

Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership



LOTTERY FUNDED

Charnwood Forest is England's 'unexpected upland'. Having been created in a volcanic eruption 600 million years ago in the oceans near the South Pole, Charnwood has developed rich layers of heritage. Its landscape is defined by granite-topped hills, wooded valleys, heathlands and grasslands. Its shaded lanes reveal Arts and Craft cottages, ancient monasteries and drystone walls. It is a surprising outpost of upland England in lowland Leicestershire.

But, despite being on the doorstep of cities, towns and villages, its value and beauty are hidden from most communities and have been overlooked for protected status. This puts it at risk: if people are not passionate about Charnwood Forest, they will not understand its importance and, ultimately, the features that make it special risk being forgotten and lost.

So the story of Charnwood needs to be told: celebrating its internationally important geology, connecting people to its history and securing its sustainable future.





What makes Charnwood Forest special?

Over 600 million years, Charnwood Forest has built up layers of heritage that make it so unique:

Geology & Fossils

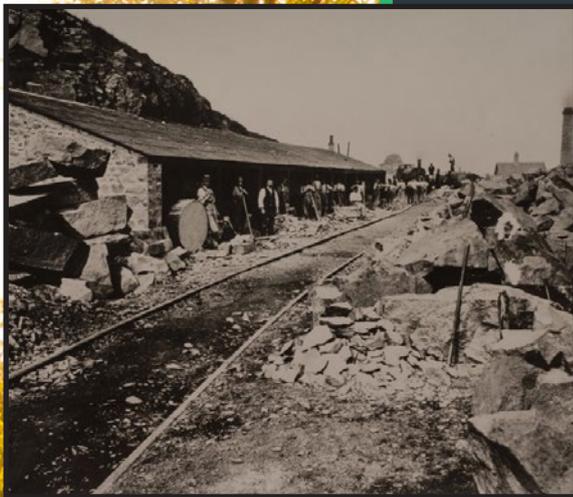
The volcanic rocks of Charnwood are some of the oldest in England, having been created 600 million years ago in the southern oceans, and contain evidence that caused us to rethink how life evolved on our planet. In 1957, a fossil was found which proved that complex life forms existed much earlier than previously thought. Named *Charnia masoni*, it is of international importance and has subsequently been found in only a handful of locations on Earth.



Landscape & wildlife

Charnwood Forest is a unique landscape, marked out by its volcanic geology. Its rugged, granite outcrops crown hilltops which rise steeply from the relatively flat landscape of Leicestershire. As a result of its geology, Charnwood contains a wealth of nationally and internationally important biodiversity and geodiversity. Despite covering less than 10% of Leicestershire, Charnwood Forest contains more than 50% of its Sites of Special Scientific Interest (by area) and 67% of its designated areas for geodiversity.





Human activity & influence

Recent archaeological investigations at Bradgate Park have identified evidence of Palaeolithic hunter gatherers dating back 15,000 years. Since then, humans have had a profound influence on the landscape of Charnwood Forest, from the establishment of priories in the 12th Century and the Medieval clearance of woodland to build villages, through to the growth of quarrying and creation of The National Forest.



Social history, stories & folklore

Charnwood Forest has a rich social history: Lady Jane Grey, Queen of England for just nine days in 1553, was born at Bradgate House; Beaumanor Hall was a WWII Signals Intelligence collection site, gathering enemy communications to pass to Bletchley Park; and a young David Attenborough's enthusiasm for the natural world was fuelled by exploring Charnwood Forest.

But it's an area under pressure

Charnwood Forest is a unique and important landscape. Its unexpected nature is one of its strengths; but it is also a critical weakness. Many of the people who live, work and play in Charnwood are not aware of its value. They drive through on the M1, walk the dog at a country park or visit local pubs without noticing the layers of heritage around and beneath them. If they don't know about its importance, it's hardly surprising that they are unaware of the pressure it is under.

Growth

Unlike many sensitive landscapes, Charnwood Forest is ringed by towns and cities. Population forecasts for the next 20 years indicate that the number of people living around Charnwood is likely to grow at a faster rate than the national average. To accommodate these new residents, there is growing pressure to build homes for them to live in. The majority of these new homes will be built around the edge of Charnwood Forest, but there is the risk that the Forest becomes completely surrounded by development.

Visitors

While future growth of the local population is a cause for concern, there are already over 1.5 million people living within half an hour's drive of Charnwood Forest. Much of the visitor pressure in Charnwood is focused on a few 'honey-pot' sites such as Bradgate Park, Beacon Hill and the Outwoods. However, each of these is a valuable habitat in its own right and growing visitor numbers are starting to impact on their wildlife. While Charnwood has a network of footpaths and bridleways, this network has gaps in key locations and these gaps make it difficult to move people beyond the honey-pot sites to explore the wider landscape. If we cannot spread the visitor pressure more evenly, our key sites may be damaged.





Heritage loss

The natural and cultural heritage that makes Charnwood Forest so important is in decline. As far back as the 1970s, a report was published which identified that habitats were being lost to development or poor management. Sadly, this is still true 40 years later, with a lack of proper management being a key risk factor. Alongside this, the skills that maintained the characteristic buildings and structures of the area are becoming less common. This is clearly demonstrated in the decline of Charnwood's drystone walls: a key part of the local character but increasingly difficult and expensive to maintain due to a lack of skilled drystone wallers. If these declines are not reversed, there is a danger that this heritage is lost.

If these problems are not addressed, there is a risk that the very things that make Charnwood Forest so special are gradually lost by attrition. Eventually all that could be left is its name on a map because, as Sir David Attenborough says:

“No one will protect what they don’t care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”



What are we doing about it?

To prevent this, we need to encourage the diverse communities within and around Charnwood Forest to explore its landscape. We need to provide everyone with opportunities to benefit from what Charnwood has to offer. We need to put in place the infrastructure to enable people to move about Charnwood more easily and safely. We need to provide priority routes from our towns to allow people to reach Charnwood by means other than their cars. We need to manage the numbers of visitors to Charnwood in a way which deepens their experience while spreading the load in a way that minimises impacts to our key sites.

We need to tell the stories of Charnwood Forest in ways that engage and enthral, that connect people with their local environment and their local history, and which make them passionate about Charnwood. We need to support schools in teaching young people about the volcano that lies on their doorstep and find new ways to make 600 million years of history come alive in a way that is relevant in the 21st century.

We need to provide local people and communities with the skills to become actively engaged in Charnwood Forest. From training in heritage skills that will enable them to get involved in managing its heritage, to wildlife identification courses that allow local people to participate in recording its biodiversity. There are lots of ways that people can become involved, and we need to provide the skills, capacity and coordination to enable them to do so.

Finally, we need to make it all sustainable. We need a Forest that can look after itself, where the local economy thrives and puts investment back into the landscape that supports it. We need local groups who have the capacity and structures to seek their own funding and make their own decisions for the future. And we need to engage with new development in and around Charnwood Forest in sensitive ways and grow new industries hand in hand with heritage.





Landscape Partnership Scheme

To bring about this major change in how we protect, manage and celebrate the heritage of Charnwood Forest, the partners in the Charnwood Forest Regional Park submitted a bid to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a Landscape Partnership Scheme.

The Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme will celebrate the area's internationally important volcanic legacy. It will enable and encourage people to explore its rich landscape and diverse heritage. It will provide deeper engagement for residents and visitors, while contributing to the local economy. It will coordinate management at a landscape scale to make Charnwood's heritage more resilient to growing pressures.

Most importantly, it will create a greater sense of local pride, inspiring communities to restore the character of this special place: 'Made by volcanoes, shaped by people'.

Bidding for a Landscape Partnership Scheme is a two-stage process. We submitted our Round 1 application in May 2017 and were delighted to receive a first round pass from HLF the following October.

We are now in a two-year Development Phase, during which we will undertake studies to provide key information and to work up the detail of how our projects will be delivered. All of this will contribute to the production of a Landscape Conservation Action Plan, which will form the core of a Round 2 bid.

Subject to this being approved, we will then have funding to deliver a 5-year programme of works, activities and engagement.

What will the Scheme do?

The Landscape Partnership Scheme is made up of a range of projects that will be delivered by partners across the landscape of Charnwood Forest. We have taken Sir David Attenborough's quote as inspiration for how we structured the project and, as a result, we have grouped them under the following themes: 'Explore Charnwood', 'Understand Charnwood' and 'Care for Charnwood'. This will ensure that every project is contributing to our broad strategic aims for Charnwood Forest.

Explore Charnwood

We will create a 'sense of place' through signage, access and welcoming features so that diverse audiences can get there, get around, enjoy the heritage, benefit their health and well-being, travel more sustainably and stay longer to contribute more to the local economy.

- **'Charnwood trails'**: Improving priority rights of way and creating links to provide a joined up network of clear, themed, guided and self-guided walks and cycle routes from urban centres and honey-pot sites. We will improve links from Leicester and Loughborough into the heart of Charnwood Forest.
- **'Choose how you travel'**: Guides and support for getting into and around Charnwood by rail, bus, cycling and walking.
- **'The volcano on your doorstep'**: A community outreach project which will excite and engage people within and around Charnwood. We will include specific outreach to communities with high deprivation, BAME communities, disabled people and older people.
- **'A warm welcome'**: We will provide a high quality experience for visitors by: offering advice and support for small-scale tourism facilities; improving the quality and welcoming nature of sites; and resolving conflicting uses. We will also pilot approaches to generating income to reinvest in the management of the area's heritage.





Understand Charnwood

We will bring Charnwood's heritage to life by engaging people to unearth its stories and make sure they are researched, developed, understood and catalogued. We will then interpret them in accessible and innovative ways to a range of audiences, engendering greater appreciation of the importance of Charnwood Forest, creating a greater sense of community pride and bringing new audiences and visitors.

- **'Unearthing what's special about Charnwood':** Encouraging and enabling people to explore and research Charnwood Forest's rich layers of heritage. Building on the successful Charnwood Roots project, we will enthuse, train and support local communities to research their buildings, wildlife, stories and traditions together with industrial, farming and military heritage. We will work with universities and local history groups to explore key sites for archaeology.
- **'Celebrating Charnwood':** Engaging people through a variety of art forms and events to record and celebrate local heritage, stories and traditions. We will build local pride, sense of place and create strong 'brand' for Charnwood Forest. We will establish links with similar geological areas around the world and explore the feasibility of future GeoPark status for Charnwood.
- **'Fire your imagination':** Engaging communities in developing an exciting range of interpretive media across all types of heritage for a broad audience. We will focus on Charnwood's volcanic past and seek to develop an innovative "wow factor" piece of animated interpretation, which allows people to see how Charnwood may have looked at this and other points in its history. We will use appropriate technology, with displays in key visitor centres and using mobile devices. We will also create a new "one-stop shop" website for heritage across Charnwood Forest.
- **'Charnwood foods and products':** We will bring together local suppliers, agree appropriate branding, support marketing strategies and business plans. This will allow customers to identify with Charnwood, build pride and support the local economy.
- **'Learning landscape':** A landscape heritage education programme including linking schools with local heritage sites and using school grounds for habitat improvements and as a teaching resource.

Care for Charnwood

We will provide a step change in the restoration of Charnwood's heritage and put more sustainable management practices into place through organisations working together, use of community enterprise and volunteering, income generation and improved training and skills.

- **'Restoring a volcanic legacy'**: Through these projects we will actively restore and enhance representative heritage features on key sites.
- **'A coherent wildlife network'**: A "bigger, better, more joined up" approach, linking up and extending out from the areas where the best wildlife habitats remain.
- **'Built from volcanoes'**: Focusing on Charnwood's distinctive built heritage, prioritising those buildings at risk that are publicly accessible/visible. We will help owners explore sustainable uses for derelict buildings and find other funding sources to restore them.
- **'Charnwood rocks'**: Interpreting important fossil sites and protecting them by means which prevent vandalism but are sensitive to their setting. We will clear views of and from rocky outcrops so that people can see and access more of the geological evidence of the volcanic past.
- **'Resilient honey-pot sites'**: Bradgate Park, Beacon Hill and the Outwoods are the most visited sites in Charnwood Forest. We will enhance their welcome, improve facilities and support co-ordinated management and interpretation. Visitors will then be encouraged to explore more of Charnwood through sustainable means of travel.
- **Charnwood Forest volunteers'**: A co-ordinated volunteer initiative linking new and existing volunteering opportunities in the area. This will enable visitors and communities to play an active role in research, interpretation and physical restoration of a range of heritage sites and features.
- **'Heritage skills training programme'**: Creating a co-ordinated programme of heritage skills training, linking in with current provision. To include dry-stone walling, traditional building techniques, hedge laying, woodland management, grassland and wetland habitat management, geology and wildlife recording.
- **'Friends of the volcano'**: Co-ordinating the development of a network of local community interest/friends of groups, providing and signposting them to advice, training and grants to improve skills and build capacity.
- **'Community heritage advice and grants scheme'**: Offering small grants for communities to restore, research, celebrate, access and interpret their local heritage.
- **'Managing the landscape'**: A grant scheme for farmers and landowners to fund the enhancement of boundaries (e.g. dry-stone walls), habitats, buildings, archaeology and access, while supporting diversification options. These will complement existing grants, such as Countryside Stewardship.

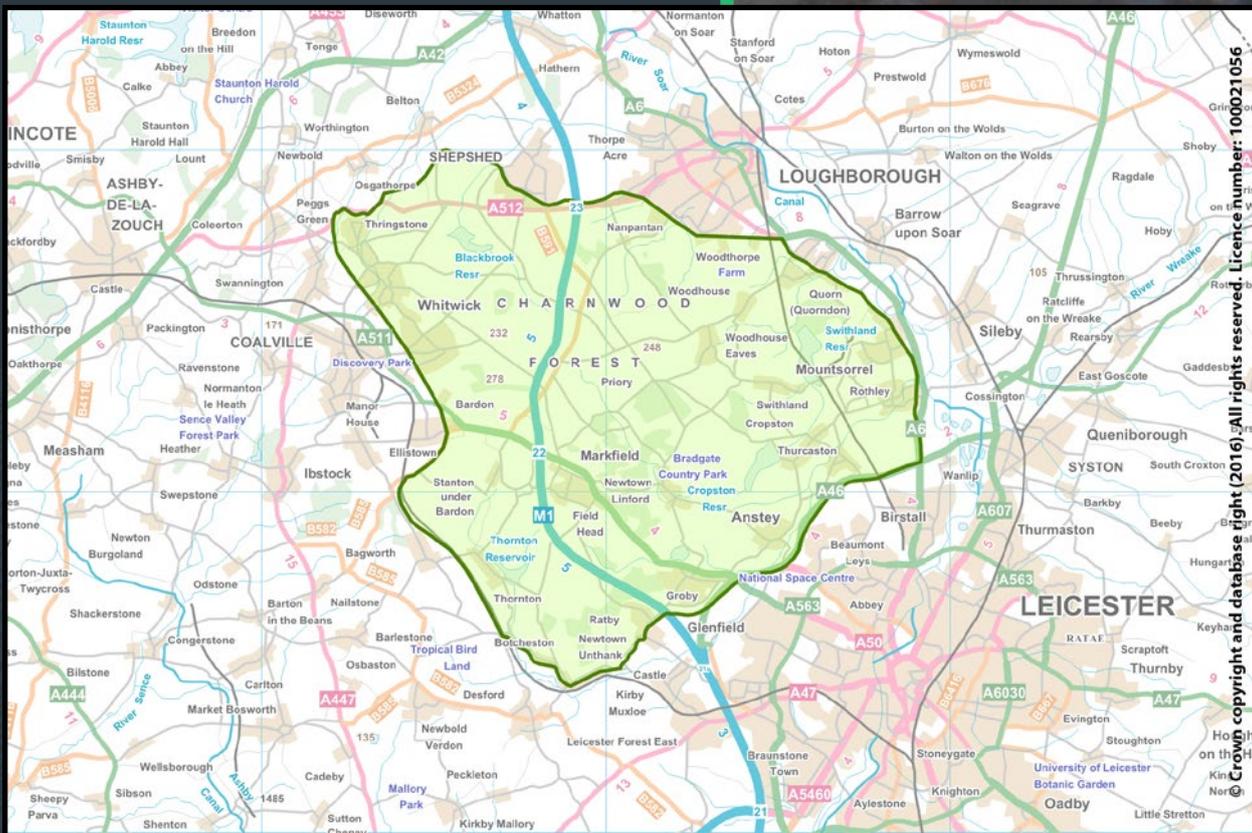




Project area

The Charnwood Forest Regional Park was established in 2012 to co-ordinate the protection and management of this important landscape. It has a wide range of stakeholders from local communities, businesses and landowners together with representatives of heritage groups, local authorities, arts groups, charities and government bodies. The partnership is led by a Board which is currently chaired by Charnwood Borough Council.

The boundary of the Regional Park is shown on the map below.



Project partners

The co-ordination of the Landscape Partnership Scheme is being led by the National Forest Company with financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Leicestershire County Council, Charnwood Borough Council, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, North West Leicestershire District Council and Natural England.

It is overseen by a Steering Group comprising delivery partners and stakeholders in the scheme, with contributions from a wide range of landowners, communities and organisations.





Timeline

Having been successful in our Round 1, we now have until 31 October 2019 to produce our Landscape Conservation Action Plan (LCAP) and submit a Round 2 application to HLF.

During this time we will be undertaking three broad tasks:

- Gathering information, filling gaps in knowledge and producing Part 1 of the LCAP
- Partnership building and ongoing community engagement
- Detailed project development for the Round 2 application and completion of the LCAP

If our Round 2 application is approved, we will begin a 5-year delivery period in 2020.

Budget

We have calculated the total cost of the scheme to be approximately £3.9 million. As part of the Landscape Partnership Scheme, partners are expected to provide a proportion of the funding as 'match' against Heritage Lottery Funds grant.

The table below sets out the proposed budget for both the Development Phase and the 5-year delivery stage.

Development phase	£242,004
Delivery phase	£3,633,525
Total project value	£3,875,256
<i>Match funding from partners</i>	£931,547
HLF funding request	£2,943,709

Could you be involved?

Given that this year is the 60th anniversary of the discovery of the fossil that gives them their name, now is the time to tell the story of Charnwood. If you want to know more about the project, visit our website or follow us on Facebook. If you would like to get involved in any of the projects included in the bid, please email us and we will add you to our mailing list for future information.

Find out more

Visit: www.charnwoodforest.org

Email: charnwoodbid@nationalforest.org



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FOREST**

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