

The Meres & Mosses of the Marches Landscape Partnership Scheme Final Report - Beyond the Scheme



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Introduction

There is a long history of partnership working in the Meres and Mosses area, which stretches south from the Mersey Estuary to the Shropshire market town of Oswestry and east from the Welsh borderlands to Stafford and the Peak District. Formerly known as the Meres and Mosses Natural Area, this region now comprises the National Character Areas of the Shropshire Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain (NCA 61)¹ and the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge (NCA 62)². From 2009 to 2011, a prioritised subset of the area received funding from the Wetland Vision³ initiative, which delivered outcomes for wildlife and communities and generated the momentum to develop an HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) bid with the following timescales:

November 2009 – Stage 1 LPS application submitted
 June 2010 – Stage 2 LPS awarded and begun
 October 2011 – LPS Stage 2 application submitted
 November 2011 – NIA business plan submitted
 March 2012 – LPS offer made
 March 2012 – NIA offer made
 April 2012 – LPS permission to start granted

The 'NIA' referenced in the timescales above is the Nature Improvement Area project⁴. This was a Defra-funded initiative launched in 2011 for partnerships to apply to enact the landscape-scale delivery recommendations of the 2010 Making Space for Nature Review⁵ and subsequent Natural Environment White Paper⁶. It was deemed by the Meres & Mosses Partnership that these schemes would fit together well; the original LPS bid timetable was therefore adjusted slightly to fit in with the NIA timetable. This resulted in an adjustment to the match funding profile for the LPS project and, more significantly, in a considerable progression of the level of ambition of the overall programme. The LPS final evaluation contractors, MRE, have assessed this effect further as part of their support.

The Meres & Mosses Partnership again worked to develop a prioritised subset of the landscape within which to deliver the LPS and NIA programme. The boundaries of this project area were defined by identifying a combination of priority sites, communities and other stakeholders (e.g. community groups).

The LPS programme was split into a series of themes and projects as appear in this report. This report has been designed to complement rather than duplicate the final evaluation report⁷ being undertaken by contractors MRE. The report takes the form of a brief introduction to each project, followed by a focus piece or case study on the innovative approach developed to deliver that project including when the project went above and beyond the original specification laid out in the business plan.

¹ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6076647514046464>

² <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5655719219036160>

³ <http://www.wetlandvision.org.uk>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-improvement-areas-improved-ecological-networks>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-today>

⁶ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmenvfru/492/492.pdf>

⁷ www.themeressandmosses.co.uk

Theme	Project	Case study/focus piece(s)
Conservation	CONS1 – Wetland Restoration	White Mere Whole 'Unit' Restoration
		Collaboration with the Freshwater Habitats Trust at Brown Moss
	CONS2 – Farm Advice	Working with the Cholmondeley Estate – a Significant Partnership
	CONS3 – Farm Grants	Case Studies with Wider Benefits
	CONS4 – Control Tower Restoration	No case study
Community	COMM1 – Wildlife Surveying	Additional Wildlife Survey Programmes
		The Argent & Sable Survey Project
	COMM2 – Peat Coring & Archaeology	The Prees Heath Archaeological Dig
		Wem Moss Bog Pines
	COMM3 – Parish Planning & Down To Earth	Parish Planning Conference
	COMM4 – Community Grants	Showing Sustainable Benefits
Skills & Training	ST1 – Skills in Land Management	Public Rights of Way Training
	ST2 – Skills to Explore & Discover	Wild Swimming and Photography Competition
	ST3 – Skills for Fun	Traditional Brick & Tile Making
Access & Learning	AL1 – Promotion & Interpretation	Topographic Map
	AL2 – Events & Festivals	Merefest Case Study
	AL3 – Walks & Trails	No case study
	AL4 – Cycling	No case study
	AL5 – John Muir	Sustainability of the Programme Case Study
	AL6 – Field Trips & Camps	No case study
	AL7 – Wood Lane Learning Centre	Post-build Use Case Study
	AL8 – Bickley Hall Farm Learning Centre	No case study

CONS theme overview

The Conservation (CONS) theme covered the programme's natural and built heritage conservation projects. The nature of the Meres & Mosses landscape made it important to focus natural heritage conservation on the wetland environment. This was done by looking at the protection of key wetland sites (CONS1) and by protecting and enhancing water quality in the farmed environment (CONS2 and CONS3). Protection of built heritage concentrated on the restoration of the former World War Two air traffic control tower at Prees Heath Common (CONS4).

CONS1 - Wetland Restoration

This project focussed on three sites: Cole Mere, Brown Moss and White Mere. All are designated SSSIs with varying degrees of additional international designation. These key sites within the Meres & Mosses are typical of the wider landscape but with their own issues to be resolved.

Significant resource was invested in what might be called 'typical' conservation activity at the sites: scrub clearance, tree management and invasive species removal. The influence of the NIA meant that this was undertaken with more resource, with a view to the wider landscape, and with a greater consideration of long term sustainability.

Beyond this, the LPS looked to tackle some specific issues:

- Cole Mere is the only English site supporting Least Water Lily (*Nuphar pumila*), so a significant project has been initiated to secure its long-term survival (see case study under COMM4). Work has also been undertaken to tackle issues arising from public access at this heavily-used, council-owned site, including dog walking and access across sensitive wet meadows.
- Brown Moss was historically grazed as a common, but post-War cessation of grazing has allowed development of extensive secondary woodland, to the detriment of the rare wetland plants for which the site is designated. Redressing this required engaging the local community (who held strong views about the site) to develop a mutually acceptable management plan; securing the re-introduction of grazing as a long-term management tool, which included installing the required infrastructure and fencing the whole site; and securing a grazier prepared to retain stock on this sensitive yet well-used site.
- At White Mere, restoration of recently lost populations of wetland plants required a holistic approach to both the site and its catchment – see case study.



Brown Moss - new fencing. Photography by Lizzie Walker.



Cole Mere. Photography by Kirsty Brown.



White Mere. Photography by Matt Jones.

CONS2 & CONS3 – Farm Advice & Farm Grants

Based in a predominantly rural landscape, a key audience for the LPS to influence was farmers and landowners. This project sought to provide site-specific farm advice in support of positive action for the environment, focussing on improving water quality through reducing diffuse pollution, and habitat enhancement.

Over the course of the project, advice was given on a wide range of interventions, including nutrient planning and soil management, managing run-off and drainage, improvement of farm infrastructure, habitat management (with a particular focus on wetlands, but including a wide range of other farm habitats), and farm business management (including establishment of new livestock enterprises).

In support of the farm advice and farm grant elements of the project, a Farming and Conservation Working Group was established, bringing together 'on the ground' staff from organisations including Natural England, Environment Agency, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Council. This worked effectively in co-ordinating activity, sharing intelligence and discussing solutions to practical issues.

Alongside farm advice, the scheme offered Farm Grants to provide an incentive to deliver solutions on the ground. This was primarily aimed at smaller-scale projects that would not be eligible for agri-environment funding.

A total of 26 projects were funded, with the majority of projects involving improvements to farm infrastructure (ranging from fencing through to construction of a biobed), alongside a smaller number of biodiversity-focussed projects.

The following word cloud gives a feel for the grants provided, while the associated case studies feature some typical projects.

Water supply
Yard concreting
Fencing Guttering
Rainwater harvesting Pond
Roofing Percolation tests
Pasture pump
Access track Silt trap
Biobed

CONS4 – Control Tower Restoration

Prees Heath Common is a SSSI site owned by LPS partner, Butterfly Conservation. It was bought due to its importance as the last site in the Midlands for the Silver-studded Blue butterfly. What was not as well recognised is its rich vein of military history; the common was a trench warfare training base during World War One and an internment camp and bomber airfield in World War Two. The World War Two control tower still stands and has been restored as part of the LPS programme to resemble its former place in the landscape, as well as providing a space for wildlife including bats, nesting birds and hibernating butterflies and moths.



Prees Heath Control Tower - restoration completed.
Photography by Stephen Lewis.

CONS1 Wetland Restoration: Case Study – White Mere whole ‘unit’ restoration

White Mere, lying a short distance south-east of Ellesmere, holds UK and international designations for its importance in the landscape. The whole site is privately owned – the mere and its eastern shore by the Grosvenor Estate, with three other landowners responsible for the remaining shoreline. The site is designated primarily for its aquatic and marginal plant assemblage. However, recent decades have seen a decline in species due to continued and extensive tree growth around the mere edge. This resulted in heavy shading and a decline in water quality. But the fact that these losses have been relatively recent does suggest that there is a good prospect of recovery.

While the LPS business plan focussed on the removal of trees, the influence of the NIA meant that (with the engagement of both landowners and sailing and angling clubs) a more holistic approach has been taken to the management of the site and its catchment – see below.



White Mere map. Map produced by Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

1. Supported by the project, a mature poplar plantation was felled along the mere's eastern shore (primarily due to road safety concerns). Following felling, it transpired that road run-off was flowing directly into the waterbody. A new wetland was therefore created, designed to trap sediments and filter water prior to its discharge to the mere.
2. The open garden frontage to one of the mereside properties supports the last notable remnant of marginal vegetation including bog bean, marsh marigold, purple loosestrife and water mint. Targeted tree felling was undertaken in the garden to further reduce shading.
3. Along the western shore, significant strips of woodland were felled to reduce shading of the shallow margins to encourage re-establishment of marginal and aquatic vegetation.
4. Through an agri-environment agreement with Natural England, the last arable field in the catchment was converted to low-input grassland to reduce run-off risk to the mere.
5. A significant impact on water quality was direct access of cattle to the mere. A Meres & Mosses Farm Grant was utilised to provide an alternative mains water supply to the adjacent field, allowing the mere to be fenced, preventing stock access.
6. Natural England constructed a new water control structure at the artificial outflow from the site, allowing more effective water level control.
7. Plans have been drawn up with the sailing club to remove artificial bank support (including concrete and tyres), restoring a more natural sloping profile.
8. A programme of monitoring (including water levels, water quality and botanical) is ongoing to understand the impact of completed works.

CONS1 Wetland Restoration: Case Study - Collaboration with the Freshwater Habitats Trust at Brown Moss

Brown Moss is a Shropshire Council-owned wetland comprising pools, marshy areas, schwingmoor bog, woodland and heathland. The botanical diversity at Brown Moss is impressive, with over 200 plant species recorded there. The site has earned the designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Plenty of other wildlife can be seen there, including great crested newts, grass snakes and the rare Mud Snail (*Omphiscola glabra*). In recent years, a number of priority plant species have declined, and some have disappeared completely. To help mitigate this loss, traditional grazing methods are now underway. The clearing of scrub and the removal of a number of trees have helped keep the habitat open, along with pond re-profiling.



Brown Moss case study FHT eDNA volunteer training. Photography by Kirsty Brown.

The Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT) surveyed the site in 1997 as Pond Conservation and again in 2015, and designated it as one of their Flagship Ponds. Further details of this and the important species present are described here:

<http://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/flagship-focus-brown-moss/>

The Flagship Pond project is 'an HLF-funded project that helps local communities and organisations protect 70 of the most important freshwater pond sites in England and Wales'. The Meres & Mosses LPS project required further wetland restoration work and volunteer training in wildlife surveillance. In order to meet these goals, in 2016 a collaboration between FHT and the Meres & Mosses LPS team resulted in two successful training days. They joined up FHT's expertise and key contacts with the Meres & Mosses LPS volunteer network, and attracting a number of volunteer participants to each:

- The first was led by FHT and used new eDNA technology to test all ponds on-site for the presence of great crested newts, in addition to testing the water chemistry (photo above).
- The second was led by a local ecologist and Field Studies Tutor, training volunteers in the recognition of the variety of habitats and their associated wetland plants (photo above).

This project also linked in with Merefest 2016 and the Meres & Mosses LPS talks programme. FHT brought the Brown Moss story and results to share with the public at Merefest in September 2016 (along with hands-on water testing sessions), and as a talk at Whitchurch Library in March 2017, which attracted an audience of around 20.

CONS2 Farm Advice Case Study: Working with the Cholmondeley Estate – a significant partnership

Located in south Cheshire, the Cholmondeley Estate is a traditional, family-owned estate, extending to some 3,000 hectares. The majority of the agricultural land is let to about 20 tenants, most of whom run intensive dairy units. The park and associated farmland is managed in-hand, alongside woodlands and other non-agricultural land, including three SSSI-designated meres and other biologically important sites. Estate income is diversified through the opening of the Castle gardens and the running of a considerable number of large events on the Estate.

Over the five years of the scheme, there has been significant interaction between the Estate and the Meres & Mosses LPS/NIA project, which has included:

- The design and practical delivery of habitat restoration / creation projects
- Undertaking botanical and hydrological surveys to inform future conservation management
- The planning of landscape-scale wetlands restoration associated with Chapel Mere SSSI
- Provision of technical input from early stages to the development of the 'Bewilderwood' attraction
- Working with the Estate to host the first Merefest and associated Meres & Mosses Forum
- Partnership working with the Estate to facilitate links to its tenants, a number of whom also engaged with the project



Farm Advice Case Study - artificial water management on the Cholmondeley Estate using plastic piling. Photography by Matt Jones.

This was the most significant landowner relationship developed during the project. The initial approach to the Estate was no different to any other landowner. However, the Estate understood what the Meres & Mosses project was trying to achieve (both the LPS and NIA), resulting in its significant engagement. This was helped by the fact that the Meres & Mosses project was a clear, co-ordinated initiative that had a broad appeal of relevance to the Estate and quickly demonstrated the capacity to deliver.

While it is necessary for projects such as the Meres & Mosses to work with a range of landowners, this experience suggests that there are benefits for the conservation sector working with large estates. In the case of Cholmondeley Estate, the positive experience was partly due to the time invested in developing an effective relationship but also reflected the following:

- Family ownership means that the Estate takes a long-term perspective – while financial drivers are important, notions of guardianship / custodianship are also strong
- The scale of operation and greater financial security mean that the Estate is better able to 'spare' land for non-agricultural purposes, including nature conservation
- Having already significantly diversified its operations, the Estate is perhaps more open to more imaginative opportunities (including reacting to the latest conservation thinking)
- The nature of the Estate's wider connections means that they are prepared to act as an advocate for the project and the messages it is promoting

Overall, the partnership between the Meres & Mosses project and the Cholmondeley Estate delivered much and shows what the conservation sector can achieve through the positive engagement of large estates.

CONS3 Farm Grants: Case Studies with benefits to the wider landscape

Case Study 1 - The Site: Coton Farm (near Prees)

The Issue: The main focus of this project was a short section of sloping access track linking fields to the yard of this dairy farm. Unsurfaced, this track was subject to significant erosion, conveying excessive run-off into the yard and creating a potential welfare issue for the farm's cattle. In addition, parts of the existing concrete yard were breaking up, allowing dirty water to percolate away and potentially affect local watercourses.

The Solution: A new concrete track was laid on an appropriate crushed stone base, and patch repairs made to the concrete in the yard.

The Cost: Total project cost = £3,707.00 (excl. VAT); Grant paid = £2,272.55

Case Study 2 - The Site: Colemere Woods Farm (near Cockshutt)

The Issue: The guttering was in disrepair and downpipes missing around a series of cattle sheds. This meant that otherwise clean rainwater was ending up in contaminated yards and, in the worst case, actually flowing through a building housing cattle. Whilst the dirty water did end up in the farm slurry pit, ultimately it was increasing the volume of material required to be spread to land (with the consequent potential diffuse pollution impacts).

The Solution: The guttering and downpipes were replaced. However, rather than simply being piped away, the rainwater was 'harvested', being directly fed into a series of new water troughs, set alongside the buildings so that they provided accessible drinking water to the housed cattle. The added advantage was reducing the farmer's mains water bill. Overflows from the troughs were fed into the existing clean water drainage system.

The Cost: Total project cost = £9,210.00 (excl. VAT); Grant paid = £3,000.00

Case Study 3 - The Site: Yarnest Lane (near Ellesmere)

The Issue: Part of Yarnest Lane, a farm track used by several landowners, was subject to regular and prolonged flooding. While in part due to water running off an adjacent road (about which discussions continue with the Highways Authority), the lane itself extends over 400 metres. Sloping over almost its entire length, it is itself a notable source of run-off water during significant rainfall. Adjacent to the lane is a historic field-corner pond which, through decades of neglect, was almost completely filled in and overgrown with scrub.

The Solution: A shallow ramp was installed diagonally across the track (close to the bottom of the slope), designed to divert run-off water towards the former pond. The pond itself was re-excavated, with a new inflow channel to capture the run-off, and an overflow to discharge surplus water to the adjacent watercourse. This is a truly multi-beneficial project: reducing a flooding issue; restoring a pond for biodiversity; and creating a silt trap, thus improving the quality of water entering the adjacent stream.

The Cost: Total project cost = 1,666.36 (excl. VAT); Grant paid = £1,106.63



Coton Farm - track before works. Photography by Matt Jones.



Coton Farm - track after works. Photography by Matt Jones.

Summary pollen diagram for the Clarepool Moss core. Courtesy of MMU.

COMM3 – Parish Planning and Down to Earth

The Parish Planning element of this project worked with Shropshire Council's Community Enablement Team to ensure that each of the parishes within the project area were visited at least twice throughout the life of the project, regular updates were sent by email and specific issues always followed up. A number of 'Parish Projects' ensued, resulting in community consultations, awareness raising of local and landscape-scale issues (e.g. septic tank issues and access issues), establishment of new volunteer groups, habitat improvements, improved communications with existing groups (e.g. angling clubs, established events), delivery of engagement events (e.g. guided family bike rides), delivery of green space and green infrastructure improvement plans, and support for Parish Plans creation (including inclusion of mentions of the importance of the Meres & Mosses landscape for the first time). This activity culminated in a parish conference and the production of planning advice sheets (see case study).

The Down to Earth element of this project focussed on four geographic locations:

Whixall parish – the Parish Council engaged well from the start of involvement in this area. As a result, several open community meetings run by the LPS team have been supported by Parish Council. The project also succeeded in delivering a local walks leaflet, the establishment of a local history group and the development of a wildlife area in the primary school.

Welshampton & Lyneal parish – this project was more 'light touch' and enabled the Parish Council to produce a series of local walks leaflets (identified through the Parish plan). The LPS team delivered an innovative set of casual pub talks on local wildlife targeted at a more general audience. A resulting interest in water quality led to some small scale water testing by locals and our 'how to manage your septic tank' leaflets were distributed.

Queensway Fields, Whitchurch – this park is owned and managed by the local community. The LPS team carried out community consultation through a series of 'play days', resulting in a visionary development plan being created and agreed on by the whole community. While funding to deliver this plan is not yet in place, this represents an exciting opportunity to restore a key habitat in an accessible urban setting linking local people to the wider landscape.

Bickley Parish and wider area – as a sparsely populated rural area with no clearly defined community, this project looked to bring smaller communities together to find areas of shared interest. The project was successful in installing nest boxes with cameras for primary school class use, a bird feeding station and house martin nesting boxes to assist the small colony already using the buildings. A local children's disability support group explored the Meres & Mosses, linking well with previous work that had identified the region as particularly well-suited for all ability access.

COMM4 – Community Grants

This project saw grants of up to £3,000 awarded to high quality projects. They met an identified local need that sprung from a parish plan, the aims and wishes of a group or building on work undertaken in other project areas. The programme's Community Officer worked with these groups to guide the development and delivery of these projects.

new
writing future
group
facts facilities children
community history landscape
allowing wildlife improved
raising making key access
awareness living
local exploration
young people area
audience



Whixall Down to Earth Community Consultation.
Photography by Luke Neal.

COMM1 Wildlife Surveying: Additional Wildlife Survey Programmes

Underspend from the Wildlife Survey Programme enabled delivery of additional water vole, invertebrates, aquatic plant and amphibian & reptile surveys in the Meres & Mosses area.

The additional water vole surveys began in April 2017 with a training day at Manor House and fieldwork around Fenn's and Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses. Attended by approximately 20 people and run by Malcolm Monie from Whitchurch Water Vole Group and Caroline Savage from Ellesmere Water Vole Group/EA. Water vole surveyors' kit was bought for all attendees and a good number of those who were trained attended four follow-on sessions where they surveyed the populations on the NNR in locations guided by the Natural England team where water vole data was lacking. This data will also feed into the new BogLIFE project at Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses.

In July 2017, the Freshwater Habitats Trust ran two days of aquatic plant surveys, one at a pond at Prees Heath Common, managed by Butterfly Conservation, and the other at Birch Road Pond, Ellesmere, managed by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, which were attended by six volunteers each day. As well as providing training for these volunteers, the data will go on to assist with habitat management of the ponds by the relevant organisations.

Invertebrate survey training was conducted by entomologist Pete Boardman over three days in early June. Six volunteers visited Clarepool Moss, a further six volunteers visited Crosemere, and a further ten visited Colemere. Amongst those attending were Shropshire Invertebrate Group members, a Field Studies Council trainee and a number of Wildlife Trust trainees.



Adder at Wem Moss. Photography by Emma Hankinson.

During June, Dr John Wilkinson from ARC Trust provided a day of training on amphibian and reptile surveying at Manor House with fieldwork at Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses, again with approximately 20 attendees. Volunteers attending this course will continue to monitor these species beyond the end of the LPS programme.



Invertebrate survey training. Photography by Kirsty Brown.



Female Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) at invertebrate training day. Photography by Kirsty Brown.



Water vole survey training. Photography by Luke Neal.

COMM1 Wildlife Surveying: Argent & Sable survey project

In 2015, an underspend in the COMM1 Wildlife Surveying project was recognised. Discussions were held with the LPS Steering Group about how to expand this part of the programme further to allow more volunteer engagement and ideally with a new species group. Butterfly Conservation proposed that the money could be used to better understand the extent of the Argent & Sable moth (*Rheumaptera hastata*). As well as being a lowland wetland specialist, this moth's name is steeped in legend and folklore and, as it is also a distinctive and day-flying species, it makes a very interesting species to engage volunteers with.

The project was delivered by specialist contractor Dave Green who engaged and trained around 30 volunteers in searching for both larvae and adults of the species. The main results of the project were two-fold; confirmation of the first records for the species on Wem Moss for eight years; and a better understanding of the management requirements for this species on the Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses NNR, where major habitat works are just about to begin. In addition, the project identified a UK BAP priority moth and two red data book moths with the same habitat requirements as Argent & Sable, showing the importance of this edge habitat on the mosses.



Argent & Sable caterpillar. Photography by Dave Green.



Argent & Sable moth. Photography by Dave Green.



Argent & Sable survey volunteers. Photography by Stephen Lewis.

COMM2 Peat Coring & Archaeology: Prees Heath Archaeological Dig

Meres & Mosses Collaboration with the Whitchurch Museum & Archives/Heritage Centre volunteers, Archaeological Comic Illustrator: John Swogger, and MediaActive

Prees Heath Common is a large tract of land south of Whitchurch, Shropshire. It has a colourful past, including King John's armies being mustered there to fight Prince Llewellyn. It was also the site of both WW1 soldier training and WW2 airfield activities. More recently, Butterfly Conservation took on ownership of an area, and has restored it into a haven for the threatened Silver Studded Blue butterfly. In 2016, another part of Prees Heath Common land was purchased by local resident John Baker, and donated to Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT).

The Meres & Mosses LPS/NIA project budget had enough funds to furnish the local Whitchurch Heritage Centre volunteers with the kit they required to undertake an archaeological artefacts dig at the new SWT site. During June 2017, dig positions were chosen based on low wildlife/botanical interest and approximately 20 volunteers undertook the dig.

Amongst the artefacts uncovered, there was lead shot, a .22 calibre bullet casing, a leather winkle-picker shoe, a bakelite electrical connector, a ceramic electrical component, a metal support square washer, a metal angle bracket, various pieces of glassware and tiles, a square-headed nail, and evidence of a fire-pit. All items are in the process of being cleaned up and identified/dated at the Whitchurch Heritage Centre, and will then be placed on display for public viewing.

The archaeological dig was followed closely by a session with Archaeological Comic Illustrator, John Swogger, where a group of volunteers gathered at The Raven Café, Prees Heath, to sketch out their interpretation of events in the area over time, in comic strip form. Attendees were well-engaged, provided great input and learned a great deal about the area, with a novel way to tell its story. The information gleaned was converted into an A3 comic strip and made available for printing and converting into banners and posters. It also went on public display at Merefest and in local libraries and will ultimately be installed at the Scrapyard Visitor Centre at Whixall Moss.



Plot 15 archaeological dig. Photography by Kirsty Brown.

COMM2 Peat Coring & Archaeology: Wem Moss Bog Pines

In early 2015, a restoration project took place on the Shropshire Wildlife Trust-owned Wem Moss National Nature Reserve through this programme. The work involved driving plastic piling into the peat to hold water on the site. As this work began, the machinery started to pull up huge tree stumps which, due to their depth, could only have been prehistoric in origin.

After conversations with existing partners at Manchester Metropolitan University (who had carried out the peat coring project), radiocarbon and tree ring dating analysis of the stumps were commissioned. The results confirmed the prehistoric status of the stumps, with an estimated dating of between 3015 and 2505 BC, making them more than 4,500 years old and in fact some of the oldest tree remains found in the Meres & Mosses.



Piling being installed at Wem Moss NNR.
Photography by Matt Jones.



Wem Moss bog pine being extracted. Photography by Tom Hayek.



Wem Moss bog pines samples being taken. Photography by Tom Hayek.

COMM3 Parish Planning & Down to Earth: Parish Planning Conference

Through consultation and personal communications, the LPS team discovered that, although the Nature Improvement Area designation was identified in national planning policy, awareness of the issues relating to planning was low at a local and regional level. In order to address this, a portfolio of planning advice sheets were created that linked key issues to the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) and local planning guidelines in a way that was accessible to people working at Parish Council level, who regularly comment on local planning

The resulting advice was to encourage local communities to engage proactively with the planning process, understand that development is necessary and that positive outcomes enhancing the local region can be found.

The advice sheets focussed on key issues for the project area; Water, Air, Biodiversity and Access. These were the areas identified by previous consultation as most pressing within the Meres & Mosses LPS area.

To launch the advice sheets and ensure full understanding of the issues, a Parish Conference was organised. All Parish Councils either wholly or in part within the Meres & Moses NIA were invited. Speakers were chosen to explain the importance of the NIA/LPS area and the landscape protection required and also how this fits into the planning decision-making process. Key speakers were developers who were able to explain the drivers behind development and the best way of engaging in the process directly. 43 people attended the event, representing 14 Parish Councils plus representatives of Cheshire East and Shropshire Councils and a number of local councillors and other interested parties.

Feedback from the event was extremely positive. Many reported that the advice sheets would inform their planning application comments, leaving a lasting legacy of the importance of the NIA in planning legislation.

“Thank you and the other speakers at the Tuesday conference My colleagues and I found it very informative as on the Wednesday morning we meet with Jeremy Owens from CEC Strategic Planning over the Wybunbury Ward NHP, with the information we had received we were able to ask constructive comments & respond to items he was telling us more knowledgeable than we could have done before.”

Jeremy Owens
Development Planning Manager,
Spatial Planning Team, Shropshire Council



Parish planning conference.

COMM4 Community Grants: Case studies showing sustainable benefits

Case Study 1: Bogwatch TV

MediaActive is a CIC based in Wem who predominantly work with young people on media projects. They were initially engaged through the LPS project to create a phone app.

Springing from their enthusiasm and high quality work, MediaActive were awarded two community grants, working in Partnership with Wem Town Hall and Kinoculture. The first was 'MediaMakers', where they helped local primary school children produce short animations on areas of landscape and folklore that interested them.

The second, Bogwatch, was much more bold. For some time, the LPS had been inviting Springwatch to the area with no success. As a result we felt that by working with MediaActive, we could produce our own version of Springwatch and broadcast from Merefest in 2016.

As part of Merefest 2016, and produced by MediaActive in collaboration with JTV Productions, Bogwatch was a six hour live-streamed show featuring interviews with celebrities, specialists and festival goers. If people couldn't get to Merefest, they could join the fun online via Bogwatch TV. Working with a professional production team, young people gained experience of running a live TV studio and presenting. Previously, it was not evident how highly enthusiastic some of the young people were to become wildlife presenters; as a result of this grant, Merefest 2017 included roving reporters to help develop local talent.

MediaActive used to work almost exclusively from their studios in Wem. However they now regard the whole Meres & Mosses region as their studio. Each year, they now take new prospective film makers, animators and media wannabes out into the landscape on a voyage of discovery.

All their work with us can be viewed here: <http://www.mediaactive.org/meres--mosses-medi makers.html>



Bogwatch studio and presenters at Merefest16. Courtesy of MediaActive.

Case Study 2: Friends of the Marlot

The Marl Allotment (Marlot) is a 2.45ha area of common land on the south side of Whixall Moss. Historically the site was dug for 'marl' - a lime rich clay that is used to 'sweeten' peaty fields for agriculture; a process that has led to an interesting mosaic of habitats within the site.

The site had benefited from habitat improvements and the creation of a management plan by Shropshire Council prior to the LPS project. But the existing small volunteer group managing the site had limited opportunity to develop their skills. Working with the expertise of the LPS team, the local Parish Council became the formal owners of The Marlot and used a community grant to provide brushcutter and chainsaw training to the volunteer group. They also installed perimeter stock fencing and a livestock drinker to allow future grazing of the site, regarded as essential to maintain the site for the future.

The Natural England NNR team was highly engaged through the project and will provide ongoing technical support to the group, including the use of their graziers to graze the site.

Case Study 3: Cole Mere - Least water lily

Colemere is believed to be the only place in England where the least water lily, *Nuphar pumila*, grows naturally. Shropshire Botanical Society, working with Natural England, wanted to definitively test this assumption through DNA analysis. They also wanted to carry out monitoring work to establish if the community was declining, stable or expanding following the associated management works carried out through the LPS. In addition, the viability of seeds was to be tested in order to establish if seed storage was an option to guard against the possible loss of this key species in England.

Firstly, the plants were located and seed heads gathered to ensure it was the correct species. Kew Gardens removed the seeds in order to determine their viability. They discovered that 95% of the seeds were viable but that growing seedlings required specific conditions, most crucially higher light levels. From hundreds of germinations, only ten live seedlings were grown. Next, dislodged rhizomes were gathered and sent to Kew to establish propagation success. They found that rhizomes without roots rotted but those with roots took readily and are still growing at Kew today. This method is likely to be the best way of preserving the population for the future as seed germination was so labour intensive. The genetic study found that the Colemere population is indeed likely to be an original relic from the Ice Age and has not hybridised with the more common yellow water lily.

This work has allowed Natural England and the site managers to better understand the ecology and therefore influence management decisions at the Mere. Through this grant, Shropshire Botanical Society has created an unexpected partnership with the Inner Space Dive Club, who were trained in underwater botanical survey techniques through the grant. This will now lead to a review of the feasible options for improving the conservation of the Cole Mere population of least water lily, such as 'in situ' site management measures (e.g. trial waterfowl exclusion), reintroduction to other parts of Cole Mere and any 'ex situ' options e.g. seed banking, off-site propagation, introduction to another water body in the area.



Inner Space Dive Club surveying least water lily population at Cole Mere.



Least Water Lily. Courtesy of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

ST theme overview

The Skills & Training (ST) theme covered the programme's activity to increase the amount of expertise within the volunteer, landowner and education communities and the wider public. These activities focussed on improving volunteer and land manager skills to manage the landscape (ST1); encouraging the public to get out and explore the area (ST2) and engaging people around some of the traditional skills and heritage of the area (ST3).

ST1 – Skills in Land Management

The key goal of this project was the up-skilling of those who live and work in the countryside. Activities were targeted at two key audiences – land managers and the general public.

Within the land manager group, the project provided key technical skills and facilitated better decision-making within the management of the farmed environment. The topics tackled were intended to help address key issues of concern within the Meres & Mosses, including the water quality impacts of agriculture and protection of wetland biodiversity. Events were held relating to pond creation and management (in conjunction with Freshwater Habitats Trust) and fertiliser calibration. A series of events were also run relating to best practice maize management (in conjunction with the Shropshire Middle Severn Catchment Partnership).

Engagement of the public centred on promoting traditional skills and providing training to allow individuals to make an effective contribution to the management of the landscape. The project facilitated hedge-laying training (an extremely popular traditional countryside skill – all days were over-subscribed) and also training for volunteers on brush-cutter use and skills relating to the management of the public rights of way network (see case study).



Volunteer hedgelaying training. Photography by Lizzie Walker.

ST2 – Skills to Explore and Discover

The main thrust of this project was to get people out and about in the Meres & Mosses; either for the first time or to encourage them to experience the landscape in new ways. With the knowledge that the public appreciate the qualities of a landscape for different reasons, we highlighted their place in preserving this landscape whether for conservation, recreation, work or other reasons. The focus was often on working in those areas where partnership organisations were not already active, in order to fill the gaps and access new audiences.

A range of activities were undertaken, including walk leader training for 'walking for health' groups, canal barge safaris for disabled people, introductory sessions in canoeing, sailing and fishing, cycle safaris for families, use of technology and smart phone apps and a variety of wildlife identification training.

ST3 – Skills for Fun

This theme celebrated some of the traditional activities associated with the heritage of the area. Almost all projects delivered saw some change from the intended focus of delivery. These included a tour of a handmade cheese producer and an art project involving communities in making Meres & Mosses wildlife-themed tiles for eventual installation as part of a bench in Whitchurch's Jubilee Park. Additionally, the creative writing project resulted in an anthology of poetry and prose entitled 'Reflections'.



'Reflections' poetry & prose anthology cover.

ST1 Skills in Land Management: Public Rights of Way Training

The Meres & Mosses project approached Shropshire Outdoors Partnership (run by Shropshire Council) to deliver a set of training events focussed specifically on the management of the public rights of way network. The purpose was to equip local people with both technical knowledge and practical skills, hence increasing engagement with local access.

The training covered three main areas:

- Rights of Way - Law and Practice: This was a 'classroom' session on the legal and practical aspects of rights of way from both the local authority and landowner perspectives, with significant questioning and discussion around the issues raised. 52 individuals attended.
- Installing Countryside Furniture: A practical session, attended by 22 individuals, which explored the technical and practical issues of installing a kissing gate on a public footpath (including logistics, safety, stock-proofing and way-marking).
- Brushcutter Training: Attended by a more select group of nine, this practical session looked at the operation, safe use and routine maintenance of brushcutters and strimmers.

Feedback on the training was positive, with the majority of attendees stating that they had gleaned knowledge that they would utilise in the future. As a direct result of the training, a new Parish Paths Partnership (P3) group has been established in the Cockshutt parish, comprising ten new volunteers. They have already installed two kissing gates and are negotiating further enhancements to the local access network with local landowners.



Workshop 2. Courtesy of Shropshire Council.



Workshop 1. Courtesy of Shropshire Council.



Workshop 3. Courtesy of Shropshire Council.

ST2 Skills to Explore and Discover: Wild Swimming and Photography Competition

Wild Swimming (comprising Dip and Introduction to Wild Swimming)

Dip:

The LPS was contacted by Shropshire Media Network, who were organising 'Dip Shropshire: 8 great summer days of wild swimming and creative workshops'. The LPS team proposed a site in the Meres & Mosses, White Mere, to be included in their programme in order to raise awareness. The workshops consisted of a wild swim followed by an artistic workshop; in the case of the LPS event, this was poetry and photography. At White Mere, the group immersed themselves in the mere, a unique experience of viewing the landscape from water level. The workshops were run by poet Deborah Alma and Andrew Fusek Peters, author and wildlife photographer.

Introduction to Wild Swimming:

In September 2017, around 20 people (all new to wild swimming), signed up to have a dip in the lake at Alderford, near Whitchurch (www.alderford.com). Local wild swimming enthusiast, Jules McRobbie, led the event, guiding people through the benefits, health and safety, and why she just can't stop wild swimming... even in winter!

The group was then split into two, with one group easing into the lake and getting to know how enjoyable it is, whilst the others joined in with pond dipping, enabling them to view a variety of freshwater creatures including snails, water skaters and water beetles. The weather was beautiful, and the team at Alderford café provided delicious cakes and hot drinks to warm everyone up after their swim.

Photography Competition:

For two years running, the LPS held a photography competition. Working with acclaimed wildlife photographer Mark Sisson, the training element began with photography workshops for amateurs, to introduce new people to the butterflies of Prees Heath and to build skills. On the back of this, an open photography competition (with first Prize being a free one-day workshop with Mark) was arranged. In the first year, the theme was 'My Meres & Mosses' and in the second year 'Faces of the Meres & Mosses'. Both years saw an incredibly high standard of entries.



2015 photography competition winner. Photography by Roger Evans.



2016 photography competition winner. Photography by Tim Preston.

ST3 Skills for Fun: Traditional Brick & Tile Making

One of the projects in the 'Skills for Fun' theme was to teach people traditional brick and tile-making. On approaching a variety of specialist artists, it became clear that this was going to be a difficult project to make sufficiently interesting to capture the imagination of the public. After a change of tack to take this into consideration, the programme team has worked with local artists Ruth Gibson and Huw Roberts to produce an impressive work of art!

A brick bench in the form of the Meres & Mosses 'M' logo has been made for installation in Jubilee Park in Whitchurch. The bench is adorned with an array of beautiful tiles depicting animals and plants of the Meres & Mosses. These tiles were created by members of the public at the Merefest and Blackberry Fair events and by pupils from Sir John Talbot School in Whitchurch.



Final tile bench assembled in workshop.



Final tile bench assembled in workshop.

AL theme overview

The Access & Learning (AL) theme covered aspects of the programme's public engagement activities outside those covered by the COMM theme, including the programme-wide interpretation of activity and delivery (AL1). The programme's various events are covered under the Events & Festivals project (AL2) and physical access to the countryside was covered by the Walks & Trails (AL3) and Cycling (AL4) projects. The primary and secondary formal education aspects of the programme were delivered through the John Muir Award project (AL5) and the Field Trips and Camps project (AL6) respectively and the development of education facilities by the Wood Lane Learning Centre construction (AL7) and the Bickley Hall Learning Centre development (AL8).

AL1 - Promotion & Interpretation

This project supported the programme team to distribute appropriate and wide-reaching communications throughout the delivery of the programme, including employment of a dedicated Communications Officer and development of the programme website¹. A number of interpretation materials were created, including information leaflets and on-site interpretation boards. More innovative interpretation materials were also delivered via digital technology and the creation of interactive models for use with school groups and similar (see topographic map case study).

AL2 - Events & Festivals

The success of the range of events and festivals attended and delivered through the programme highlights the need to reach new audiences with a wide range of messages about the importance of this landscape and people's place in it. The key to this has partly been to not repeat what is already delivered by the partner organisations, but at the same time adding value to them. The major events delivered through the programme have been Merefest (LPS-led – see case study), the Meres & Mosses Forum (LPS-led) and Blackberry Fair in Whitchurch (supported and part-funded by the LPS).

The Meres & Mosses Forum has been running in various forms for more than 25 years. Through the LPS, this semi-formal one-day get-together for scientists interested in the Meres & Mosses landscape was developed into a two-day conference, attracting researchers and practitioners from around the UK. Also already well-established, Blackberry Fair is a key community festival in the region and provided the opportunity to engage with a wider audience and provide a 'shop window' for partnership activity.

¹ www.themeressandmosses.co.uk

AL3 - Walks & Trails

The focus of this project was to improve people's access to the Meres & Mosses landscape both through developing and promoting the existing network of public rights of way and through creating new trails and access points. Access was significantly enhanced at Wem Moss and Brown Moss and new routes were created around Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Bickley Hall Farm (linking with the Sandstone Trail), Prees Heath and Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses National Nature Reserve (including the new Mosses History Trail). New disabled access was created at the Morris' Bridge car park and an all-ability boardwalk enabled access onto the mosses at Bettisfield Moss. The final part of this project delivered an increase in the number and quality of tourism brown signs.

AL4 - Cycling

This project delivered a number of cycling events, from 'cycle safaris' for families to lunch & talks for experienced cycling groups. A new signed cycle route around the meres of Ellesmere was also created.



Wem Moss trail boardwalk. Photography by Gareth Egarr.

AL5 – John Muir Award

This project focussed on encouraging a wider range of people to explore and enjoy the Meres & Mosses. Opportunities to get involved were enabled by introducing primary-aged school children to the landscape; specifically, through the delivery of the John Muir Award via Shropshire Wildlife Trust's experienced education team.

The project has been a great success, working with 25 classes from 12 primary schools. This translates to 604 individual children engaged! A key output of the project was to ensure that primary schools in the area continue to visit the local landscape now that the funded project delivery has ended. There is evidence from some of the participating schools that this is already happening.

AL6 – Field Trips & Camps

This project has looked to find a way of engaging with the hard-to-reach secondary school age group by taking them out of the classroom to experience the landscape and by giving them more tools to know how to explore it. Residential and one-day camps were introduced with an impressive array of activities. Having realised quickly that the original delivery plan would have difficulties, perhaps the most valuable aspect of this project was the opportunity to trial different ways to connect with the demographic. These learning lessons have informed our future work with young people, including our successful Growing Confidence project.

AL7 – Wood Lane Learning Centre

The Wood Lane Learning Centre was developed through the LPS programme to provide an engaging place for schools to come and learn about the history, pre-history, geology, wildlife and landscape of the Meres & Mosses. Through the design and build of this visually striking and modern building, schools from the local area and further afield have been able to explore the unique nature of the Meres & Mosses in an exciting way.

AL8 – Bickley Hall Farm Learning Centre

Cheshire Wildlife Trust's headquarters is on a working farm, embedded in the landscape of the Meres & Mosses. It allowed the LPS project to be part of an innovative barn conversion that would act as a base for schools, universities, community and other groups from which to explore the immediate and wider area. The fact that this facility has already hosted school trips, community consultations, business networking events and a scientific conference is showing how valuable the development of this centre will be.



2013 AL6 camp. Photography by Ellie Larkham.



Official opening of Bickley Hall Farm Learning Centre. Courtesy of Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

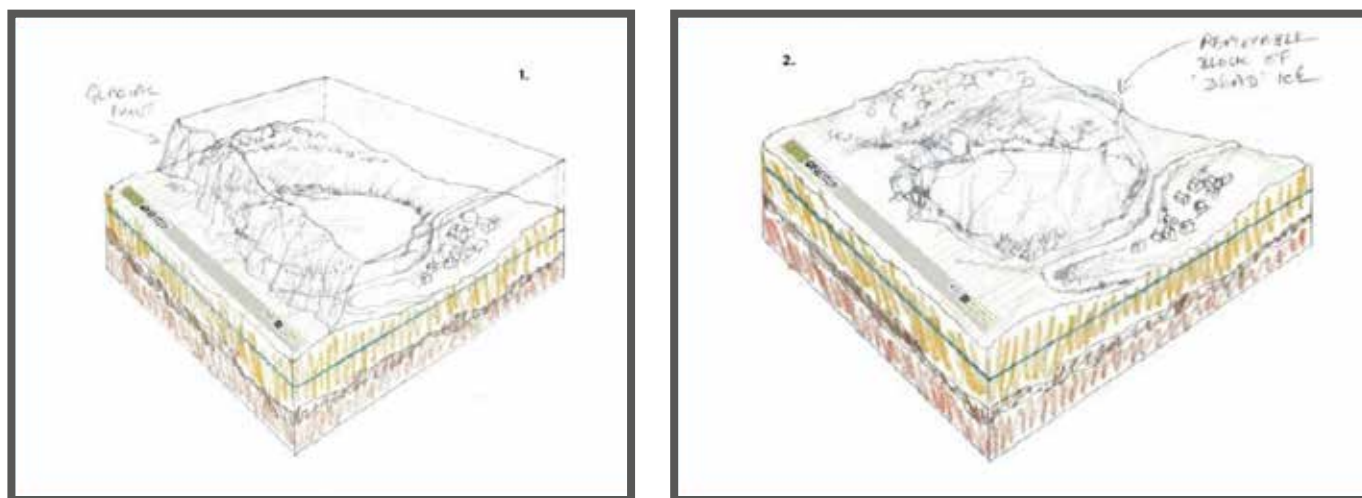
AL1 Promotion & Interpretation: Topographic Map

The original concept for this project was to commission an artist to draw a graphic representation of the Meres & Mosses area and include 'hot spots' of interest - facilities, cultural interest, wildlife, views and special stories identified during the branding exercise.

Recognising the requirements of the LPS to 'sell' the Meres & Mosses to a broad audience, the initial brief was to create an exciting and concise interpretation.

As such, the Meres & Mosses team was adapted and a fibreglass sculptor was engaged to illustrate the many facets of this varied landscape such as its archaeology, history and contemporary uses.

Approximately a metre-square, the base section depicts the underlying geology of the region. On initial observation, the landscape is mostly covered by a 'glacial front'. This allows the interpreter to explain the landscape 10,000 years ago - i.e. its retreating glacier and the underlying earth science (Figure 1)



The glacial front is removable to help interpret the contemporary landscape through time and how the meres developed from 'dead ice' which formed depressions across the landscape and provided the area's characteristic series of water bodies (Figure 2).

The dead ice is also removable to show how meres are created (Figure 3), water can be added to the model enabling the interpreter to highlight issues with urban drainage systems, pollution into water bodies from agricultural land as well as the benefits of slowing water flow through fields and woodlands.

Two of these interpretive topographic models have been created as educational tools. One is located at Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Bickley Hall Farm Learning Centre and the second to be shared between Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Wood Lane Nature Reserve and The Boathouse restaurant & visitor centre on The Mere edge at Ellesmere.



AL2 Events & Festivals: Merefest Case Study

In the original programme business plan, there was to be an annual festival reaching a minimum of 800 people per annum. In the first year of the programme, this event was branded as 'Merfest' and run at Cholmondeley Castle gardens on the shore of Deer Park Mere. It received around 1,500 visitors, gained glowing reviews and, by its fifth year in 2017, was still getting many repeat visits from these first attendees.

Originally it was intended for the event to change venues each year but in Year 2 (2014) it was held at Ellesmere, in the park beside The Mere. The response was excellent, with the key benefit being passing trade from people who would not normally access this type of event, visit a castle or Wildlife Trust centre. It also engaged with local community groups and artists, which had not been the case at Cholmondeley. Would this be lost if the event moved on? As a result, the decision was made to continue in Ellesmere. Numbers have increased ever since and it is estimated that more than 15,000 attendees have been attracted to the festival in the first five years of the programme!

The success of Merfest is down to a combination of factors, especially the presence of a wide range of programme partners and other community groups (i.e. not just conservation interest). They all delivered interesting and varied activities, ensuring the event was family-friendly and accessible to all. Also positive were the presence of hands-on activities that anyone can get involved in, based around the theme of wildlife and landscape, and finally making The Mere itself the star of the show with a festival layout that maximised its presence as part of the event.

Merfest, at its heart, is a really well-organised and large village fete, something people can relate to and get involved with. The festival has struck a chord with the general public and ridden the wave of popularity of bushcraft, wild swimming and other outdoor activities.



Sparkling imaginations with storytelling at Merfest.
Courtesy of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.



Kids get back to nature at Merfest.
Courtesy of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.



The mere as the focal point of Merfest.
Courtesy of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

AL5 John Muir Award: Sustainability of the Programme Case Study

A significant challenge was how to maintain ongoing engagement with the schools that were involved with the project (we already know that two of the nine schools involved continue to take part in John Muir Award activity in the Meres & Mosses on an annual basis). The John Muir Award is a major commitment for schools, both time-wise and financially. The programme has looked to address this by offering free teacher training sessions designed to give everyone the confidence to get out into the school grounds or local area, not just those who were directly involved in the John Muir Award.

Legacy / the future

The vision is for schools we have worked with the programme to become ambassadors for the Meres & Mosses, so they continue using the landscape for learning. To achieve this, a successful model from Shropshire Wildlife Trust's work in south Shropshire was used to partner with schools to create a Wildlife Watch after-school club network across the Meres & Mosses.

Each school in the network is provided with a box of equipment and resources, including seasonal session plans, activity instruction sheets, risk assessments etc. They also receive initial training from Wildlife Trust staff to get the group started plus ongoing support which includes two network meetings per year when staff from different schools can come together to share best practice.



Students from Whitchurch Junior School discovering Wem Moss. Courtesy of Shropshire Wildlife Trust



John Muir Award teacher training. Photography by Ellie Larkham.

AL5 John Muir Award: Post-build Use Case Study

The Learning Centre at Wood Lane has become a fabulous resource to cater for larger and more diverse school groups and other education sessions at all times of year. Wood Lane was already the main teaching reserve for Shropshire Wildlife Trust, but the quality of the experience was threatened by the facilities available. Prior to the start of the LPS project, the indoor space for school groups visiting Wood Lane was in a poor condition; it had a leaking roof and was not fit for purpose as a venue for educational activities.



Wood Lane Learning Centre naming winner Louise Edmonds.
Courtesy of Shropshire Wildlife Trust



Wood Lane Learning Centre. Courtesy of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

In the year following the installation, there was an increase in both the number of schools visiting and the size of groups. The extra publicity around the official opening event and the warm contacts created by inviting teachers to the opening had a measurable positive impact on bookings. Coming second only to the unique opportunity to visit a landfill site and working quarry, it is the attractive and excellent facilities that keep schools coming back to the site. The new centre is also suitable for professional training courses, a new market that Shropshire Wildlife Trust would not have been able to attract with the old facilities.

The new Learning Centre has also vastly improved access to the site for a broader range of visitors including groups of much younger children, nursery

schools and reception classes. The centre has also been able to better accommodate people with disabilities, including several profoundly disabled children in electric wheelchairs. This has also been made possible owing to the support of site owners, TG Group, who upgraded the toilet facilities to include a large disabled toilet with ramp access.

The additional space and separation between the public area and classroom have allowed access to larger groups. A number of secondary schools have come with a whole year group of around 100 pupils and sessions have been hosted for primary schools who brought along the whole school or 'cluster days', where several primaries have come together so that their children can interact.

Conclusion

The Meres & Mosses combined Landscape Partnership Scheme and Nature Improvement Area programme has been a fantastic opportunity for Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the other partners both to understand this area better and to experiment with new methods of delivery over a larger geographic area. The main learning from this programme has been that wildlife, nature and built heritage conservation are reliant on a much wider community than the partner organisations have been used to working with. Only by working with community groups, politicians (both local and national), businesses, volunteers, universities, schools and a huge variety of other interest groups do we stand any chance of halting the biodiversity loss that is currently threatening our landscapes.

The associated project evaluation report (available on www.themereandmosses.co.uk) shows that this programme has significantly altered the way many people see their place in the Meres & Mosses landscape of north Shropshire and south Cheshire. The project has a real legacy in a number of initiatives that have sprung up as we reached the end of the programme; not least the EU LIFE-funded BogLIFE project that will spend the next 5 years working to restore the Fenn's, Whixall, Bettisfield and Wem mosses and telling more people the amazing story of why they are here and what they offer our communities.

We hope that this report highlights that an innovative and thoughtful approach to working across a landscape like the Meres & Mosses allows organisations such as those who have been partners in this project to speak to people they have never thought of as an audience and in ways they didn't think possible. This is summed up well by the Cole Mere Least Water Lily community grant (see page 19) which involved a specialist volunteer-led group working with statutory authorities to facilitate research by a world-leading institution supported by a sailing club and a dive club: it doesn't get much more diverse than that!

We would like to thank the project partners who have helped to drive this programme of work forward (see front cover of this report). We would also like to thank the Heritage Lottery Fund and the other funders of the programme including Natural England, Jean Jackson Charitable Trust, LEADER and Environment Agency. Above all we must thank the impressive array of volunteers who have been unfaltering in their support for what we have achieved – the preparedness of people to go out in all weather and whenever called upon never ceased to amaze us!

Tom Hayek
Meres & Mosses Programme Manager
January 2018



