

Skell Valley Project

Management and Maintenance Plan

June 2025



National
Trust



Nidderdale
National
Landscape



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1. Introduction

Reasons for Preparation of the Plan and Authorship

This document has been prepared to provide a management and maintenance plan for the work of the Skell Valley Project for which the development phase concludes in May 2025.

The plan has been written by Stephanie Hall-Stead of Evans & James Heritage Consultants in close consultation with the project team and project partners in February 2025.

The Plan aims to identify key areas of project intervention which will require management and maintenance to ensure condition and/or relevance over the period of the next ten years.

Expertise

Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal is a National Trust property with a full-time staff that manage and maintain the site, supported by volunteers. Further expertise is provided by Regional and National experts from the National Trust for support and assistance where required. Landowners who have been involved with the project will benefit from the support of both the National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape for management and maintenance of interventions on their land.

Scope

Due to the extent of coverage of the project (see figure 1), this plan covers the project interventions only, and not all heritage and landscapes within the ownership or management of either of the partner organisations.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Legacy Plan.

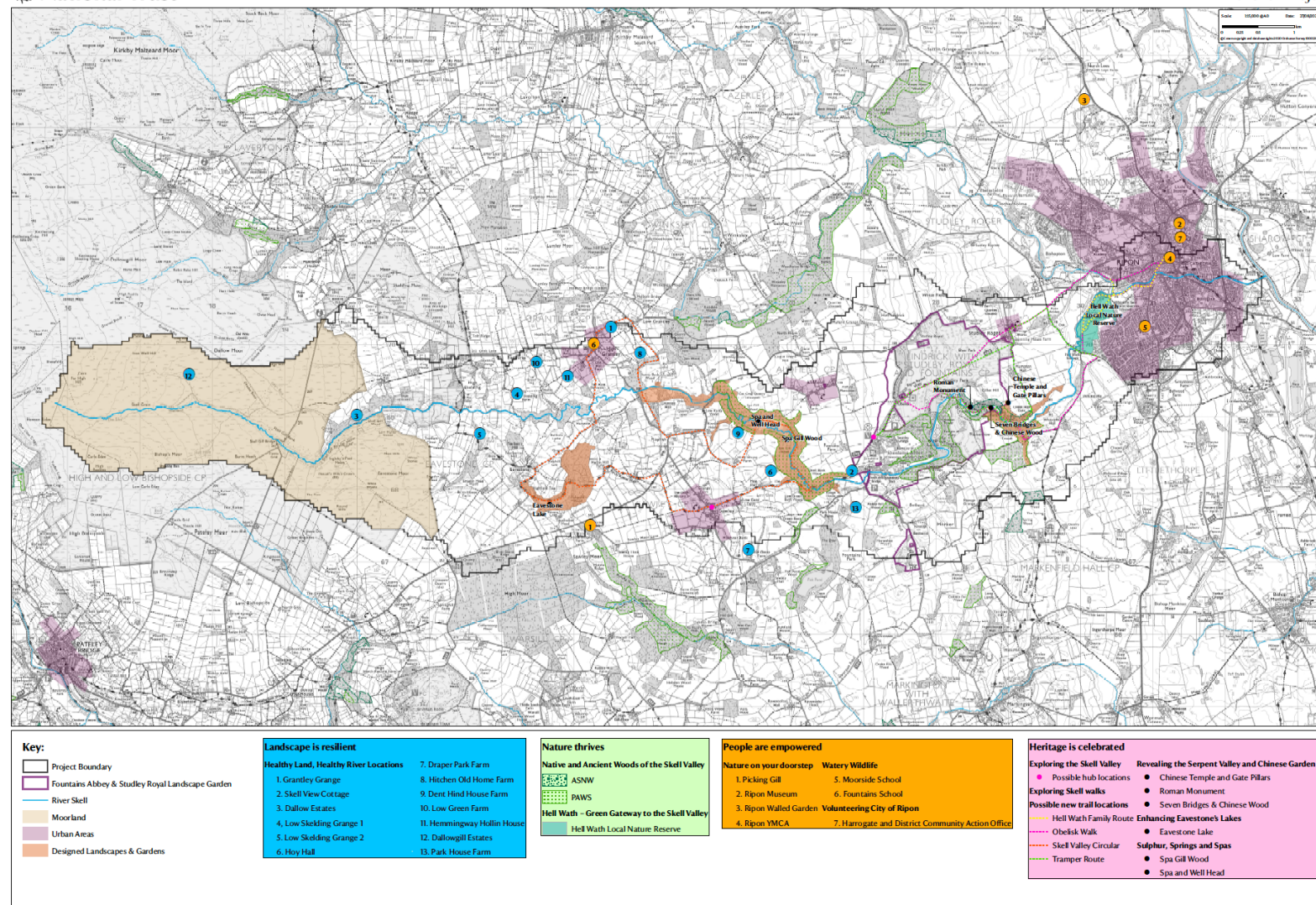


Figure 1: Skell Valley Project Delivery Areas

2. Understanding the Landscape

Description of the Landscape

The Skell Valley Project has been co-led by National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape who jointly led a partnership of 16 organisations. The Project has focused on 12 miles of the River Skell falling between Dallowgill Moor and the City of Ripon. The delivery phase of the project commenced in April 2021 with a budget of £2.5m. The vision of the project was:

“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.

An understanding of the site was gained through the following reports and surveys during the course of the development stage:

- Landscape Conservation Action Plan by
- Natural Flood Management Opportunities Mapping Report by AquaUoS
- Payment by Outcomes Scheme for NFM by the integrated Catchment Solutions Programme (iCASP)
- Hydrological Monitoring Protocol developed by AquaUoS
- The Skell Valley- Review of the Harrogate District Landscape Character Areas by Martin Woolley Landscape Architect
- Skell Valley Project- Conservation Management Plan by Southern Green Landscape Consultants
- Rights of Way Survey by Peter Lambert Consultancy and Volunteers
- Skell Valley Community Engagement Report by Skell Valley Community Participation Officer
- Interpretation Plan by The Creative Core Group Ltd
- Enterprising Landscapes Action Plan

The Skell Valley Project was delivered as a programme of 15 projects to tackle the identified themes with a detailed Activity Plan to support delivery and achievement of the project objectives.

3. Current Situation

Responsibility for Management and Maintenance

Prior to the project, the responsibility management and maintenance fell to the individual landowners with no cohesive approach to land/river management or management of heritage assets.

Management and Maintenance Standards

National Trust land and assets have been managed and maintained in conjunction with statutory requirements and the guidelines of the National Trust. Staff have access to appropriate training and development opportunities provided through both internal and external training providers.

Landowners will be expected to maintain their land in accordance with statutory obligations, land management best practices and the landowner agreements which they have committed to for a period of ten years.

4. Management and Maintenance Aims and Objectives

The project team have identified the following themes for managing and maintaining the extent of the Skell Valley Project post completion:

1. Access; maintain the condition of access interventions and consider and seek to improve and extend where possible through future funding streams
2. Nature; Continue grassland management at Hell Wath and Manage and improvement of habitats
3. Heritage; Maintain repaired and restored heritage, seek to maintain and upskill in heritage skills
4. NFM; Maintain hedges and buffer strips
5. Monitor; Continued river monitoring, seeking to extend monitoring to further species

Responsibility for Management and Maintenance

An organigram depicting the responsibilities for management and maintenance activities included within this plan is shown below in Figure 2.

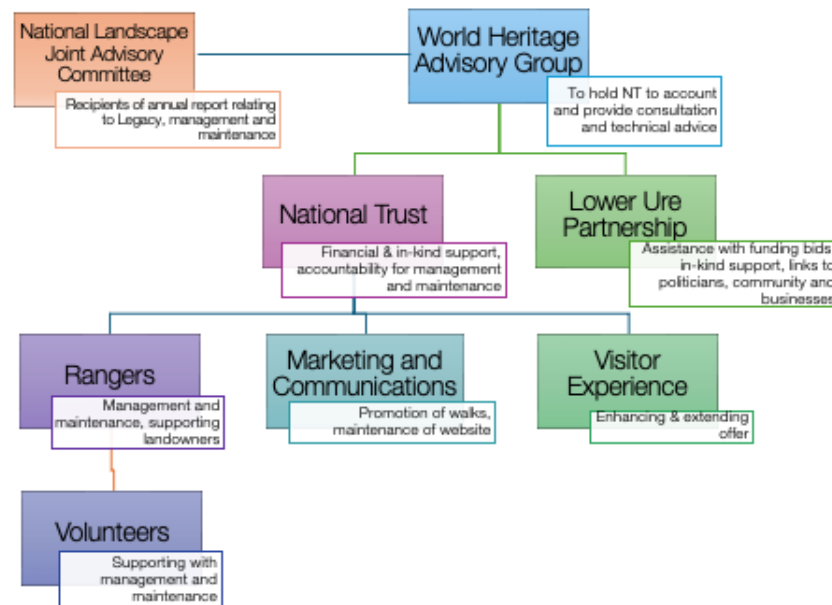


Figure 2: Proposed management and maintenance structure

The World Heritage Advisory Group is a pre-established group comprising both National and Regional Organisations including but not limited to, ICOMOS (UK), Natural England, Environment Agency and Local Farmers/neighbours. The Group hold the National

Trust to account, ensuring effective oversight of the project Legacy including the Management and Maintenance Plan. An annual report will be issued to the National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee.

Training Requirements

Peer to peer training will be provided where required to enable successful execution of the Plan.

Standards of Management and Maintenance

National Trust land and assets have been managed and maintained in conjunction with statutory requirements and the guidelines, standards, and best practices of the National Trust. Staff have access to appropriate training and development opportunities provided through both internal and external training providers.

Where Woodland Management Plans have been developed, these have been approved by the Forestry Commission. No woodland works will be undertaken without felling licences in place, most of which are already in place as part of woodland management plans.

Public rights of way will be maintained to meet statutory requirements.

Landowners will be expected to maintain their land in accordance with statutory obligations, land management best practice and their landowner agreements.

5. Action Plan

The action plan below demonstrates the ongoing management/maintenance actions required to maintain the project deliverables. A detailed costed schedule is included within Appendix 1.

PROJECT	LOCATION	OUTPUT DELIVERED	MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENT	FREQUENCY	TIME OF YEAR (IF APPLICABLE)	OWNER	ASSUMPTIONS
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Hedgerow Planting	Summer and Winter beat up	Once		NT	To be undertaken by 2 members of NT Ranger Team leading 2 Skell Valley Task Force volunteering sessions
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Hedgerow Planting	Cut back/Lay	Every 3 years		NT/ Landowner	Landowners responsibility to cut back, no cost allowance for this. NT to Aim to lay 25% of the 2.5km planted (subject to landowner permission). 4 Volunteer sessions in 2033 and 3 sessions in 2034 with 2 Rangers leading each session. Allowance for materials included.
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Fencing	Visual checks and reactive repairs	Annually		Landowner	NT to undertake in years 1 & 2, Landowner thereafter. Use NT materials stock in years 1&2.
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Fencing	Consider replacement if required	Year 10+		Land owner	Landowner decision to replace if they require fencing provision in addition to established hedgerow. Allowance in year 10 for NT replacement of 450m fencing at kitchen bank.
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Leaky Dams (Small)	Visual checks, removal of debris, tightening wires and check/remediation of erosion	Annually	April/ after storm events	NT	To be undertaken by NT, 2 Rangers for 1 day
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Leaky Dams (large)	Visual checks, removal of debris, tightening wires and check/remediation of erosion	Annually	Summer/ after storm events	NT	External contractors required due to size, £2.5k per dam, assumed 5 dams every other year and 1 day per year for NT Ranger visual checks
Healthy Land, Healthy River	Various	Cross Drains	Visual inspection and reactive repairs where required	Annually from year 2		Landowner	
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix X)	Ponds	Visual checks	Annually	Autumn	Landowner	
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix X)	Ponds	Clearance using livestock grazing	Annually from year 2	Autumn	Landowner	
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Trackways	Fill pot holes and scrape off soil.	Annually / as required		Landowners	NT will purchase and store stock-pile of stone for landowner's use for maintenance project trackways.
Healthy Land, Healthy River	See Plan (Appendix 2)	Trackways	Leaf clearance	Annually	Autumn	NT	To be undertaken by NT Rangers & Volunteers over 2 sessions. Hell Wath-Fountains and Hell Wath accessible routes to be principal areas of clearance
Enhancing Eavestone	Bridge & Boathouse at Eavestone Lake	Research, recording and repairs	Vegetation clearance	Annually	Winter	NT	NT Rangers & Volunteers Undertaken whilst linked with other volunteering tasks, 1 Ranger for 1 day allowed for supervision
Enhancing Eavestone	Bridge & Boathouse at Eavestone Lake	Research, recording and repairs	Condition review: loose pointing, deterioration to structure	Every 3 years	Spring	Landowner	NT to provide Building Surveyor technical advice if required. Allowance of 1 day.
Enhancing Eavestone	Bridge & Boathouse at Eavestone Lake	Research, recording and repairs	Bridge Surveys and maintenance	Every 3 years		Landowner	Assume collaboration with Building Surveyor and North Yorkshire Council Public Rights of Way Team. Maintenance costs responsibility of the landowner
Exploring the Skell	See Plan (Appendix 3)	Walking Trails with Signage	Cleaning of signs and benches, visual checks for damage, treatment of benches every few years	Bi-annually	April/May & Autumn	NT	NT Rangers, signage within Fountains Abbey visitor welcome area by Facilities team
Exploring the Skell	See Plan (Appendix 3)	Walking Trails with Signage	Replacement signage (end of service life)	Year 10		NT	Marketing and Comms Team responsible for reviewing. There is a 10 year guarantee for signage, anything arising should be checked for guarantee claim. Allowance of renewal of bus station vinyl's every three years due to likelihood of higher level of wear and tear. Allowance for replacing one sign insert per year (theft or damage)
Exploring the Skell	See Plan (Appendix 3)	Walking Trails with Signage	Replacement benches (end of service life)	Year 10		NT	Fountains Abbey and Comms team responsible for review in conjunction with feedback from NT Rangers undertaking visual checks. 10 year guarantee for benches.
Exploring the Skell	See Plan (Appendix 3)	Walking Trails with Signage	Website maintenance & review validity of QR code links	Annually / as required		NT	Fountains Marketing and Comms team responsible, assume sample checks of QR codes undertaken by Rangers as part of visual checks

Exploring the Skell	See Plan (Appendix 3)	Walking Trails with Signage	Website updates	Annually / as required		NT	NT Marketing and Comms team
Digging Deep in the Archives		Oral histories	Continued maintenance of oral history archive website and public access	Annually		Yorkshire Archive Service	
Hell Wath	Hell Wath	Scrub clearance	Scrub clearance and grassland management	Bi-Annually	Summer/Winter	NT	NT Rangers to undertake using Skell Valley Task Force. Two sessions in Summer and two sessions in Winter.
Hell Wath	Hell Wath	Path works	Check path condition, repair as required	Annually	Autumn	NT	NT Rangers and Skell Valley Task force to undertake in conjunction with the leaf clearance works on line 13. Material for stone allowed on this line.
Hell Wath	Hell Wath	Marker stone repairs	Check marker stone condition	Annually		Friends of Hell Wath/NT	Friends of Hell Wath to notify NT if any repairs are required which will be organised by Building Surveyor. Allowance of 1/2 day Building Surveyor time every three years. Decoration of plaque every five years. NT to supply plaque casting to Friends of Hell Wath so facilitate recasting of plaque in the future if this is ever required.
Skell Valley Task Force	See list of assets	Purchased assets	Annual service	Annually		NT	Undertaken in-house every other year. Externally serviced every other year.
Hug an Ancient Tree	See Ancient Tree Inventory	Locating, recording and surveys and tree works	Visual re-survey & inventory updates	Every 5 years	Summer/Autumn	Landowners	Cost allowance for 1 NT Ranger for 1 day to undertake visual checks to NT Ancient Trees
Native and Ancient Woods	See Woodland Management Plans	Woodland Management Plans developed for identified areas	Undertake management works in accordance with Woodland Management Plan	Annually		Landowners	
Native and Ancient Woods	See Woodland Management Plans	Woodland Management Plans developed for identified areas	Review of Woodland Management Plan	5 years		Landowners	Allowance of 2 Rangers for 1 day to undertake review of NT Woodland Management Plans
Native and Ancient Woods	See Woodland Management Plans	Woodland Management Plans developed for identified areas	Renewal of Woodland Management Plan and submission of application for felling licences	10 years		Relevant Landowners	An allowance has been made for consultant fees for renewing 3nr. NT Woodland Management Plans, however, grant funding may be available which would reduce this cost.
Nature on Your Doorstep	Ripon Walled Garden	Creation of 'Nature on your doorstep' spaces	Maintenance and repair of apple press	Annually / as required		Ripon Community Link	
Nature on Your Doorstep	Skell Valley	Financial support of volunteer led bioacoustics bat recording project	Place bat monitors on asset list and in conjunction with NT Ecologist/North Yorkshire Bat Group, agree monitoring projects for next ten years			NT/North Yorkshire Bat Group	NT Ecologist and Rangers will need to work with the bat group to advise and agree. Allowance of 1/2 per year for Ecologist and 1 day per year for Ranger
Nature on Your Doorstep	TBC	Create 'library' of free equipment and tools to support people in creating spaces	Ongoing maintenance/replacement of tools sharing organisation?			Ripon Walled Garden	
Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden		2 historic structures recorded and conserved; Roman Monument and 18th Century River walls at the outlet from Studley Lake	Annual check of condition of built structures and remedial maintenance planning	Annually	Autumn	NT	NT Building Surveyor to coordinate. Allowance for de-vegetation and localised re-pointing.
Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden	Outlet from Studley Lake	2 historic structures recorded and conserved; Roman Monument and 18th Century River walls at the outlet from Studley Lake	Possible vegetation clearance	Annually	Autumn	NT	NT Rangers, allowance of 1 Ranger for 1 day
Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden	Skell River	River Walls (outlet from Studley Lake)	Condition review of integrity of walls during Reservoir Surveys - this needs to be added onto external consultant's scope of works	Annually	Summer	NT	Facilities Manager
Skell Valley Task Force	Skell Valley	Establishment of 'Skell Valley Task Force group to operate across the project area	Maintain volunteer provision; uniform expenses, training and equipment	Annually	As required	NT	NT Rangers/NT General Manager
Tourism Development	Online	Website of resources for local businesses	Local business resource website; continued hosting, management and maintenance	Annually		Ripon BID	
Watery Wildlife	Online	Development of digital education packs	Digital Pack maintenance of web presence (Nidderdale and NT websites)	Annually		Nidderdale National Landscape and NT	
Watery Wildlife	-	Deliver an upstream/downstream river monitoring project with approximately 684 school children	River Dipping Equipment Maintenance / Replacement	Annually		Moorside Primary School / Grewelthorpe Primary School	

Table 1: Action Plan

Skell Valley Task Force

The Skell Valley Task Force is an established group of 16 volunteers who attend fortnightly for volunteering sessions. They will continue both upstream of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal to undertake maintenance outputs identified in the Action Plan. Furthermore, they will assist downstream nearer to Ripon, including Hell Wath, where they will undertake Balsam and scrub clearance, maintaining grasslands etc. Annually they will be able to review the Exploring the Skell Valley paths/interpretation and way markers to ensure condition and maintenance is maintained.

The Task Force will continue to be an active part of the National Trust Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Volunteering Community and will continue to be part of ongoing communications and invitations to celebration events.

Funding and Delivery

The National Trust will fund ongoing costs through the underspend in their match funding contributions to the project and later, from Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal property financial reserves.

To support delivery, the Project Ranger will transition into the property Ranger team as a permanent employee at the end of the project. She will provide support and training to the team in project deliverables to facilitate the team, as a whole continuing the Legacy of the project. The Ranger team will collectively be responsible for working in the wider catchment, path network and with the Skell Valley Task Force. This approach, rather than maintaining one designated team member as being responsible will help ensure that valuable relationships are not lost should that individual leave the organisation, and so that the wider catchment work is not seen as separate to our normal work but becomes part of our BAU practices.

Where actions fall to relevant landowners, the National Trust will provide support and resources where required. This will include maintaining fences in years 1-2 post project completion, leaf clearance from trails and provision of access to material stockpiles for maintenance of trackways, paths and gateways.

Income and Expenditure

Fountains Abbey		Last Year	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034
Visitors	425,404	413,671	428,699	445,337	462,877	471,061	479,232	487,427	495,678	504,015	512,516	521,170
Operating Income	5,595,234	5,983,234	6,091,438	6,341,273	6,604,859	6,890,898	7,192,738	7,511,349	7,847,766	8,203,089	8,578,493	8,975,227
Operating expenditure	-4,321,767	-4,538,360	-4,800,720	-4,937,561	-5,081,165	-5,229,462	-5,382,623	-5,540,822	-5,704,240	-5,873,066	-6,047,498	-6,227,740
Operating Contribution	1,273,468	1,444,874	1,290,717	1,403,712	1,523,694	1,661,436	1,810,115	1,970,527	2,143,526	2,330,023	2,530,995	2,747,487
Planned project spend including maintenance (not Skell maintenance)			-1,019,480	-769,270	-1,214,204	-1,147,580	-1,509,680	-524,519	-549,608	-575,952	-20,000	-20,000
Skell project Mangement and Maintenance Plan (seek external funding 1st)			-2,021	-18,475	-3,572	-28,755	-3,950	-20,851	-12,917	-21,092	-5,676	-33,665
Balance			269,216	615,966	305,918	485,102	296,485	1,425,158	1,581,002	1,732,979	2,505,319	2,693,822
Notes: 1. The above does not include any overheads for regional or central resource sharing 2. Project spend plans for 2030 onwards are less developed than earlier years 3. Labour costs in the M&M Plan are met through Fountains operating expenditure ie current staffing												

Table 2: Income and expenditure for Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal maintenance commitments

6. Risks

RISK	RISK TYPE	IMPACT	LIKLIHOOD	MITIGATION
Management and Maintenance Plan not adopted and used	Human	Medium	Low	- World Heritage Advisory Group to hold NT to account and ensure interventions are maintained - NT Project Management Framework requires reviews 2 years and 5 years post project which will further hold to account and ensure benefits being realised and maintained - Relationships to be maintained with partners and NT will provide in-kind expertise and support where required
Lack of project knowledge; not all management and maintenance is undertaken	Human	Medium	Low	Project Ranger to transition into NT Ranger team and will provide peer to peer handover and training to colleagues.

				• A process for training new employees to be put into place to ensure continuity
Landowners fail to follow maintenance and management plan	Human	Medium	Medium	• NT to maintain ongoing relationships with landowners • NT to offer support where management/maintenance can be seen to be overlooked • NT to provide stockpiles of materials for use to encourage that maintenance tasks to be completed • Landowner agreements in place for a period of ten years (Appendix 4)
Lack of funding to undertake maintenance	Financial	High	Low	• Match funding contribution underspend to be allocated to fulfilling management and maintenance plan • Property reserves have been allocated to fund

				ongoing maintenance over maintenance period • NT will seek to engage donors and other funders to continue project legacy with further interventions
Skell Valley Task Force engagement or numbers diminish	Human	High	Low	• Regular provision of opportunities to ensure maintenance of numbers and interest • Continue to seek to recruit additional volunteers to supplement existing task force • In April/May when activities are harder to complete because of bird nesting/grass growth other activities outside of the Action Plan can be identified and a celebration event will be held with plans ahead to maintain interest

				• Legacy of project will help identify options to extend scope of task force and seek new opportunities for interventions and management
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Table 3: Risks

7. Monitoring

Review

The Plan will be a live document which should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis by the National Trust Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Property team. Accountability for the plan will sit with the World Heritage Advisory Group and a copy of the report will be provided to the National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee.

The National Trust Project Management Framework includes an End of Project Review after both year 2 and 5 of projects for the purposes of monitoring deliverables and project success. This will provide a further safeguard for ensuring that the plan is reviewed as it will fall as part of these processes.

Records

A log should be completed regularly to record the works undertaken over each year. The logbook can be reviewed and used to inform any amendments to the Maintenance and Management Plan. This will require relevant landowner permissions for access.

There is a master document (Appendix 5) of where all project documents are stored and available for open access under Creative Commons Attribution. Links will be checked annually to ensure that all documents remain accessible and any issues in availability will be rectified.

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Appendix 3

Appendix 4

Appendix 5