

Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme Prospectus



Charnwood Forest has a remarkable geological story that dates back nearly 600 million years, and is home to some of the oldest animal fossils ever described. Its ancient rocks have created a mosaic of wildlife-rich habitats and distinctive landscapes, shaped across the centuries by its communities. Today much of this remarkable heritage is hidden from all but the most inquisitive and is increasingly at serious risk of diminishing to the point that it is lost.

The Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme is now enabling partners, communities, and businesses across the region to celebrate and promote learning about our unique heritage, support sustainable geotourism, and protect local sites.

The Scheme celebrates Charnwood Forest's internationally important geological legacy through eighteen interconnected projects. These projects are inspiring people to explore its rich landscape, understand its diverse heritage, and develop skills to care for it whilst also enabling the partnership to coordinate management at landscape scale and finally secure the future of this extraordinary place.





What makes Charnwood Forest special?

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

Geology and Fossils

Charnwood Forest is Britain's unexpected upland. Having begun its journey nearly 600 million years ago in the seas of the southern hemisphere, this very special region has continued to develop rich layers of heritage. We are home to some of the oldest animal fossils ever described and have quarries whose stone has shaped not only our quiet villages, but also many English cities. Our landscape is defined by crag-topped hills, wooded valleys, heathlands, and grasslands. Shaded lanes reveal Arts and Craft cottages, ancient monasteries, and drystone walls.

Landscape & wildlife

Charnwood Forest is a unique landscape, marked out by its 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 create new 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.”

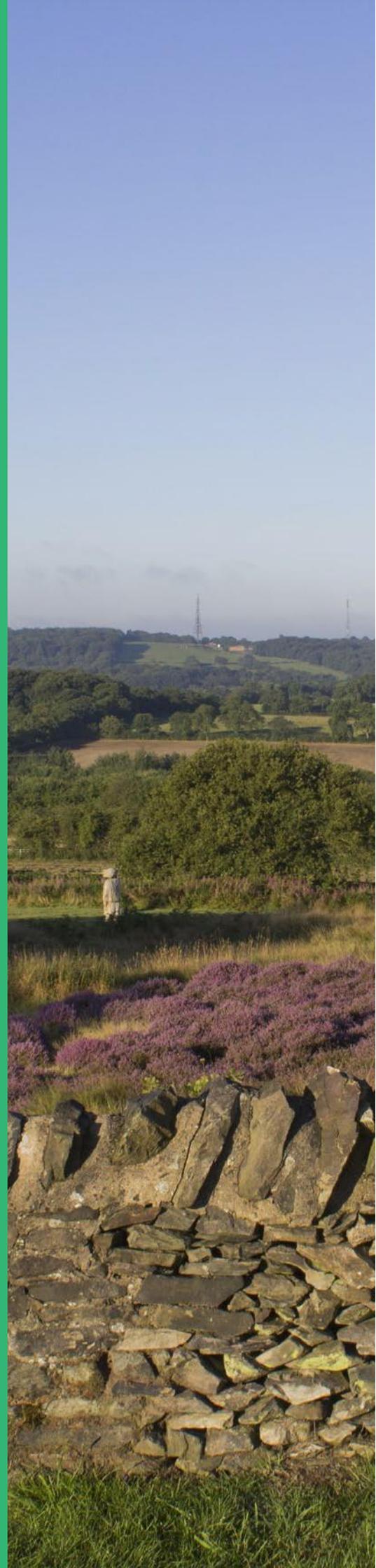
What are we doing about it?

To prevent this, we need to encourage the diverse communities within and around Charnwood Forest Geopark to explore and understand its landscape. We need to provide everyone the same 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 makes them passionate about Charnwood. We need to support schools in teaching young people about the amazing landscape 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 Geopark. 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 that they need 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 Partnership submitted a bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for a Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS). This bid was successful and secured £3.73 million of funding to deliver a five-year programme of works, activities and engagement.

The Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme celebrates the area's internationally important geological legacy. It enables and encourages people to explore its rich landscape and diverse heritage. It provides deeper engagement for residents and visitors, while contributing to the local economy. It coordinates management at a landscape scale to make Charnwood's heritage more resilient to growing pressures.

Most importantly, it creates a greater sense of local pride, inspiring communities to restore the character of this special place.

The Scheme commenced on 1st July 2020 and we are now recruiting members of the LPS Delivery team who will support the Partnership to deliver the Scheme.

The Scheme is being hosted and led by the National Forest Company and delivered by a Partnership which includes the following organisations:

Active Together
Bradgate Park Trust
British Geological Survey
Charnwood Arts
Charnwood Borough Council
Environment Agency
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council
Leicestershire County Council
Leicestershire Local Access Forum
Leicestershire Promotions
Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
National Farmers Union
The National Forest Company
Natural England
North West Leicestershire District Council
Soar Catchment Partnership
Voluntary Action Leicestershire

What does the Scheme do?

The Landscape Partnership Scheme is made up of a range of projects that are being 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.
- **'Charnwood Forest on your doorstep'**: A community outreach project to enable a wider range of people to engage with Charnwood's landscape and heritage. The project includes roadshows, events, digital participation, and an intensive heritage and health programme involving a small number of target groups and individuals with physical disabilities, limited mobility, or moderate mental health difficulties.
- **'A warm welcome'**: Providing a high-quality experience for visitors by improving small-scale tourism facilities, the quality and welcome of sites and the coherence of the visitor offer. This will include a training and support programme for SMEs operating in the tourism sector. Visitor information hubs will be created at 15 sites across the Forest and a new website will provide a one-stop shop for visitors to find out about the Forest.





Understand Charnwood

We will bring Charnwood's heritage to life by engaging people to unearth and record its history. We will interpret heritage in accessible and innovative ways, engendering greater appreciation of the importance of Charnwood Forest, creating a sense of community pride and bringing new audiences and visitors.

- **'Unearthing what's special about Charnwood':**

We will encourage and enable people to explore and research Charnwood's history and archaeology.

We will support landscape surveys, community digs and archival research to discover, record, analyse and share Charnwood's economic, social and cultural history.

- **'Celebrating Charnwood':** Engaging people through a variety of art forms and events to record and celebrate local heritage, stories and traditions. This will include projects with community groups, online collaborations with other global sites with Ediacaran fossils and participation in the National Forest Timber Festival. We will develop participatory community arts projects which help the public to engage with decision-making about Charnwood, its management, and its future.

- **'Learning landscape':** An outdoor learning programme which develops facilities in primary, secondary, special schools and community spaces. This will include training in outdoor learning for teachers, Forest School networking events and an education pack linked the National Curriculum to teach children about the formation of Charnwood's landscape.

- **'Fire your imagination':** This project will bring Charnwood's geoheritage to life for new audiences through innovative digital interpretation and performances. We will also create new interpretation for at least 15 hub sites around the Forest. Finally, we will help partners to create and coordinate their interpretation through a new interpretive framework and guidelines.

- **'Charnwood foods and products':** We will map, celebrate and support the creation and management of the Edible Forest, including community orchards. We will deliver 3 sustainable food projects focussing on food waste, food production and food heritage. We will support producers to help them identify how they can use Charnwood's heritage to develop and market new products.

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 partnership working, use of community enterprise and volunteering, and improved training and skills. This will help make the landscape more resilient in the face of current threats and growth pressures and grow a committed and trained group of supporters to care for it in future.

- **'A coherent wildlife network'**: A bigger, better, more joined up approach to managing Charnwood Forest, linking up and extending out from the central area where the best wildlife habitats remain. This will bring grassland habitats into management, create better connectivity across woodland blocks and deliver natural flood management improvements.

- **'Charnwood rocks'**: This project will address principal threats to Charnwood's increasingly vulnerable geoheritage and re-build capacity for geoheritage conservation to secure a sustainable future for some of the world's most important sites. It will include a systematic audit of fossil sites, a conservation research project to establish the best methods to care for them and lay foundations for an application to UNESCO for Global GeoPark status.

- **'Stone Walls'**: This project will investigate and map the condition of Charnwood's stone walls in order to better understand their complex construction and establish how best to care for them. This will include a Citizen Science project, a specialist lichen survey and an apprenticeship programme.

- **'Charnwood Forest volunteers'**: A coordinated volunteer initiative to grow and support a committed team of volunteers actively caring for Charnwood. This will trial new approaches to volunteering and build capacity amongst local community groups to help them adapt and develop flexible volunteering opportunities.

- **'Charnwood Forest Ambassadors'**: Coordinating the development of a network of local community groups and stakeholders, providing and signposting them to advice, training and grants to improve skills and build capacity.

- **'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 accessibility, and support coordinated management and interpretation.

- **'Heritage skills training programme'**: Creating a coordinated programme of heritage skills training, linked to current provision, including stone walling, hedge laying, woodland and heathland management, wildlife recording, geology, landscape surveying and wood crafts.

- **'Community heritage advice and grants'**: 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 enhancement of boundaries, habitats, buildings, archaeology and access, while supporting diversification options.





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 the Regional Park Board which is currently chaired by Charnwood Borough Council.

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

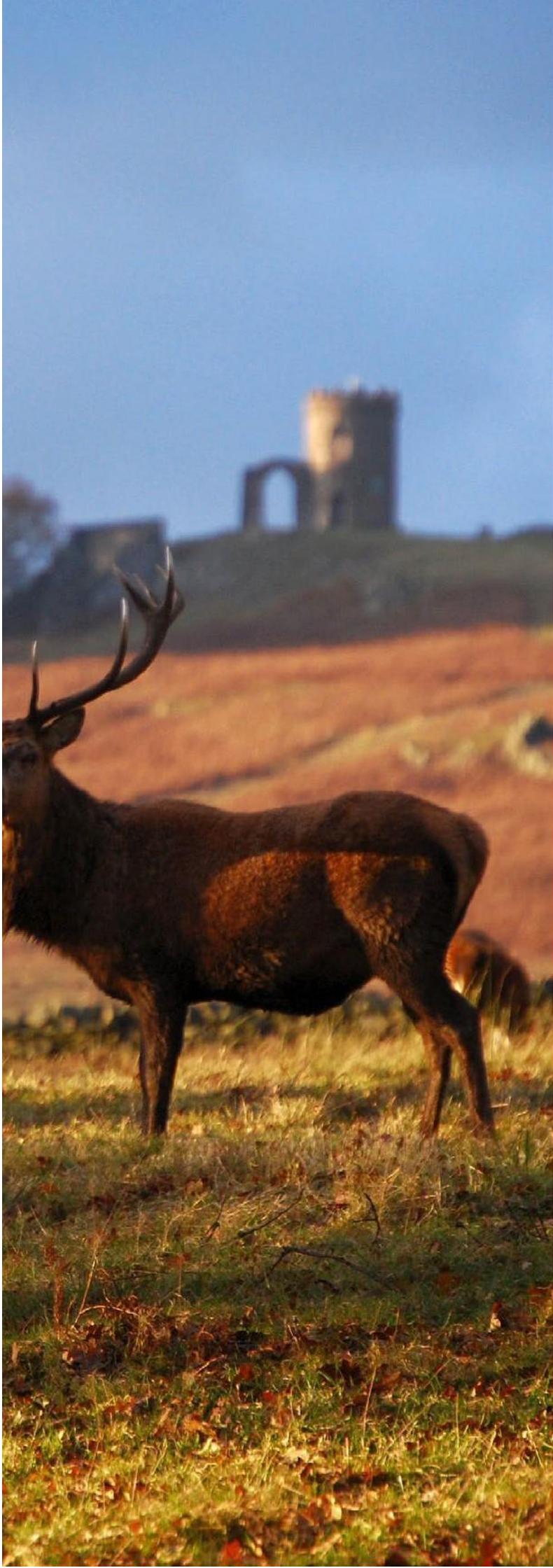


Project partners

The co-ordination of the Landscape Partnership Scheme is being led by the National Forest Company with financial and in kind support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Partner organisations (see p.9).

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

The Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme commenced on 1st July 2020 and will run for five years, finishing on 30th June 2025.

Budget

The total cost of the five-year delivery phase of the Landscape Partnership Scheme is £3.73 million. As part of the Scheme, partners are expected to provide a proportion of the funding as 'match' against the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant.

NLHF funding	£2,786,800
Match funding from partners	£953,176
Total project value	£3,739,976

Could you be involved?

Now is the time to tell the story of Charnwood. If you want to know more about the project, contact us. If you would like to get involved in any of the projects included in the Scheme, please email us and we will add you to our mailing list for future information.

Find out more

Visit: www.charnwoodforest.org

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**THE NATIONAL
FOREST**

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