

CHARNWOOD FOREST REGIONAL PARK BOARD

Thursday 15th June 2023

Microsoft Teams Meeting

10am – 12pm

MINUTES

(The meeting was recorded for the purpose of the minutes)

Present:

John Everitt, National Forest Company (Vice-chair)	JE
Dr Jack Matthews, National Forest Company	JM
Julie Attard, Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme	JA
Sam Lattaway, National Forest Company	SL
Kirstie Rea, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council	KR
Graham Chilvers, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council	GC
Cllr Roy Denney, Leicestershire Local Access Forum	RD
Helen Smith, Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS)	HS
James Dymond, Bradgate Park Trust	JD
Vicky Cormie, Leicestershire County Council	VC
Mat Carter, CEO, LRWT	MC
Phil Jackson, Aggregate	PJ
Matthew Bradford, Charnwood Borough Council	MB
Cllr Ian Ashcroft, Charnwood Borough Council	IA
Katie Mills, Charnwood Borough Council	KM
Martin Peters, Leicestershire Promotions	MP
Maria Bates, Leicestershire County Council (Minutes)	MB

Apologies:

Cllr Avril Wilson, North West Leicestershire District Council	AW
James OBrien, Leicestershire County Council	JOB
John Howells, Leicestershire Local Access Forum	JH
Atul Patel, Independent Chair, LPS Steering Group	AP
Karl Hobson, Natural England	KH
Mark Fennell, Charnwood Borough Council	MF
Martin Peters, Leicestershire Promotions	MP
James Marshall, Natural England	JMa
Cllr Blake L. Pain, Leicestershire County Council	BP
Cllr Martin Cartwright, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council	MC
Wendy May, North West Leicestershire District Council	WM
Ian Nelson, North West Leicestershire District Council	IN

1	<u>Apologies</u> Apologies were noted as above.	
2	<u>Welcome and Introductions and any changes to membership</u>	

	<p>JE introduced himself and explained that he will be chairing the meeting today. He also thanked Richard Bailey for his time as Chair and his input into the group which has been most helpful with the work that has been done over the years.</p> <p>Introductions were made by all attendees and there were some new members who have joined the Board.</p> <p>JE briefed the Board on the focus of the meeting today which is to look at the progress of the Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) Project, particularly focussing on the next steps in relation to the Geopark and a number of other initiatives that are being moved forward.</p>	
3	<p><u>Minutes and Matters Arising</u></p> <p>The minutes from the last meeting on 8th March 2023 were agreed as a true record of the meeting</p> <p><u>Matters arising</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minerals Report Update: The report has been received and will be circulated along with the minutes of the meeting. Will need a small working group to look at some next steps and what it means. SL will get in touch with people before the next meeting. ▪ Legacy Committee: There was nothing to report from this meeting and a date for the next Committee is still to be arranged. Any updates can be circulated with these minutes. ▪ Geopark briefing for politicians to be arranged: This will be picked up with the Geopark timeline. 	<p>SL</p> <p>JA/MB</p>
4	<p><u>Steering the Landscape Partnership Scheme - JA</u></p> <p>JA shared a presentation and gave some additional background information about the project to new members of the Board.</p> <p>Action: A briefing document will be circulated with the minutes which will provide further details about the project.</p> <p>JA reported on the last few months of activity across the three schemes - (Explore, Understand and Care For Charnwood Forest); the mid-point review and the Charnwood Forest Geopark website which is being created.</p> <p>The following was noted from the presentation:</p> <p><u>Headline progress report on project delivery</u></p>	<p>JA/MB</p>

- Progress Summary: All 18 projects are now up and running with 56% of them on track. Any issues are being mitigated and to date 23% of the overall budget has been spent. Rebates from the Lottery are on track and there is 8.6% of Match Funding to raise which equates to approx £80,000.

Theme 1: Explore

This slide showed some of the work carried out during the last few months and these projects are focussed on: getting people out into the landscape; community engagement activities; supporting the visitor economy; and helping tourism and food producing businesses to promote their work and what they are doing.

The projects are:

- PROW Network which will connect Beacon Hill and Outwoods which are two of the honey pot sites. This will create a 10k route which is completely off road from the edge of Leicester and the edge of Loughborough.
- Accessible trail for Beacon Hill has been launched.
- 5 guided walks have been delivered during the National Forest Walking Festival.
- The Urban Forest in Loughborough which promotes the Charnwood Forest Geopark has welcomed 9,000 visitors over the last 6 months for creative activities, talks, exhibitions etc. and an outdoor programme of activities will follow.
- Home Farm is where a series of capital works have focussed on natural flood management which is helping to reduce flooding downstream in Loughborough. As part of the business development, support has been given to create some visitor facilities to host groups and schools.

Theme 2: Understand

These projects are designed to help people understand more about Charnwood Forest through the education work, community artwork and interpretation.

The slide described the activities that have been taking place over the past few months.

- Urban Forest Outdoor Programming at Outwoods.
- Education Programme – CPD grants have been taken up at primary and secondary level; Anglo-Saxon Poetry Writing competition.
- Community Orchards – Blossomfest in Anstey in April.
- Promotion of local foods and products through the Edible Forest 365 development and Geo product branding has started.

Theme 3: Care for Charnwood Forest

These projects focus on habitat creation and management and conservation activities both geological and habitat conservation. Progress over the last few months:

- The Charnwood spider has been found and the two-year spider survey has been completed.
- Launched the Geo-heritage conservation campaign with the 3 honey pot sites. The Geo-conservation volunteering group will be launched in the next few weeks.
- JM and JA attended the UK UNESCO Global Geopark Conference in Northern Ireland which will be discussed later in the meeting.
- An Apprentice Stone Waller has been recruited and will be based at Bradgate Park. Repairs will also be carried out in other sites across the forest and Leon will help to develop volunteer groups who can support stonewalling repairs.
- A Woodland Management Volunteering Group has been formed at Beacon Hill. JA explained the events that have been run to find out how the local community groups can be supported over the coming years.
Training sessions have been running to support the volunteering projects and conservation work.
- Community Heritage Grants have been awarded to Artspace and Charnwood Bird Ringers. Managing the Landscape Projects are under development.

Evaluation and Lottery Mid-term Review

- An independent assessment will be carried out for the work done so far which will look at the outcomes and objectives and whether they are being met.
- A meeting with the National Lottery Heritage Fund will take place in September to review the assessment. There will be an option at this point to extend the scheme for time lost due to Covid. A short extension may be recommended for the delivery of the project, (6-9 months) which will mean the project will run to the end of December 2025. A further 3 months will be required to tie up any loose ends therefore, an extension of 9-12 months may be required which will take us from July 2025 to Spring/Summer 2026.

Charnwood Forest Geopark Website Development Timeline

The website will also contain information about the LPS Projects and it will promote: Charnwood Forest as an area; the Geopark and the aspirations for UNESCO Global Geopark Status.

Key features and the website timeline were listed on the slide with 'Go Live' in September.

Comments:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JE acknowledged the work that has taken place. • Action JA: AP recommended that the Lottery logo etc is added to the website. • MP congratulated JA on the work that has been achieved. It was noted from JA that at the mid-point review the funders may want to arrange a series of visits to some of the projects therefore, colleagues may need to be available to support the visits and talk about the projects. JA will update in due course. • At the midpoint review the external consultants may want to speak to members on the Steering Group and some of the Project Leads. • The Evaluation Consultants are currently being appointed. <p>A discussion was held on whether there is anything that the Board can do to support the two projects with major issues. JA updated the Board that these are being mitigated and explained that they have moved to red due to capital works being delayed and will shift back to yellow in the next quarter.</p> <p>In relation to Match Funding and the project extension the following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All to let JA know if there are any opportunities for Match Funding. • The quarry companies will be approached which will bring in some additional Match Funding. • Conversations have taken place with James Dymond and Natural England around some of the stone walling funding that's needed for the conservation and interpretation work at Bradgate Park that may well off set some of the funds that would have been spent at Bradgate Park. <p>It was noted that Match Funding can be in the form of volunteer time and non-cash match as well as cash match. There is a certain amount of cash match that needs to be raised and this is the area that needs some focus. The non-cash match is in a reasonably good place.</p> <p>JA confirmed that the volunteer time that RD already has logged will help with the Match Funding as there is still 25% of the target to reach.</p> <p>JE acknowledged the work that's been done to get the project delivered and thanked all partners for their contributions.</p>	<p>JA</p> <p>All to note</p>
5	<p><u>Strategic Development of the Regional Park</u></p> <p><u>Global Geopark update</u> – Next steps: Funding the Independent Report and International Committee Visits; Update on Geofoods and Products</p>	

JM shared a presentation and updated the Board as follows:

- Working with JOB at LCC to put together some member briefings over the summer with an aim to provide at least one in-person and one online briefing for all the LA's involved with CFRP. Also considering providing a specific briefing for LA and partner officers. This is in progress and further information will follow.
- JM shared a geological map of the 152 square kilometres that covers the CFRP. The CFRP boundary is used for the Geopark boundary.
- JM explained that a Geopark is about celebrating Geodiversity and internationally significant geology; using it together with cultural heritage and biodiversity for the benefit of education and sustainable economic development.
- The Focus areas for Geopark status are:
Education - field trips for schools/colleges, the Riddle Competition and British Science Week.
Public Engagement: The slide showed a new artistic reconstruction of what the Ediacaran sea floor would have looked like 560 million years ago. (Ediacaran is the geological period that's well represented in Charnwood Forest). JM explained the background to how this artwork has been acquired.
- Geo Conservation: The Geo Conservation Campaign has been launched at the 3 honey pot sites and have been supporting Natural England in their work of auditing the many designated geological sites within Charnwood Forest. The Geopark Volunteer Programme can be found on the social media sites if anyone wishes to join.
- Sustainable Economic Development: All of this has to be for the betterment of local communities through sustainable economic development. The LPS and Geopark will pursue this by supporting the tourism and hospitality events industry and Geo-product brand. JM explained what the four core partners will be producing and there are other businesses who are interested in getting involved.
- UNESCO Global Geoparks: There are now 195 UNESCO Global Geoparks and the slide showed some examples of where they are in the world. JM referred to the Discovery Global Geopark in Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada which is our sister Geopark. This was launched last year and the sistership link can be used by organisations represented on this Board.
Newfoundland are interested in a Twinning Agreement with some of the villages and towns which will be an opportunity for cultural exchange, business partnerships and municipal agreements.

Timeline towards a UNESCO Global Geopark:
By Autumn 2024 will effectively be operating as a UNESCO Global Geopark. The website will be active; there will be sites for visiting; a Business Network which will increase investment in the local economies.

JM explained that if the dossier is submitted in Autumn 2025 to UNESCO and if successful in submitting in that year, there would then be an evaluation visit in 2026, with UNESCO Global Geopark status being confirmed around April/May 2027. This is the preferred timeline.

The slide included various activities which are likely to incur a cost which includes attendance at conferences, being a member of the Global Network, engaging with Geoparks around the world and paying for the 2 evaluators and their visits.

- All UK Geoparks need to have a UK evaluation to check they are ready to apply and JM feels that it would be beneficial to do this in Autumn next year. There is a cost but smaller to the international evaluation
- An independent report will need to be done due to the close proximity, (100 kilometres) of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark to say that the rocks at both sites are significantly different (which they are). Natural England have offered to do this for free and therefore there will be no costs incurred for the LPS or the Regional Park Partnership.
- JM is comfortable that the timeline can be fulfilled. It is important to note that there are some things that are out of our control that could affect the timeline. JM explained that there can only be two Geopark applications from one country in the system at one time, and once in the system, will remain in there for 18 months. There are four other aspiring Geoparks that have a UK connection, Jersey, Transmanche, Arran and Antrim. If two of those are accepted by the UK Committee to submit in 2024 there won't be an opening until 2026 and we will be pushed back a year. There may be some financial repercussions should this happen but will prepare and be ready for 2025.

JM will provide more details in the Summer briefing.

JE acknowledged the presentation and the support internationally from the work that's being done.

Comments:

- It was noted from RD that BDC have one field of the forest which is not represented and there are aspirations to be a hub for visitors to the forest.

JM explained that it might be useful for all the partners to re-assert their commitments to the UK Global Geopark aspirations. e.g LA's passing motion that they support the Global Geopark application and recognise that there are two LA's who aren't recognised in the Regional Park who have small areas within the Regional Park boundary. JM suggested having a letter of support from the two LA's. This would help with the UK Committee and be very useful when the dossier is being prepared for UNESCO.

Action JM: JM offered to prepare the documents and any supporting elements in expectation of supporting letters and motions.

- MP asked if there should be a schedule of unavoidable costs that can't be funded through the Landscape Partnership Scheme and are likely to be incurred as the process progresses so funding can be identified prior to the costs coming through.

JM explained that the costs and estimates are being brought together as part of the Legacy Committee. Initial discussions have already started about the potential sources for the funding, both for the costs pre 2025 that can't be in the LPS and also thinking about the long term as UNESCO will want to see a financial plan for the next 5 years.

Action: The Legacy Committee can report back to this Board at the next meeting.

JE agreed with this way forward.

JM reminded the Board that part of the work to raise the profile of Charnwood Forest as a standing place of international significant geological heritage and also to bring further investment into the region, a bid has been successful to host the International Symposium for Pro Geo which is the International Association for the Conservation of Geological Heritage.

JM thanked CBC for hosting the event which takes place 9th-11th October 2023 in the Town Hall. The event includes field trips to Bradgate Park for all delegates, additional field trips around the Geopark and a pre-conference field trip to the UNESCO Global Geopark in the Black Country. Delegates have registered from all around the world which will raise the profile of Charnwood Forest and is a major investment for the region. This would not have happened without the LPS.

There will be an opportunity for Board Members to join the conference Ice Breaker Reception and invitations will be sent out nearer the time.

JE summarised the following:

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JM

- Progress reporting from the Legacy Committee and where they've got to for the next meeting.
- Briefings for Councillors and other organisation will be key in the timeline to ensure they are aware of the process, financial commitments, implications etc.

Tourism Strategy – Building on the mapping work already done to identify visitor economy gaps and opportunities in the context of the Geopark and Landscape Character Assessment and how we move forward with a plan (Presentation and discussion – SL)

- SL briefed the Board on the review of existing accommodation and tourism attractions within the Charnwood Forest area and this also included where there were any gaps.

A discussion was held on the opportunities so far and the slide listed some questions to structure the conversation to start thinking about whether a Tourism Strategy is needed for the Charnwood Forest Geopark (see slide). It was noted that this sits outside of the remit for the LPS.

Comments:

- MP asked whether there is an actual need for a Tourism Strategy for the Charnwood Forest? The reason for this is there is currently an overload in relation to strategies in the tourism field and will need to think about what is actually needed and what's the outcome that's being looked for? E.g. increased overnight stays; increase day visits and what is it we'd would like to see in 5 years that's different from today? This could then help to understand what the document needs to look like.
- It was noted that RD doesn't see the need for a strategy or plan other than a product which makes all the partners and other tourism organisations around the fringes include the Geopark when they're promoting their areas. This exercise is worth while to explore what needs to be done.

JE invited Board members to comment on how to take forward some of the work that's been done to date, particularly how to build on the audit work that's been done or some of the contextual work that might be needed as part of the Geopark discussions.

JE suggested to have a small group to give some thought about what sort of strategic context to put the work into that's been done to date.

In summary, JE agreed that whatever the objectives and the outcomes, this would help to steer in one direction. The idea that some of the outcomes from existing strategies from either districts or others would give a real focus on deliverables and some of that could probably feed into the legacy work from the LPS and highlight some of the things that still need to be delivered and

	<p>aspirations that might be tied into the next funding round. Also think about how to start to coordinate some of that effort in relation to the Geopark.</p> <p>Action: Feedback at the next meeting.</p>	<p>SL/JE</p>
<p>6</p>	<p><u>Partner Updates</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Work</u></p> <p>SL briefed the Board on the Midlands Forest Network and the following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a partnership of the National Forest Company, Woodland Trust and the Midlands Engine Observatory. • Looking at a 2 year project to look at the feasibility of creating a network of woodland and forestry projects across the whole Midlands. Some of the existing partnerships are the National Forest, Charnwood, Sherwood, Wyre Forest etc. • The idea is to get the network of all the projects working and talking together to share best practice, support each other, reduce duplication of effort etc. • The main ambition is whether physical connections between the projects can be mapped to start to identify linear routes where habitat creation, tree planting can either create corridors or stepping stones at a regional level. • This has never been tried in quite this way in the country and just waiting for final approval on funding. • The intention is to have a project team of 2.5 fte in place by late summer who will be hosted by the National Forest Company and Midlands Engine. • The next step is to engage as many different partners as possible in the network, talk to the forestry projects and also identify the communities in between who can benefit from the network, more access to green space etc. • The idea is also identifying a pipeline of fundable projects. Different partners around the region will be able to take these projects and fund raise for them. This could be the Lottery or whomever they want and start delivering their parts of the network. <p>Action SL: Update at the next meeting</p> <p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RD acknowledged this idea in particular to the connectivity to wildlife. <p><u>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</u></p>	<p>SL</p>

	<p>VC updated the Board as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCC are expecting to be appointed as the responsible authority for producing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Waiting to receive the letter from government confirming this and the funding that will be made available. In the meantime, currently out to recruit for a project manager for the LNRS and hoping to have the interviews in early July. • There is an online information event planned for the 30th June 10.00-12.00pm which is open to anyone that's interested in applying. The link was added to Teams meeting. • Just starting to think about formalising governance structures, memberships and looking at developing engagement and communication plans. Will then start to work on the project plans and profile the budget. <p><u>Planning</u></p> <p>There were no planning updates for the Board</p> <p>KM updated the Board the status of Charnwood's Local Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The examination hearing sessions are now complete • A letter has been received from the inspector on 23rd May asking CBC to publish four more pieces of evidence which have already been discussed as part of the hearing sessions. • A date needs to be agreed for the consultation with the inspectorate, which should be over the summer period. 	
7	<p><u>Project development</u></p> <p><u>Discuss and approve proposed amendments to Terms of Reference and membership of Charnwood Forest Regional Park Board (paper – HS)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some work has been done with a small group and JOB has gone through the ToR as they currently stand. Everyone should have received a document with the proposed changes which include: making the ToR reflect more closely the work of the partnership; review the membership so there is absolute clarity of who is a member and who can vote; how information is shared from the Board with the wider stakeholders. <p>The Board were invited for comments on the ToR and they were agreed by the Board.</p> <p>Action: HS will circulate the final version to the Board</p> <p><u>Start process for election of new Chair of the Board by Autumn 2023</u></p>	HS

	<p>Historically it's been the intention that the Chair is an Elected Member and volunteers have been sought from the Members to put themselves forward.</p> <p>Action: JOB will write from the County Council to seek a volunteer for a Chair and this will be brought to the next meeting for approval.</p>	JOB
8	<p><u>Dates of future meetings</u></p> <p><u>Stakeholder Forum to be planned for October 2023</u></p> <p>The last meeting of the Forum was March 2022. JE is happy to work around the meeting date in October and hold a CFRB meeting in September 2023 in advance of the Forum meeting.</p> <p>JD agreed with this approach and suggested also having an interim meeting.</p> <p><u>Agree a schedule for the next two meetings</u></p> <p>Action: Arrange meetings for September 2023 and January 2024</p>	MB
9	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>RD updated that the guide to the forest that he's been working on is nearly complete.</p> <p>JA updated in relation to replicating the Forest in the shop unit as in Loughborough. Currently in the process of doing an evaluation of the Urban Forest and pulling together all the things that will help to make a decision about what can be done and at what scale. The Urban Forest was a good showcase but was also quite expensive, therefore will need to balance this against other things that's being delivered within the LPS. There will be some type of activities in Coalville and Leicester but not sure on what scale yet.</p> <p>JM made the Board aware of a potential opportunity. They've been contacted by Historic England (HE) who work with local partners in Charnwood Forest, particularly the Buildings Conservation team at H&BBC. They have been looking at the issues in relation to the lack of supply of Swithland Slates and are interested in looking at the potential for a project to investigate the history and sites in which Swithland slate was extracted to better understand potential sources, either reused or a small kind of micro-extraction for supporting the conservation of historic buildings which contain the slate. This would be for the betterment of all LA's and regions across Charnwood Forest Geopark.</p>	

	<p>Further conversations will take place with HE and there may be potential for some funding from HE to support this. JM will keep the Board updated.</p>	
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	<p>It was noted from MP that applications for the Tourism Awards is open.</p>	
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