over need to use volunteers to complete some elements - my sites don't have volunteer teams. We are building them but this takes time."

This indicates that maybe partners are unclear as what resource is needed to do a thorough piece of work that includes planning, communications, practical delivery as well as monitoring & evaluation work.

Partnership benefits and successes

Graph 1 shows the results of when partnership members were asked to tick any of the benefits they have experienced as a result of participating in the partnership. The benefits that received the highest scores were: acquiring additional financial support, development of valuable relationships and ability to have a greater impact than I could on my own. All of the benefits in the list got at least one tick. One person ticked 'other', expanding that they also have the *"potential to have a greater impact, hopefully"*.



Graph 1 - Partnership benefits

Partnership members were asked to give three examples of what they think the partnership does well. The results were grouped into themes and are shown in Table 2. The most popular successes highlighted from Table 3 are around partnership working, community engagement/events and practical capital projects.

Successes grouped into themes
Partnership working: Good partnership working, particularly communication and team work. Colin and Katy are approachable and good to work with. It has created relationships where otherwise partners wouldn't come into contact with each other. The partnership is good for acting as a forum for collating expertise/ information/shared ideas and pooling resources and contacts.
Practical action: Putting money into practical action where heathland habitat has been restored and managed.
Campaigns: Successful campaigns, particularly the 'Take the Lead' and Dog Ambassadors
Work plan: Good mix of capital projects and public engagement. The current development of work programmes by new project manager looks to be going well.
Training: Providing training opportunities that will better our management of the heaths.
Events: Successful events, particularly the one at Shortheath and 'Hairy not scary'
Engagement: Good community engagement.
Comms: Successful comms work, particularly the interpretation work and education work.

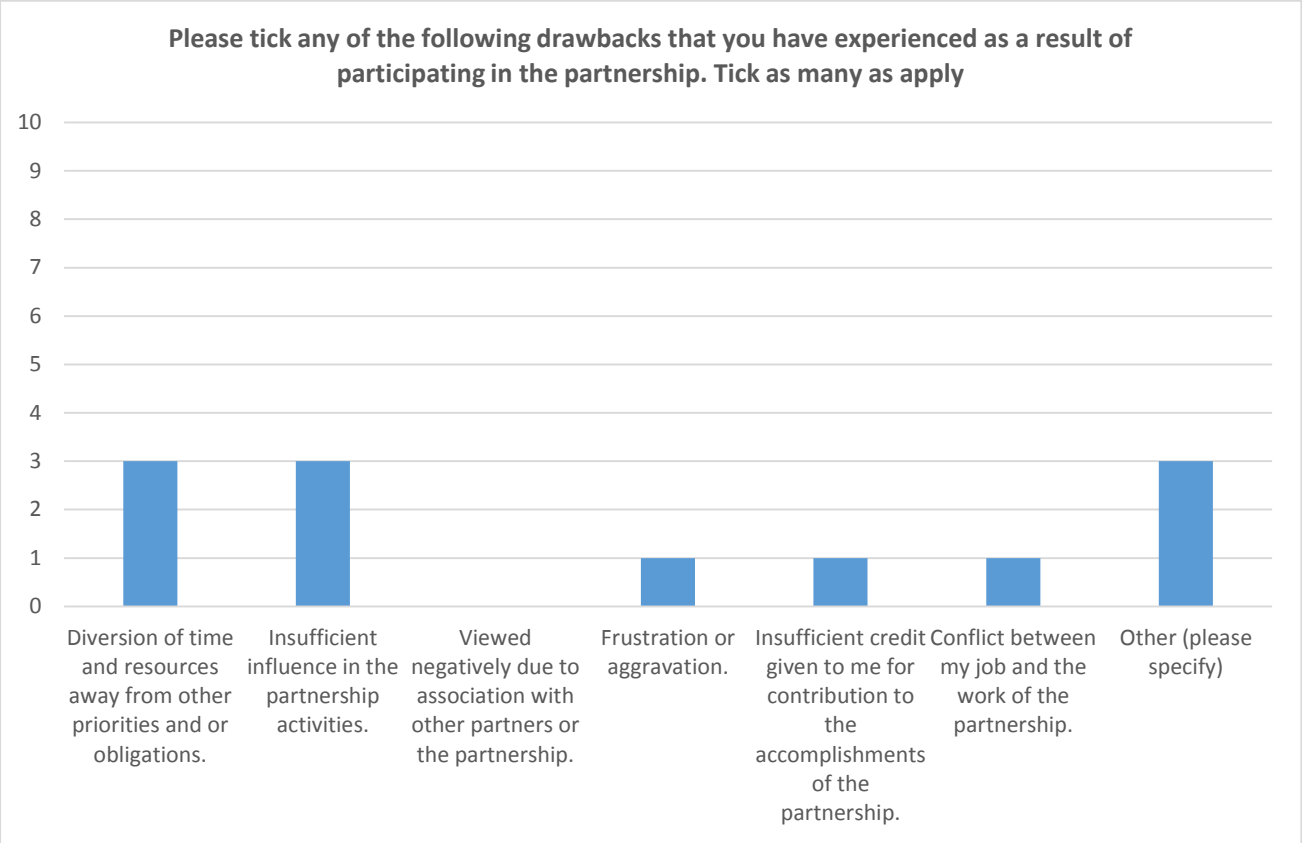
Table 3 - Partnership successes grouped into themes

Partnership drawbacks and challenges

Graph 2 shows the results of when partnership members were asked to tick any of the drawbacks they have experienced as a result of participating in the partnership. It should be noted that 6 people skipped this question, with one person stating "*none apply*". The most popular drawbacks ticked were:

- division of time and resources away from other priorities and/or obligations; and
- insufficient influence in the partnership activities.

One respondent quoted under 'other': "*however, I think the new project manager has taken positive steps in these regards and I think things are progressing in a good direction*". The respondent who ticked 'conflict between my job and the work of the partnership' also added the following statement under 'other': "*Conflict-ish. Unable to use HeRe resources on HLS funded projects. HLS is not usually enough!*"



Graph 2 - Partnership drawbacks

Partnership members were asked to give three examples of what challenges they think the partnership has faced. They were then asked how these challenges have been addressed. The responses are shown in Table 4. The most popular challenges highlighted were around changes in project staffing and partnership cohesion/ownership.

Challenge	Solution to challenge
Dog ambassador scheme isn't working.	Finding a new way to address dog issue through responsible dog walker sign up scheme
Changes in staffing (both on the project and with partners) leading to some difficulties specifically funding and delivery is complicated(ish) and is another of a series of complicated funding arrangements that land managers have to deal with. Inevitably it is going to cause delays in implementation with staffing changes.	Patience and perseverance by Colin and partners!
Change in project manager	The new project manager has taken his time to get to know the project and the partners
Delivery behind schedule	Project Manager visiting all partners individually
Not all elements of project are popular e.g. sculptures	listening to local communities
Change of project management and therefore direction - has definitely raised previous issue and addressed them.	Timelines, goal achievements and budget are being closely measured now to ensure smooth running of the project.
SDNP has occasionally not treated the project as a partnership	Let's see this year!
Difficulties with the apprenticeship scheme	National Park are now running this
Perhaps ensuring partners deliver on commitments	Above and regular contact from PM to update on progress
Partners very busy and sometimes struggle to invest much time into the project.	Partners are able to slightly change what is listed in their capital works for the project.
Lack of cohesion	Yet to be addressed
Lack of volunteers to offer guided walks, presence at events...etc	Meeting directly with each partner instead of relying on partners to volunteer at meetings.

Table 4 - Partnership challenges and solutions

Lessons learnt

When asked whether they have transferred the lessons learned from the HeRe project to others, 70% of the partnership members answered 'yes' and 10% answered 'no' (20% said 'don't know'). Quotes included:

"It has helped in setting the culture for the Changing Chalk HLF bid. The same logical framework was used which worked well and was facilitated by a strategy lead from the National Park"

"Mainly examples from partners passed onto staff in our organisation"

"I am also involved in an HLF funded multi-partner project called Back from the Brink"

The Partnership members were asked what top 3 changes they need to make to the structure of the partnership and/or the way that they work together to better achieve the partnership goals. Their responses are presented in Table 5. This indicates that partners need to be more responsible, accountable and less SDNP heavy.

Improvements

Still a bit SDNP led as a project and need to find a better way to get partners to deliver different aspects of the project as a team
Greater ownership of the project by partners - promote the identity of the project and the partnership rather than the National Park
Believe changes have been made and these are working. It's understandable that it takes time for the partnership to deliver goals.
Start work on new habitat corridors and the true reasons behind the project.
Regular planning meetings with partners should be undertaken.
Continue to share training events, forums and partnership meetings.
Try and join up neighbours to create heathland habitat across boundaries
Provide support to project events and social media messages.

Table 5 – Suggested Partnership improvements

Some of these suggested improvements could be taken on board by the partnership, and have been included as recommendations. The suggested improvement relating to the identity of the project is a valid point and has been recognised previously by the project team something that comes up repeatedly. The branding of the project should be the project logo, not the SDNPA logo, in order for partners to feel greater ownership of the project.

Recommendation 9: Bring partners together in a more cohesive way so that it feels like one project owned by the partnership, for example:

- a. Find a better way to get partners to deliver different aspects of the project as a team
- b. Hold regular planning meetings with partners
- c. Continue to share training events, forums and partnership meetings.

Recommendation 10: Start work on new habitat corridors

Recommendation 11: The branding of the project should be the project logo, not the SDNPA logo

Recommendation 12: Provide practical support to project events as well as event promotion including social media messages

Project progress

Partnership members were asked whether they thought the project has proceeded according to plan. 30% said 'yes', 60% said 'partly' and 10% said 'don't know'. Quotes included:

"I think the change in project manager has had an impact but that is not a reflection on either of the individuals concerned."

"While slightly behind schedule I believe that is explainable and a good mix of projects are being achieved"

When asked whether they believed there has been a resulting improved standing for heathlands as an important habitat within the National Park, 30% of the partnership members said 'yes', 50% said 'partly' and 20% said 'don't know'. Quotes included:

“Still lots to do”

“Time will tell - opportunity to connect with locals at events has been good.”

“Greatly increased profile and publicity has been generated, especially through new comms methods.”

The responses indicate that the aims of the project are not yet being achieved. Hopefully, by implementing recommendations will improve confidence and output.

The Partnership members were asked if they had any further comments about the HeRe partnership. Comments included the following:

“The new project manager is getting on top of the project delivery well and I think things will move forward”

“It has a great purpose which we all believe in - it just needs a bit more cohesion to feel like one project owned by us all rather than lots of little ones.”

“Excellent work on sourcing volunteers and including schools”

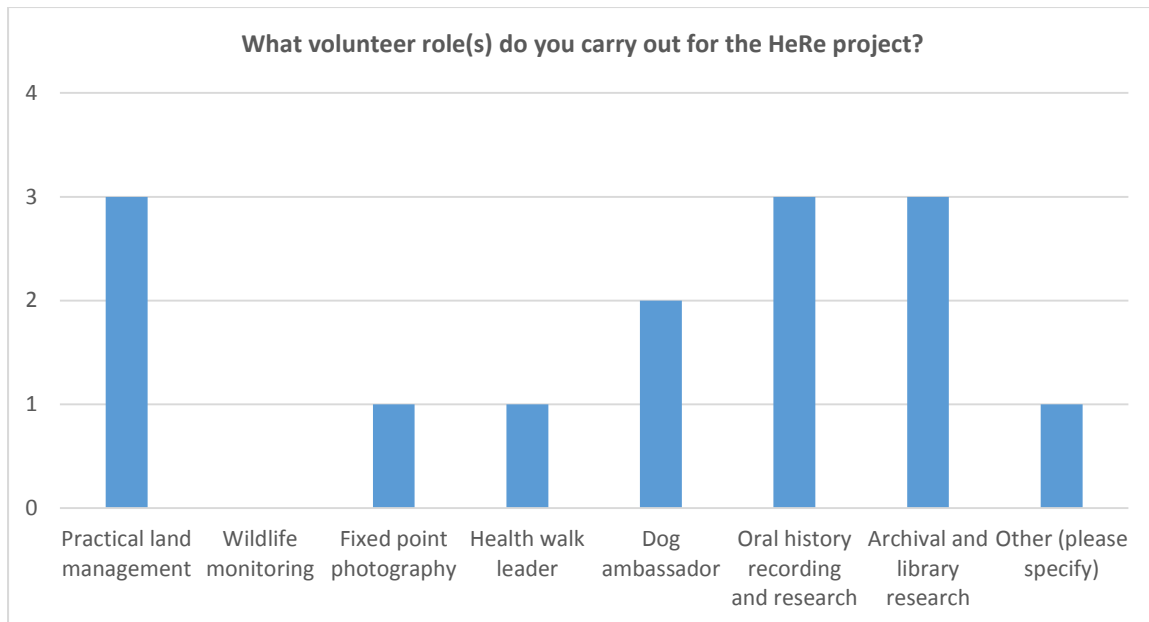
“One of the best things to come out of the project so far is the range of volunteer roles - each is extremely useful and well resourced.”

4.2 Volunteering survey

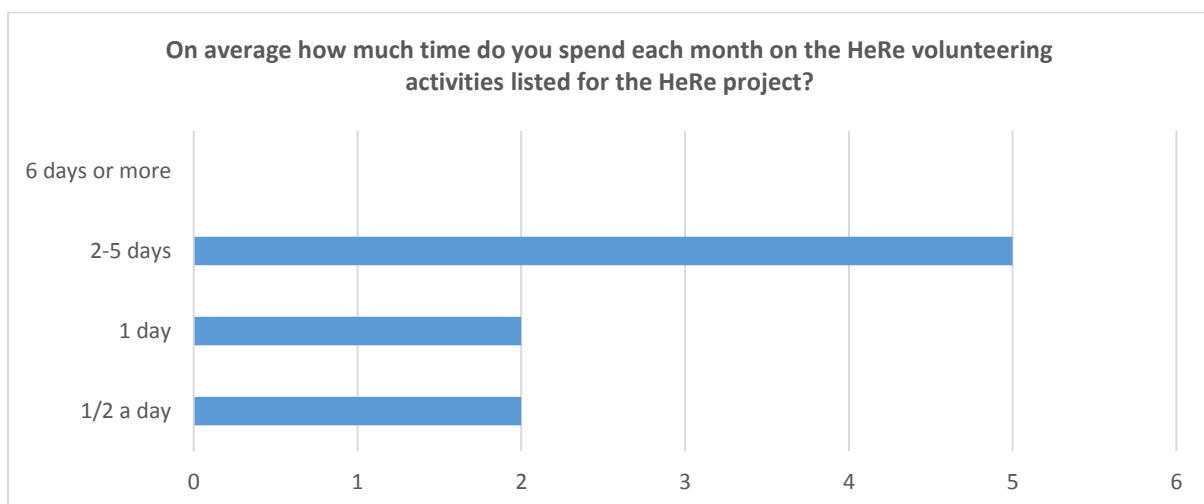
There was a 17% response rate to the Volunteering survey. This is quite a low response rate, and is not completely representative of the 60 people the survey was sent out to. It does give a rough idea of the opinions of the volunteers though.

Recommendation 13: Explore other, more effective methods to find out about volunteer experiences.

The volunteers were asked what role they carry out for the HeRe project, and gave the responses set out in Graph 3. The responses cover a reasonable enough spectrum of volunteering types. Most of the volunteers who responded to the survey take part in practical land management, oral history recording and research and archival and library research. Graph 4 outlines how much time they spend on volunteering for the project in a month. The majority of the respondents spend 2-5 days a month volunteering for the project.



Graph 3 - volunteer roles



Graph 4 - Average time spent volunteering

Benefits of being a volunteer for the HeRe project

Generally, the volunteers who responded do feel that they have benefited from giving their time to the HeRe project. When asked if they have learnt new skills, 70% of respondents said they either agreed or strongly agreed with this (30% said 'neither'). 80% of respondents said that they had made new friends. When asked whether volunteering with the HeRe project has made them fitter and more physically active, 40% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this (50% said 'neither' and 10% said 'disagree'). The respondents who disagree with this, or said 'neither', may have already been fit before volunteering as this kind of activity does attract people who are generally quite active in the first place. 50% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that volunteering for the project had made them feel more confident and able to try new things, but 20% of respondents disagreed with this (30% said 'neither'). 90% of the volunteers who responded said they have learnt

more about the history and heritage of the HeRe project area (10% said 'neither').

Well-being

The volunteers were asked whether, compared to one year before they began volunteering with the HeRe project, has their sense of well-being (feeling good about themselves and cheerful) has improved. 30% of respondents said yes it had, 30% said no, 10% said partly and 30% said that they didn't know. Of the people who responded 'no', two people clarified their answer:

"I 'felt good about myself ' before, and have a positive outlook. That's why I volunteer, I think, not the other way round!"

"Did not have a problem before"

Other comments to this question included:

"It has been good to learn more about the natural environment and be in a position to help out, also meeting like-minded people has been great"

This indicates that respondents do feel a sense of well-being and positivity when volunteering for the project. However, one respondent noted:

"I volunteered to host health walks but nothing has been scheduled."

It has already been recognised by the project team that gaps in capacity have led to volunteers for Health Walks not being followed up. This is already being addressed.

Volunteer support services

The volunteers were asked how satisfied they are with support services, which received quite a mix of responses. Generally, the volunteers who responded know who to contact if they have a query, feel up to date with project activities and receive relevant training.

When asked if they know who to contact if they have a query, 80% said they were very satisfied or satisfied with this (10% said 'neither' and 10% skipped the question). One respondent commented:

"Good lines of communication with Katy Sherman, the Engagement officer and access to the HeRe Partner Portal. Had relevant and informative training for role as dog ambassador."

There were mixed responses when they were asked whether they feel up to date in their knowledge about project activities: 70% were either very satisfied or satisfied, but 10% said they were very dissatisfied (20% said neither). The volunteer who said they were very dissatisfied gave an explanation: *"More communication about what is going on and more volunteering opportunities would be good"*. This may be something that the project wants to address in the future.

Recommendation 14: Look at ways to improve follow-up/communication from the project team on volunteering opportunities and project activities

When asked whether they have received good quality, relevant training to do their role, again, there were mixed responses. 80% said they were either very satisfied or satisfied, but 10% said they were dissatisfied (10% said 'neither'). The volunteer who said they were dissatisfied gave clarification as to why this is the case: *"I hoped the species recognition course which never happened."* This is something that the project may want to look into.

Recommendation 15: Look into scheduling a species recognition training course and communicate them effectively to the volunteers.

Sharing of lessons learnt

The volunteers were asked whether, since becoming a volunteer with the HeRe project, there have been occasions when they have had conversations with others (e.g. friends and family) about anything they have learnt. 80% of respondents said that they had, which is really positive. It indicates that they are genuinely interested in the project, which you could argue would make them more enthusiastic and positive about the project. It also shows that there is increasing general awareness of the project.

Volunteering successes

The volunteers were asked what they believe are the best three things about volunteering for the HeRe project. The responses have been grouped into themes, which can be seen in Table 6. There were a few comments around learning about the project area and the park, including the history of the park. There were also a few comments about being outdoors, meeting new people and adding value to the conservation of the heathlands and making a difference.

Best things, grouped by theme
Adding value: Being able to contribute to the project and doing something that hopefully will be of benefit to future generations. Adding value to conserve the heathland and making a difference
Learning about the project area: Discovering about our local landscape and history. Listening to tales of their lives when talking to people for Oral History. Learning more about the park. Learning more about natural world. See a bit more of the area.
Meeting new people
Being outdoors: Being out around South Downs area and doing practical tasks that will benefit future Generations.
Training: Being able to attend training /events
Everything!

Table 6 - best things about volunteering for the project

At the end of the survey the volunteers were given a chance to record any further comments about their experiences. There was one, very positive comment left: *“Absolutely love it all, Brilliant”*.

Suggested changes

The volunteers were asked what three changes could be made to make their volunteering experience with the HeRe project even better. The responses have been grouped by theme and can be seen in Table 7. Some volunteers said they had no changes to make and are happy the way things are, which is positive. As already stated above, the volunteers seem to be a positive group of people, who are happy to give some of their time to volunteer for the project. Just a few small changes could help make their experiences even better, so we don’t end up losing some of them. Some of these suggested changes could easily be implemented by the project team, and are noted as recommendations. The portal was set up as a way of allowing the volunteers to communicate with each other, so instead of using social media as suggested by one of the respondents, the portal could be utilised more effectively.

Changes grouped by theme
A social event: More project get-togethers for staff and volunteers.
Social media: Consider more use of social media for volunteers to share their experiences & communicate with each other.
Communication: Better communications and follow-up from the project team.
Practical work: Practical tasks to be carried on a regular consistent basis until any one task is completed.
Organised: Being better organised.
Volunteering opportunities: More information on heritage volunteering opportunities. Being used to run a health walk. Consider having volunteers at SDNP events to help with encouraging more volunteers.

Table 7 - Suggested changes

Recommendation 16: Organise a social event for HeRe staff and volunteers
Recommendation 17: Utilise the portal for volunteers to share their experiences and communicate with each other

4.3 Steering Group survey

There was a 31% response rate to the Steering Group survey, which is not especially representative of all members on the Steering Group (4 people responded out of the 11 members). Two of the people who completed the survey said that they had recently joined the Steering Group. As with the volunteering survey, although this is not a good representation of the Steering Group, some good ideas and opinions have still been drawn from the survey responses. However, due to the low response rate, it's impossible to know what issues are being faced by the Steering Group. It might be worth the Project Manager to explore an alternative method of measuring the health/success of the Steering Group because the survey was not as effective as it could have been.

Recommendation 18: The Project Manager to explore an alternative method of measuring the health/success of the Steering Group.

Purpose, role and responsibilities

When asked how well they understand the overall purpose of the Steering Group, 100% of respondents said 'very well' or 'well'. This is very positive. Two people (50%) said they had not been on the Steering Group long enough to answer some of the questions relating to role and responsibilities.

When asked how well the Steering Group provides advice, guidance and support for the project team, 75% of respondents said 'well' (25% said 'don't know'). 75% of respondents feel the Steering Group monitors the progress of the project outputs and outcomes 'well', and 75% of respondents feel that the Steering Group monitors the project risk register 'well' too. 75% of respondents said that the Steering Group reviews activities, identifies learning and makes recommendations 'well'.

When asked how well the Steering Group addresses key challenges faced with the project, 75% of the respondents said 'well', but 25% said 'not well'. When asked how well the Steering Group has a robust overview of project budgets, including income and expenditure, 75% of respondents said 'well', but 25% said 'not well'. These are areas that the project could improve on quite easily with some small changes.

Recommendation 19: Look into how the Steering Group address key challenges faced with the project and develop an appropriate process.

Recommendation 20: Project Manager to continue to give overview, and improve clarity of budgets/income/expenditure in Steering Group meetings.

100% of respondents are satisfied that the membership of the Steering Group is representative of all partners. 50% feel satisfied with the way the members of the Steering group work together (50% said they are 'indifferent' or 'don't know'). 50% said they are satisfied with their level of influence in the Steering group (50% said they are 'indifferent' or 'don't know'). 100% of respondents said they are either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the clarity of their role in the Steering Group.

Steering Group performance

The Steering Group was asked how well they worked with the partnership to ensure a strategic and co-ordinated approach to heathland conservation within/adjacent to the project area. 75% of respondents said 'very well' or 'well' (25% said 'neither'). There was a mixed result when asked how well the Steering Group represents the interests of all members of the partnership: 50% said 'well' and 50% said 'not well'. One person explained their answer with a comment:

"I think the new project manager and the filling of vacancies on the steering group will help achieve the commitments better over the coming year"

When asked how well the Steering group acts as advocates for heathlands within and around project area, all respondents said 'well', however, one person left the following comment:

"Suggest it's important to remember that heaths are just one element in a wider integrated landscape and encourage the advocacy role to highlight the value of the heathy habitats in this wider context rather than just as a specific habitat."

The Steering Group were asked whether they believe they are achieving what they set out to do, overall. 75% said 'yes' and 25% said 'partly'. The person who said 'partly' stated that *"I have only just joined the steering group so this is partly based on my knowledge as part of the wider partnership"*. Another respondent said that they *"have only attended one SG meeting so far but was impressed by how well the various elements were addresses (though would appreciate slightly larger type face - or a magnifying glass!)"*

When asked for any further comments about the HeRe Steering Group, one person said:

"Thank you for inviting me to be part of the steering group which I think is heading in the right direction."

Benefits of the Steering Group

The Steering Group was asked to think about the wider benefits that have come from the collaborative approach to delivering HeRe. The responses are summarised in Table 8.

Benefits
Co-ordination on issues such as fire, grazing and sustainable management of heaths
Encouraging co-operation on issues such as professional dog walkers on heathland sites, and brought in expertise from elsewhere
Take the lead campaign, particularly the use of take the lead videos etc. during the lambing season this year
Maintaining the heathland partnership and keeping it strong for beyond the life of the project
Collaboration of a wide group of organisations to achieve the same objectives and outcomes.

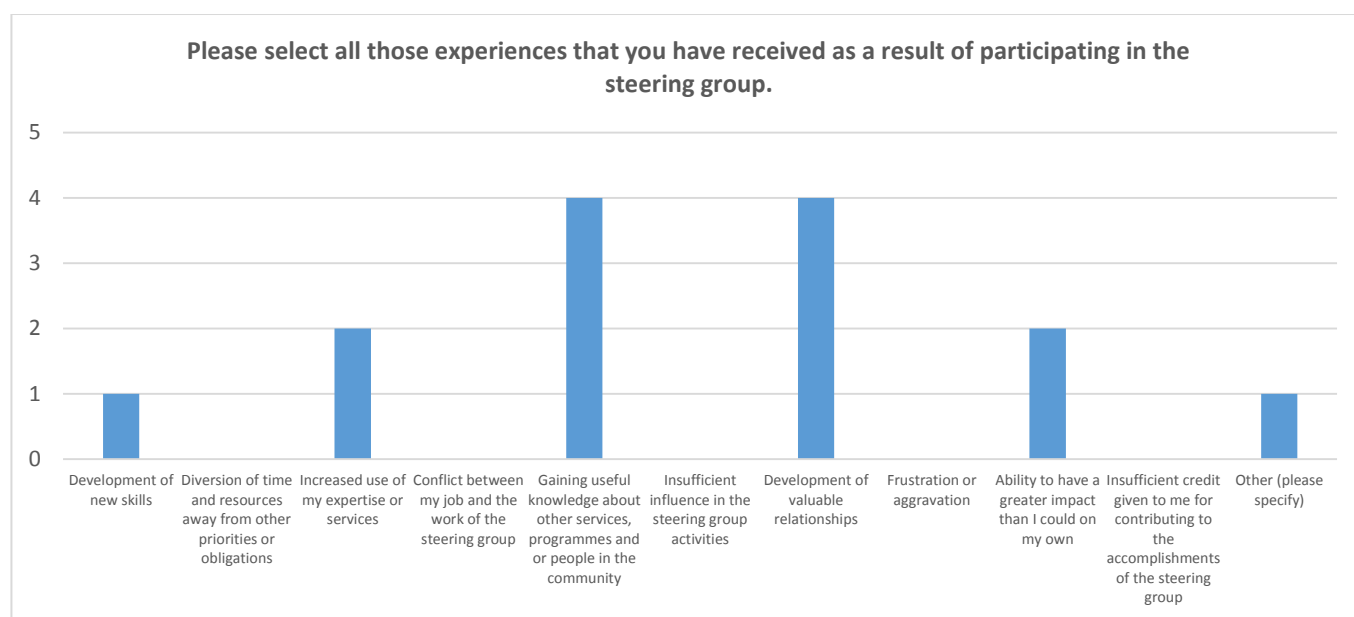
Table 8 – Benefits of the Steering Group

The Steering Group were asked five questions relating to their satisfaction around administration. All of the responses were positive: they are either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the following questions:

- How satisfied are you that steering group meetings are being well chaired?
- How satisfied are you that steering group meetings are focused, productive and effective?

- How satisfied are you with the administration of the steering group meetings, e.g. receiving papers in a timely manner?
- How satisfied are you with the length of steering group meetings?
- How satisfied are you with the frequency of steering group meetings?

The Steering Group were asked about the experiences they have received as a result of participating in the group. The results from this are shown in Graph 5. All respondents state that they benefit from gaining useful knowledge about other services, programmes and/or people in the community and also the development of valuable relationships. The person who ticked 'other' said: *"Other: Opportunity to better integrate heathy and woody habitats"*.



Graph 5 – Experiences received from participating in the Steering Group

100% of all respondents said that, overall, the achievement of the Steering Group are worth the expenditure of their time, effort and other resources.

Successes of the Steering Group

The Steering Group were asked to think of three things that the group has done well. The responses can be seen in Table 9. There were positive comments about budget management and team working.

Successes
Brought people together
Got the project capital works back on track
Impressed by the community engagement
Created a clear identity
Engaged successfully with partners
Impressed by the first steering group meeting
Got on top of the budget issues. Excellent budget updates communicated
Impressed by the current team

Table 9 – successes of the Steering Group

Challenges and solutions

The Steering Group were asked to think of three challenges that the group has faced. They were then asked how the challenges have been addressed. The responses have been grouped by theme and can be seen in Table 9. The challenges that came up most frequently are around staff changes in the project and representation from partner organisations.

Challenge	Addressing challenge
Partner organisations need to feel more ownership of the project	Not sure this has been yet
Change in project manager	New project manager taken a lot of time and trouble to get to know the project and the partners
Behind programme for significant capital works	Improved communication and planning for works
Not many organisations represented	New members appointed (FC/NT)
Identifying specific partner contributions	Improved partner collaboration

Table 9 - challenges and solutions of the Steering Group

Lessons learnt

The Steering Group were asked what top three changes they need to make to the structure of the group, and/or the way that they work together, to better achieve their common goal of supporting the successful delivery of the HeRe project. Only 2 people responded to this question, with the following comments:

- *“Maybe spend half a day on a heathland site together?”*
- *“Ensure all stakeholders have a voice on the steering group”*
- *“Attend some of the events”*
- *“Support from wider group”*
- *“Spend some time with the HeRe team”*
- *“Give the key partners a section to brief the group on their work and contributions”*

Some of these suggested changes could easily be implemented by the project team, for a quick, positive result, so have been turned into recommendations.

Recommendation 21: Spend half a day on a heathland site together as a group with the HeRe team

Recommendation 22: Look into membership of the Steering Group to ensure that all partners are represented and that all stakeholders have a voice

Recommendation 23: Encourage all Steering Group members to attend some of the events

Recommendation 24: Create some time in Steering group meeting for key partners to brief the group on their work and contributions

4.4 Overall summary of survey results/responses

4.4.1 Successes

Partnership

Overall, Partnership members seem to have a good grasp on the purpose and responsibilities within the HeRe project. They also all believe that the overall achievements of the partnership are worth their time and effort. In terms of the performance of the partnership, members seem to be working well together to achieve the partnership goals. The responses highlight that partnership members are generally happy that they have the materials, skills and connections they need to achieve the partnership goals.

There were positive responses about communication within the partnership, including informative meetings. There were mixed responses, however, about how well the portal is being utilised. They acknowledge that the portal is a good resource, but it's not used by some members. It would be worth, therefore, to revisit how the portal is being used, by whom, for what purpose and how engagement could be improved.

There were positive responses around the work being carried out on community engagement and events and practical capital projects. However, there was one comment that some members are not delivering as much community engagement elements as required in their agreement. There were also quite a few positive responses about the new project manager, who is getting on top of project delivery and moving things in a positive direction.

Volunteering

Generally, the volunteers seem like a really positive and enthusiastic group and have an increasing general awareness of the project. They report that they have benefitted from giving their time to the project, for example: they have learnt new skills, made new friends and have learnt more about the history and heritage of the project area. They seem to feel a sense of well-being and positivity when volunteering for the project. They like being outdoors and making a real difference to the conservation of the heath, particularly learning new skills.

When asked if the volunteers could suggest any changes to improve the volunteering experience, some of them said they had no changes to make, which is positive – most are happy with the way things are.

Overall, the volunteers are happy with the support they receive from the project. They know who to contact if they have a query, feel up to date with project activities and receive relevant training.

Steering Group

Only four members of the group responded to the survey, and two of those people had only joined the Steering Group recently. Therefore, the response rate is too low to give a useful representative result. However, from the four Steering Group members who did respond, they have a good understanding of their overall purpose. All of the Steering Group members who responded to the survey are satisfied that the membership of the group is representative of all partners as well as

being satisfied with the clarity of their role in the Steering Group. The majority of the Steering Group believe that they work well with the partnership to ensure a strategic and co-ordinated approach to heathland conservation within/adjacent to the project area. They feel they act as advocates for the heathlands.

Generally, the Steering Group believe they are achieving what they set out to do, and work collaboratively to achieve the same objectives and outcomes. There were some positive responses around the Steering Group meetings – particularly about how the meetings are chaired, how effect they are, the administration of them and the frequency.

The Steering Group feel they benefit from being a member, such as gaining useful knowledge about other services, programmes and/or people in the community and also the development of valuable relationships. All of the members who responded said that the achievements of the Steering Group are worth their time, effort and other resources.

4.4.2 Challenges

Partnership

A common theme that emerged throughout the survey responses were about the change in staff early on in the project. Partnership members believe that the process of changing staff affected the delivery of the project and some of the momentum was lost. There was a sense throughout the responses that some feel that the partnership is not as cohesive as it could be, which some have linked to the change in project manager (the process in which it was carried out, not a reflection on the individual). However, comments indicate that this does seem to be improving now. It was noted that the new project manager has taken time to get to know the project and the partners and have visited them all individually, which was appreciated. It might be worth revisiting the risk table for if a key member of staff leaves and needs to be replaced, and come up with a suitable process for mitigating the impacts.

Some feel that the lack of partnership cohesion is still something that needs to be addressed in order for it to feel like one project owned by the partnership rather than lots of little ones. Although the results show that the partnership is generally working well together to achieve their goals, some members feel that not all partners are as engaged as others. Again, this seemed to be another common theme that carried through the survey. The responses demonstrate that the partnership is in agreement with the project aims, but struggle with the dynamics of working as a partnership. Some members believe that there's a lack of partnership feel and buy-in at the moment and that some members are not fulfilling their commitments to the partnership. It would be beneficial to carry out an exercise to remind each individual organisation's responsibilities and commitments. It would also be useful if each partner updates the group on each of their commitments at partnership meetings. Any issues can then be flagged at steering group.

It was highlighted that the project capital work is still quite behind schedule (e.g. new habitats corridors). This does seem to be improving now, with much of the project back on schedule in some areas, with a good mix of projects being achieved. There were mixed responses about how the partnership communicates with stakeholders (local residents, landowners and businesses). This could be an area for improvement for the partnership, and something that they may want to explore further, for example, revisiting the communication plan, the evaluation plan and the organisational

commitments to stakeholders.

Volunteering

Although generally there were positive responses about the support that the volunteers receive from the project, there were one or two respondents who had some specific issues to raise around communication and knowledge of project activities. Some have requested more communication about volunteering opportunities. One person said they had agreed to host a health walk, but it didn't get scheduled. Another person wanted to join a species recognition course, but this didn't happen either. These are simple things that the project can address. As there was a low response rate to the volunteer survey, there could be more effective methods of finding out about volunteer experiences that the Project manager may want to explore. The portal could be utilised more effectively by the volunteers to share their experiences and communicate with each other.

Steering Group

As previously stated, there was a low response rate to the Steering Group survey, so the numbers are too low to give a useful representative result. Of the four people who did respond to the survey, there were mixed views about how well the Steering Group represents the interests of all members of the partnership. Some felt that not many organisations are represented on the Steering Group. As highlighted in the results from the partnership survey, the Steering Group also feel that partner organisation need to feel more ownership of the project.

A few comments were made about the project being behind schedule on the programme of capital work, but they note that this is starting to improve now that the new project manager is in place. Increased engagement with delivery team would also be beneficial.

5. Conclusions

Overall, the results from the surveys were positive. The partnership, volunteer experience and the Steering Group appear to be organised and generally running quite smoothly. There were a few areas highlighted for improvement, but on the whole the responses were positive. Key challenges highlighted from the responses included the change in staff early on in the project and the lack of communication to partners about this, leading to lack of cohesion within the partnership and delays in the project schedule. However, members noted that since the new project manager started, things do seem to be improving and the project is getting back on schedule. The Steering Group survey highlighted the need to look into representation on the group, but they are happy with the way they are functioning as a group.

The volunteers appear to be an enthusiastic and positive group of people, who seem to be happy with the way the volunteer scheme is being run. There were a few challenges raised about improved communication on volunteering opportunities and project activities, but on the whole the results from the volunteer survey were very positive. The majority of volunteers said they had no changes to suggest for improvement.

Each group surveyed feel that they are benefitting from the project in some way, whether it be the new skills they are learning or the connections they are making. The portal received some positive comments, but it needs to be utilised more for communication.

Apart from highlighting that there were delays in the project schedule early on in the project, many people have noted that activities seem to be back on track – or at least on the way to being on track. The results from the surveys indicate that project oversight and governance is now proceeding according to plan. However, it's apparent that the general feeling is that the project is only 'partly' achieving its aims at present, which indicates a need for improvement.

6. Recommendations and learning

This section summarises the learnings and suggested recommendations from section 4, which can be taken on board for Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 to improve the performance of the partnership, volunteering experience and the Steering Group.

6.1 Learnings

As mentioned in section 4.4.2, one of the common themes from the surveys was the change in staffing (particularly the project manager) early on in the project, which led to delays in project delivery. It also led to drift in the partnership, with some members commenting that there is a lack of cohesion. It was noted that this was caused by the way the change was implemented, rather than a reflection on the individuals involved. One member commented that there was no discussion with the partnership about the change in project manager, and that some late communicate was sent out but not to all partners. This is a key lesson we can learn from this – it's important to keep partners in the loop about key decisions.

Another common theme that emerged from the surveys was that not all partners are as engaged as others, and that some believe there is a lack of partnership feel. Therefore, another lesson we can learn from this is that communication is very important in order for partners to feel connected, a lack of which can result in members stepping back from the partnership.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendations relating to the Partnership

1. The Project Manger to think about how to get the partners to clearly understand their organisation's roles and responsibilities.
2. Ensure all partners are aware of their commitments and have organisational plans/targets
3. Include more partner updates in meetings and encourage partners to take the lead on some agenda items.
4. Identify the community engagement elements of the project and communicate it with partners for them to deliver it.
5. Revisit how the portal is being used, by whom, for what purpose, and how can engagement be improved.
6. Project team to revisit the partnership communication plan and evaluation plan

7. As a group, revisit the organisational commitments to stakeholder engagement
8. Explore how improvements can be made to how the partnership communicates with stakeholders (local residents, landowners and businesses)
9. Bring partners together in a more cohesive way so that it feels like one project owned by the partnership, for example:
 - a. Find a better way to get partners to deliver different aspects of the project as a team
 - b. Hold regular planning meetings with partners
 - c. Continue to share training events, forums and partnership meetings.
10. Start work on new habitat corridors
11. The branding of the project should be the project logo, not the SDNPA logo.
12. Provide practical support to project events as well as event promotion including social media messages

6.2.2 Recommendations relating to the volunteers

13. Explore other, more effective methods to find out about volunteer experiences.
14. Look at ways to improve follow-up/communication from the project team on volunteering opportunities and project activities
15. Look into scheduling a species recognition training course and communicate them effectively to the volunteers.
16. Organise a social event for HeRe staff and volunteers
17. Utilise social media for volunteers to share their experiences and communicate with each other

6.2.3 Recommendations relating to the Steering Group

18. The Project Manager to explore an alternative method of measuring the health/success of the Steering Group.
19. Look into how the Steering group address key challenges faced with the project.
20. Project Manager to continue to give overview, and improve clarity of budgets/income/expenditure in Steering Group meetings.
21. Spend half a day on a heathland site together as a group with the HeRe team
22. Look into membership of the Steering Group to ensure that all partners are represented and that all stakeholders have a voice
23. Encourage all Steering Group members to attend some of the events
24. Create some time in Steering group meeting for key partners to brief the group on their work and contributions