

Skell Valley Project Legacy Plan

June 2025



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1. Introduction

This document has been prepared to consider the Legacy of the Skell Valley Project over the next ten years to ensure that the project successes are built upon and further opportunities pursued. This document sits alongside the Management and Maintenance Plan which set out how the interventions achieved during the project will be maintained.

The Legacy Plan has been written by Stephanie Hall-Stead of Evans & James Heritage Consultants in close consultation with the project team, Fountains Abbey and Brimham Leadership Team and co-partner Nidderdale National Landscape through workshops held on 9th and 29th April 2025. Project partners have also been consulted over the course of the project via quarterly Partnership meetings.

2. Project Context

In 2014, consultation on the 2015-21 World Heritage Site Management Plan for Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal (designated UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986) identified flooding and siltation as the greatest threat to the site's Outstanding Universal Value. It was recognised that this could not be resolved without looking outside the boundaries of the site and through collaborative working with landowners and farmers, many of whom were unknowingly contributing to the siltation through their land management practices. Nidderdale National Landscape (formerly Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) agreed that a partnership approach working with landowners and farmers to introduce natural flood management methods had the potential to reduce the risk of flooding, for the benefit of the whole valley and Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal.

In 2018, The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) awarded stage one development funding to the National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape as lead partners. The National Trust acted as grant recipient and employer of the project team which included a Project Manager and Community Engagement Officer to facilitate research, public consultation, planning with prospective partners, financial planning and fundraising. This stage also facilitated several tangible research outputs including the development of the Landscape Conservation Action Plan (LCAP) for the Skell Valley. The stage two delivery phase application was submitted in Autumn 2020, and in December 2020 NLHF confirmed that £1.4 million had been awarded towards the total project cost of £2.5m for the delivery of the Skell Valley Project, focusing on a twelve-mile catchment of the River Skell. The project was supported by match funding from a number of organisations including but not limited to, private donations, funding from charitable Trusts and Foundations, Nidderdale National Landscape and European Union ERDF.

The Skell Valley Project, in addition to the lead partners, was delivered in partnership with sixteen further organisations and community groups:

- Eavestone Estate
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Grantley Hall Estate
- Grantley, Sawley, Skelding and Eavestone Parish Council
- Harrogate and District Community Action
- Friends of Hell Wath
- Natural England
- Nidderdale National Landscape's Joint Advisory Committee
- North Yorkshire Council
- The Skell Farmers Group
- Ripon Museums Trust
- West Yorkshire Archive Service
- Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust

The delivery phase of the project commenced in April 2021, with a core team of four project staff working alongside partners from HADCA (Harrogate & District Community Action), WYAS (West Yorkshire Archive Service) and YDRT (Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust).

The NLHF grant expiry date is 30th June 2025 with all grant-funded activity ceasing on 31st May 2025 for the Skell Valley Project.

Skell Project Vision

“Together, we will restore the River Skell to the heart of a unique and well-connected landscape; where heritage is celebrated, nature thrives, and people are empowered to lead change which ensures the long-term sustainability of the Skell Valley for future generations”

The project objectives were grouped into four themes which were identified within the stage one Landscape Conservation Action Plan;

1. **Landscape is resilient;** We'll help tackle the threats of climate change and ensure we play our part in a 'green' recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic-making the landscape, its people and the local economy more resilient.
2. **Nature thrives;** We'll reverse the decline in nature, conserve ancient trees and woodlands and wildlife they support and create nature-rich green spaces near to where people live
3. **People are empowered;** We'll empower people to deliver projects for nature, heritage and landscape by supporting them in learning the skills they need and removing current barriers that stop people accessing the outdoors and nature around them.
4. **Heritage is celebrated;** We'll save our heritage from the threats of climate change and general neglect and create new and exciting opportunities for people to explore the nature and history of the Skell Valley and be involved in its care.

The project was delivered through fifteen projects, each falling under one of the above themes.



Figure 1: Project area of the Skell Valley Project

Approved Purposes

On award of the stage 2 Lottery grant, NLHF agreed that the funding would be spent delivering the following approved purposes:

- Following Heritage Fund recruitment and procurement guidelines, employ a Scheme Manager (FT), Heritage Officer (0.6FTE), Skell Ranger (FT) and Senior Project Coordinator (FT), plus specialist consultants
- Deliver and maintain Natural Flood Management measures on privately-owned land, incentivise landowners/managers through a trial Payment-by-Results scheme, establish an initial Landscape Enterprise Network and establish a hydrological monitoring programme.
- Recruit and train 40 'Skell Valley Taskforce' volunteers to deliver land management work.
- Collaborate with tourism/hospitality businesses and public sector organisations and provide them with an online community, marketing workshops, resources and networking events.
- Safeguard privately-owned Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites through woodland management works and improved management/maintenance strategies. Recruit and train 10 volunteers to identify/record 100 ancient trees. Deliver tree surgery for 10 ancient trees.
- Support Friends of Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve to recruit/train 15 additional volunteers, deliver 24 training and practical management days, deliver 18 community heritage days and develop interpretation.
- Deliver archive research and c30 oral history interviews, working with West Yorkshire Archive Service, University of Leeds' students and 15 new volunteers. Interpret findings.
- Establish Volunteer Development Officer (0.4FTE) at Harrogate and District Community Action to embed shared approaches throughout the local community/voluntary sector.
- Deliver community outreach work by working with/equipping local groups to improve six 'spaces for nature' across Ripon.
- Work with Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, 26 volunteers and schools to support river monitoring.

- Deliver interpretation and access improvements throughout the Skell Valley.
- Work with archaeologists and volunteers to research/record the Serpent Valley/Chinese Garden and Spa Gill, conserve four historic structures, undertake surrounding vegetation management and deliver activities.
- At Eavestone Lake, repair key built heritage features, undertake landscaping works and improve woodland management. Involve 10 volunteers in research. Deliver two conservation events for students and apprentices.

3. What is Legacy?

What is Legacy?

Legacy in the context of Landscape Partnership projects is discussed as being “the enduring benefits which result from HLF-funded activities, and which continue after the landscape partnership scheme has completed delivery...safeguarding legacy has additional benefits beyond simply maximising the value obtained through HLF funds” (Mount, 2013, p.5). As a separate document, a management and maintenance plan has been developed to ensure that the interventions made through the project are adequately maintained and funded, however, it is important to consider opportunities for influencing the future of the Skell Valley landscape further, in a positive way.

Why Continue?

The Skell Valley Project has made significant achievements against the project themes, however, there is only so much that can be achieved in one project within the four-year timeframe of the project.

The NLHF project has demonstrated that working as a partnership at scale, and with collaboration from community, landowners and farmers is effective, and we need to ensure that these relationships are maintained, and momentum continued to help to continue to achieve meaningful change, to manage the impacts of climate change, land management and habitat improvement.

Legacy Planning Approach

The Legacy of the project was considered, and information gathered via the following activities:

- **Partnership meetings:** Discussion of Legacy during the course of 2024 at three of the quarterly Partnership meetings to determine the future of the Partnership and next steps
- **Project team meetings:** Regular attendance at project team and project boards meetings during 2025 to facilitate production of a plan reflective of the views of the project team and lead partners
- **Workshops:** Two workshops were facilitated with the project team, and Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Leadership team held on 9th and 29th April 2025. Co-partner Nidderdale National Landscape were invited to participate in these workshops but due to commitments were unable to attend and have been separately consulted.

Process

Processes employed were based on questions relating to the key issues highlighted below:

Issue	Question
The role of the partnership	Is the partnership, in its current form, the appropriate model to continue legacy? Are there existing mechanisms more appropriate to delivery of legacy? How will the future implementation of the legacy be monitored and who will be responsible for this?
The role of the lead partners	How can we assist partners in delivery of their future legacy projects? What does this support look like?

	How do we resource the legacy? How can Legacy contribute towards the strategic objectives of both partners?
Understanding the legacy	How do we maintain momentum? What are the challenges? What are the opportunities? What are the priorities?
Identify the legacy	What are the priorities? Which partners will take on, and build upon existing projects What are the new projects to continue the momentum of the existing project?

Table 2: Key legacy issues and questions

Outputs

The outputs of this activity were:

- **Mechanism for delivery:** A number of options for delivery of the model were explored and are briefly discussed in Section 5.
- **Priorities:** Key priorities for legacy were identified
- **Action Plan:** An action plan of specific projects and outputs has commenced development, this will be explored and refined further via planned workshops in Autumn 2025 and Spring 2026 due to the scale of work required in developing this.
- **Resource:** Methods of resourcing both capacity/expertise and financial have been considered and will be refined in conjunction with the action plan.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis below identifies opportunities and challenges that we may face in delivery of legacy:

STRENGTHS • Lead partners continue to maintain strong relationships with partner organisations • Lead partners have specialist in-house expertise which can be used to support organisations and community groups in seeking to undertake new projects which will continue the legacy of the project • Some initiatives which were started as part of the original project have been adopted and developed by partner organisations with their legacy continuing outside of the project	WEAKNESSES • Delivery cannot be accurately planned as we will be reliant upon funding opportunities as they arise and whether the funding objectives align with desired projects • Additional resource (human) will be required to deliver the priorities and the financial implications of this can be difficult to obtain funding for
OPPORTUNITIES • Potential for further partnerships for funding applications working with Nidderdale National Landscape and local landowners • National Trust can provide in-kind support to partnership organisations where they are seeking funding for projects which will maintain or expand the legacy of the project further • National Trust strategy launched in 2025 may encourage further organisational support for funding legacy priorities in the future • Nidderdale National Landscape Management Plan Objectives 2025 (draft and subject to consultation) align with project themes	THREATS • Availability of adequate opportunities for funding the desired priorities within the legacy period • Continued climate change may change priorities along with how, and at what pace we need to react • Changes to legislation • Changes to organisational priorities of the lead partners in the future • Maintaining the support of landowners for legacy work over and above maintaining the project interventions as their priorities may change over time

• Ownership of the river monitoring equipment facilitates further monitoring subject to obtaining funding to support specialist interpretation of these results using our existing relationship with Leeds University • Now that the project is complete, there is the potential to expand the project outside of the initial geographic area of the project • Opportunities to partner with organisations who were not part of the original project partnership for future legacy projects	
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4. What are our Priorities?

As a separate document, a Management and Maintenance Plan has been developed which identifies how existing outputs will be maintained over the next ten years, this is supported by a costed action plan which the lead partners, partners and landowners have committed to.

Looking beyond managing and maintaining the existing project outputs, the legacy process has considered the key legacy priorities over for the next ten years. This will be further developed into an action plan over 2025/early 2026 with specific projects identified. It should be noted that delivery of these priorities is reliant upon both human and financial resource to deliver. When these priorities can be delivered will be dependent upon available funding and success in award of funding to deliver these priorities:

- **Reach:** The National Trust will expand our work and reach into the corridor of land between Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal and Brimham, engaging with new partners, landowners and farmers in this corridor
- **Partnership working:** Continue to work and engage with project partners and community groups, providing in-house specialist support where required and deploying the Skell Valley Task Force to assist with management, maintenance and further interventions
- **Sharing our learning:** Following the success of the end of project seminar, continue to host an annual seminar sharing our work and learnings with other organisations
- **Ranger/Skell Valley Task Force:** Area Ranger to be absorbed into Fountains Abbey Ranger team and will train Rangers to lead the Skell Valley Task Force in both the maintenance and delivery of further work within the Skell Valley
- **River monitoring:** Establish long-term river monitoring programme of the catchment in partnership with Leeds University to help inform priorities for further interventions

- **Natural Flood and Sediment Management:** Delivery of natural flood and sediment management in the river catchment based on the outcomes of the project monitoring and data interpretation
- **Natural Flood Management:** We will undertake further natural flood management within the catchment including planting new hedgerows and creating more ponds
- **Exploring the Skell Valley:** Enhance existing walking routes and create one additional walking trail in the valley
- **Condition of Heritage:** Monitor, record and improve the condition of built heritage within the valley, reinstating lost features to two listed structures
- **Work with local businesses:** Continue to work with network of local businesses to collaborate on coordinated 'offer' to customers and engage with customers on the legacy of the project
- **Payment by Results:** The National Trust Ranger Team and Nidderdale National Landscape Farming Advisers will work together to identify suitable sites. Implementation of the payment by results scheme to these sites would be dependent upon obtaining funding from private donors
- **Opportunity mapping:** Identify opportunities beneficial for water management
- **Regenerative Agriculture:** With Natural Flood Management being only the first step in flood and sediment control, the Nidderdale National Landscape will continue to work with local farmers to encourage adoption of Regenerative agriculture techniques
- **Participation:** Participate in Uredale Community Partnership
- **Power of 10:** Harrogate and District Community Action will continue and further developing the power of 10 volunteering scheme with aspirations including an app and opportunities for national roll out
- **Improve Catalogue Quality and Accessibility:** West Yorkshire Archive Service will continue to enhance the accessibility and discoverability of archives relating to Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal
- **Legacy Outreach Plan:** West Yorkshire Archive Service will develop a legacy outreach plan incorporating future exhibitions, blog posts and

educational content to keep the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal collection relevant.

How do we Maintain Momentum?

The following methodology for maintaining the momentum of the project was identified:

- Identifying a 'champion' for the project legacy
- Continue to work with local partners via the Ripon community groups
- Share the load and support other organisations in delivery of projects contributing to the project legacy
- Use the reputation of the National Trust/ Nidderdale National Landscape to influence other organisations, community groups and landowners to take action
- Celebrate successes

A series of working group meetings are planned for Autumn 2025 and Summer 2025 to explore and action this further.

5. What are the Mechanisms for Delivery of Legacy?

Key to any partnership project is how organisations continue to work together upon conclusion of the funded project. This is particularly important for the Skell Valley, in which our future actions will impact our ability to realise the benefits of the work and efforts undertaken so far, particularly in relation to natural flood management. This project is seen as the first step of many, and it is vital that the legacy of the project is impactful and lasting.

The mechanisms for delivery of legacy were considered by the partnership organisations over three of their quarterly meetings, the first meeting was speculative, the second discussion considered options for delivery and in the third meeting, a decision regarding the preferred option was selected and confirmed. The following options were considered:

Option 1: Retain the current Steering Group

The partnership Steering Group have met quarterly throughout the project. Whilst all saw the value in these meetings whilst the project was underway, it became clear that as the project has progressed, there are now established mechanisms outside of the project where many partners meet and collaborate.

As the momentum of the Skell Valley project will undoubtedly slow whilst the action plan is developed and funding sought for key projects within this, there is a danger that as partnership meetings continued, their value would be lost which could endanger momentum. This could also restrict opportunities to engage and collaborate with new partners who were not involved with the original project.

It was therefore agreed by the partnership steering group that the quarterly meetings should not continue.

Option 2: Split legacy actions and allocate to individual partner organisations

In this option, each partner would take specific legacy actions from their project areas and work separately from each other in delivery. This option could risk organisations returning to silo working and it was felt that this would be a backwards step away from what had been achieved when partners were working together collaboratively under one umbrella project.

Option 3: Split legacy actions across the governance of two existing mechanisms

In this option, the project co-leads would be accountable for the legacy of the project with partners meeting to consider and review legacy under two existing mechanisms. This would include the UREdale Partnership which most of the partnership organisations already attend. The farming community will be engaged via continued social events and the Nidderdale National Landscape programme of technical advice events/workshops which are held on a regular basis. There is one partner which does not fall into either of these two mechanisms, Grantley Hall, however, the relationship between the partner and the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal is now established as a result of the project and communications and updates can be shared between the organisations.

This option was agreed by the Partnership Steering Group to offer a sensible solution to maintaining legacy and meaningful collaboration and was selected as the mechanism for delivery of legacy.

All partners will have an opportunity to come together at the annual seminar identified as a priority in Section 4. This will be hosted by the National Trust.

6. How will we be held accountable?

The National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape will be the key drivers behind Legacy Delivery. The National Trust will be held to account via the World Heritage Advisory Group who meet every six months. The National Trust will provide an annual report to the group which will outline progress in legacy delivery. The World Heritage Advisory Group is a pre-established group comprising both National and Regional Organisations including but not limited to, ICOMOS (UK), English Heritage, Historic England and North Yorkshire Council. The Group will hold the National Trust to account, ensuring effective oversight of the project Legacy. This report will also be shared with The National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee.

Where appropriate, other partner organisations will take ownership of the legacy of specific project outputs, for example:

- Harrogate and District Community Action are continuing and further developing the power of 10 volunteering scheme for young people and a Youth Council
- Nidderdale Partnership continuation of community links
- Ripon Disability Forum seeking to make further improvements to the accessible trail
- Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust and Ripon Museums have now sought funding for individual NLHF projects
- Hell Wath Nature Reserve, working in Partnership with Plant Life for funded works enabled by the project, but now outside of original Skell Valley project scope

7. How will we Maintain Legacy?

A Legacy review process will be undertaken in year 5. This will enable the Legacy Plan to be reviewed against the social, economic and political contexts at that time, allowing the plan to be amended where necessary to ensure continued relevance. The National Trust Project Management Framework includes an End of Project Review after both year 1 and 5 of projects for the purposes of monitoring deliverables and project success. For this project a 10-year review has also been proposed. This will provide a further safeguard for ensuring that the Legacy plan is reviewed as it will fall as part of these processes.

8. Resourcing Legacy

Beyond the management and maintenance plan for which financial resources are already allocated and in place, Legacy planning has identified priorities and desired projects which require both human and financial resources to deliver. As a kick-start to Legacy delivery, the National Trust have allocated funds to continue the Skell Area Ranger project post following conclusion of the project, thus enabling the continuation of the Skell Valley Task Force. The Ranger will move into the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal team and will provide training to the existing team so that the team as a collective have responsibility for the wider Skell catchment and activities. This ensures legacy of relationships should personnel change in the future, but also empowers the wider Ranger team to look beyond the boundaries of the Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal site.

Further human resourcing for future specific projects will need to consider to the following:

- Partner joint funding of project roles
- Increasing partner capacity to deliver legacy
- Partner funding of external consultancy services
- Use of existing human resources within the partner organisations and recruitment of 'backfill'

Specific funding opportunities for individual priorities and legacy projects have not been considered in detail at this stage as funding opportunities are subject to change depending on wider context and funder priorities. It is unlikely that Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal would apply as a main applicant for National Lottery Heritage Funding again due to the organisational priorities of the National Trust and other owned properties, however, the organisation has expertise which can be offered in kind to existing and future partners seeking to fulfil Legacy actions. Potential sources of funding may include:

- Nidderdale National Landscape submission of a National Lottery Heritage Fund 'Landscape Connections' bid
- National Lottery Heritage Funding applications where other organisations are the lead delivery partners

- Nidderdale Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) funding application for joint partner and landowner bids
- Natural England funding opportunities
- Approaches and applications to individual donors and Trusts
- Wider opportunities in Green Finance and biodiversity net gain guided by partner organisation policies
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund for smaller partner applications