



Upper River Thames Heritage Project

Newsletter, Issue no. 2

The Heritage Lottery Fund, Landscape Partnership Scheme, the next steps.

The Project Planning Grant phase of the Upper River Thames Heritage Project will draw to a close on 30th April 2006. That initial 12 months of funding has produced great results; it has helped us to understand and draw together the facts and figures needed for the project to proceed to the next stage through 2006 and beyond. We now have a wealth of information on the natural features of the River, its built heritage, its resident and visiting communities. The structures that date to the Second World War are plotted and described in detail. The Lechlade History Society has supported the project; their input has looked beyond the listed structures, into some of the less well known features and history of the River Thames around Lechlade.

We now have to write a document that the HLF call 'The Landscape Strategy' using all that great information gathered over the past 12 months. The Strategy will be delivered to the HLF by the end of April 2006. The project will then have its focus on the development and delivery to the HLF of a document known as the Phase 1 application. If successful, this application will provide funding for up to 18 months to develop detailed programmes of work.

The final phase is the award of the Landscape Partnership Scheme; this is the big money. It will fund all of the HLF approved programmes and projects described in the Phase 1 application.

To summarise the details, we have to:

- complete and deliver the Landscape Strategy – 30th April 06
- prepare the Phase 1 application – 1st October 06
- confirm and accept the Landscape Partnership Scheme from the HLF

“*There is a lot to do as you will have read, but then again, together we have already achieved a great deal. We welcome your support and participation as we continue to make this a successful project; it will bring real benefits to all those who live, work beside or visit this beautiful river.*

Patrick Norris, GWCF

”

For further information about the project contact:

Patrick Norris, Project Officer – Great Western Community Forest
Tel: 01793 466321 **Email:** pnorris@swindon.gov.uk

Launched in April 2005, this project is an exciting partnership initiative addressing key environmental and social issues on the stretch of the Thames between Ashton Keynes and Radcot.

A big 'thank you' from the team

Over the past eight months literally hundreds of people who live, work in and visit the Upper River Thames area have been helping the Great Western Community Forest team to piece together a picture of life there in the past and the present.

We want to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to all the businesses, organisations and individuals who have given their time. So if you came to our initial forum in Buscot, were interviewed in the streets, answered questions on your doorstep, came along to the community workshops, have chatted on the telephone, attended meetings or sent us information, ideas, reportsa very big thank you!

Everyone's comments, ideas and thoughts have been recorded to inform us for the next phase of the project. We are really overwhelmed with the enthusiasm in the area for practical projects and support on the ground.



The Second Stakeholders Forum

Thursday 30th March 2006 1pm-4pm The Baptist Church Hall, Sherbourne Street, Lechlade

The forum will enable partners and community groups to find out more about the consultative processes and results. It will also provide the chance for the GWCF team and partners to thank those who have contributed to the project so far, as well as providing a further opportunity for meeting some of the key people involved.

Community Consultation Results

Consultants from the Countryside and Community Research Unit (CCRU) of the University of Gloucestershire were employed by the Great Western Community Forest team (GWCF) to carry out a visitor survey and a community survey of the Upper River Thames study area. These studies explore the value of the Upper River Thames corridor as a natural and a cultural heritage attraction from both a visitor and a community perspective.



1

Consultation methods

A range of methods using qualitative approaches were adopted:-

A visitor survey: during the first two weeks of September 2005, 336 interviews were conducted with visitors to the area in a range of towns and villages including Ashton Keynes, Buscot, Castle Eaton, Lechlade and Kelmscott. The questionnaire covered what activities visitors took part in, how much they spent, their attitudes to the area, how things could be improved and general socio-economic data.

A resident's survey: 142 door-door surveys were carried out in Lechlade, Cricklade, Ashton Keynes, Kelmscott, Castle Eaton, and Kempford. The questionnaire contained sections on awareness of the project and locality, use of the River Thames and it's surroundings, opinions of the area and household characteristics.

A telephone survey of tourist

businesses: this established a profile of tourism and owner perceptions of local needs. Pubs, B& B's, tearooms, moorings, a hotel and a campsite were surveyed.



2

Community workshops: held in Lechlade with invitees from across the whole study area. Two workshops were held to elicit the views of local stakeholders about key issues and to develop potential ideas for project work.

Educational interests: a range of people within education were interviewed in person or by phone to explore the potential of the study area for schools, colleges and outdoor educational establishments.

Findings and results of the survey

The visitor survey revealed that the study area is important as a local and sub-regional tourist destination. The features cited as special to their visits were most positively the landscape, the peace and tranquility, the river and river based recreation and the area's 'sense of place' – the friendly, safe community. This was shared by a wide range of visitors who pursue a wide range of activities. The more negative aspects of their visits, which generally people felt should be improved, were the presence of litter, traffic and parking issues and they felt that accessibility should be enhanced.

The tourist providers viewed the river, the landscape, the wildlife, walking opportunities and interesting villages and towns as important to their businesses, in that order. They couldn't specify how many people were local or from further afield that used their services but that on weekdays about 50% of users were business related.

They felt there are opportunities to extend the season providing attractions in the winter months. Improvements that they cited as priorities were river management, better paths and way marking and a coherent plan of activities in the area.

Photos from top-right

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Stakeholder Forum | 4. Access issues |
| 2. Red Lion, Castle Eaton | 5. The river from Castle Eaton bridge |
| 3. Recreation on the river | |

The community survey recognised that there is a high level of use made of the river as a recreational resource – often accessed by foot from home. This is a deeply embedded part of being a resident in the area. It seemed that the aspirations of local residents are broadly compatible with a widespread feeling that access could be enhanced, both pedestrian and car parking related. Also, better way marking and some loop walks should be provided. River management was recognised as a key issue – boating, fishing and wildlife interests have different views about management of the river, but a need for a plan and a platform for all voices was strongly voiced. Some residents felt that the built heritage merits more attention – a real concern was to enhance vernacular architecture of the area. Another idea was to transform the use of old unused agricultural buildings for recreational or educational use, craft centres or low cost accommodation.

The community workshops revealed a wide range of project ideas about how the area might be enhanced as a cultural and natural heritage asset. The very breadth of these reflects the range of



5



4

interests. Some of the proposals indicate the energy and interest of local groups, organisations and individuals in wildlife survey work, potential circular walks, low key visitor centre(s), leaflets and information, promoting local

churches, craft workshops, better access to the river, a river management forum and a photographic exhibition.

Schools' use of the area – discussions revealed that there was some existing use of the river as an educational resource but only when the teacher had first hand experience of prior use. It was usually used in relation to biology, geography, history, literacy, or art projects but it is recognised that the area holds enormous cross-curricular possibilities.



3