

Oadby & Wigston Borough Council

**Natural Discovery Volunteer
Development Project**

Heritage Lottery Evaluation Report



Oadby & Wigston
BOROUGH COUNCIL

| Contents | Page |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Executive summary | 3 |
| 2. Background information | 4 |
| 3. Aims of the Project | 4 |
| 4. The Project Board | 4 |
| 5. The Friends of Brocks Hill | 5 |
| 6. Funding | 6 |
| 7. Achievements | |
| 7.1. Lead Volunteers | 7 |
| 7.2. Electric Vehicle | 8 |
| 7.3. Tools and Equipment | 8 |
| 7.4. Training | 8 |
| 7.5. Volunteering Hours | 11 |
| 7.6. Approved Purposes | 12 |
| 8. Photographic Evidence | |
| 8.1. Fludes Lane | 14 |
| 8.2. Pochin's Bridge | 15 |
| 8.3. Brocks Hill | 16 |
| 9. Evaluation Results | |
| 9.1. Response rate | 18 |
| 9.2. Summary | 18 |
| 9.3. Limitations | 19 |
| 10. Challenges | |
| 10.1. Changes | 19 |
| 10.2. Lead volunteer recruitment | 20 |
| 10.3. Ambitions of the project | 21 |
| 10.4. Sub commissioning | 21 |
| 10.5. Office move | 21 |
| 11. Learning | |
| 11.1. Positives | 22 |
| 12. Sustainability | 23 |
| Appendix 1 – Breakdown of survey responses | 24 - 29 |

1. Executive summary

This report highlights the benefits and achievements identified as a result of the Heritage Lottery grant awarded to Oadby and Wigston Borough Council in 2015. It also reports on the challenges encountered during the project delivery, together with learning and recommendations.

The Natural Discovery Volunteer Project was developed in response to a successful pilot scheme set up at Brocks Hill Country Park, to explore volunteer role development. The Natural Discovery project focused on: increasing volunteering opportunities; volunteer recruitment and providing appropriate training, whilst celebrating the improvements to the Borough's natural green spaces.

This project was developed as a partnership project and involved a range of stakeholders, as well as directly linking to the Council's Greening the Borough strategy. One of the key partners was the 'Friends of Brocks Hill', who were involved in the project bid and delivery from the start. Not only did they bring in a considerable amount of partnership funding at the beginning, but as the project progressed they continued to raise money for the benefit of the volunteers.

There were many achievements throughout the course of the project, including an increase in the number of new people engaged in volunteering, thus increasing the number of volunteering hours achieved. The ability to purchase a range of new tools and equipment through the grant funding, including an Electric Van which will act as a lasting legacy to the project. This together with well-trained volunteers, through a dedicated programme of training (ensuring the majority of investment was in the Lead Volunteers to aid sustainability), has been really positive and will help to improve the Borough's natural green spaces now and into the future.

There were some challenges along the way. This included the need to re-recruit twice to the Project Officer post; it was therefore agreed with Heritage Lottery to extend the project end date, in order to fully deliver the planned two-year project. On reflection, it was felt that the low starting salary for the post holder and the fact that it was a fixed-term contract contributed to this.

There was some learning from the project; this included the need to be more realistic with the Key Performance Indicators, to take account of the seasonal constraints and the number of volunteering hours that can be accumulated across relatively small local sites. Another key learning point was to ensure more robust monitoring and evaluation procedures were set-up from the start, in order to be able to fully evaluate the project at the end.

In conclusion, this project has left a lasting legacy for the Borough. The engagement of a range of individuals who wouldn't normally seek out conservation volunteering has been positive, particularly the difference volunteering has made to their lives. The range of physical improvements achieved across the Borough have undoubtedly contributed to the on-going achievement of the Green Flag Award and honours awarded at both the East Midlands and Britain in Bloom competitions.

The opportunity to carry out conservation volunteering will continue to be driven forward through the Council's commitment to improving the environment and the health and wellbeing of its residents. This can be seen by its commitment to employ a full-time, permanent Park Warden, who will oversee the volunteering element moving forwards.

"This project has supported one of the Council's corporate priorities, the delivery of Green and Safe Spaces, by developing the number and skill level of local conservation volunteers"

Cllr David Carter, Chair of the Natural Discovery Volunteer Project Board

2. Background information

Oadby & Wigston Borough Council (OWBC) is a Local Authority based in South Leicestershire. The Borough is a relatively compact, predominantly urban area comprising of Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston. There are no civil parishes in the borough.

In October 2015 the Council was delighted to be awarded a Heritage Lottery grant of £43,900 to deliver the Natural Discovery Volunteer Development Programme.

As a small authority and team, working with volunteers is integral to delivering countryside services. Volunteers, the majority of whom live in the locality, bring a community perspective to the work and help contribute to and play a meaningful part in the development of localism. Pilot work at Brocks Hill, to explore volunteer role development, had shown benefits in the Country Park, wildlife, visitors and those involved in volunteering.

This project was developed as a partnership project and involved a range of stakeholders, as well as directly linking to the Council's Greening the Borough strategy. The Friends of Brocks Hill was identified as one of the key partners, it is a fully constituted and independent community group, who were involved in the project bid and delivery from the start and fully supported the funding bid.

Brocks Hill Country Park is based in Oadby, and acted as the base for the project, equipment and communications.

3. Aims of the project

The two-year project aimed to increase volunteering opportunities, promote and market volunteering, recruit and engage new volunteers, provide training and development opportunities to enhance the borough's natural green spaces. Additionally, the project aims to engage with groups and individuals not normally engaged in the natural environment, all of which in turn helps to address the health and wellbeing agenda. A project plan was developed, which included the setting up of a formal 'Project Board'.

The five Approved Purposes, which were agreed at the beginning of the project, are shown below:

- a) Create 'Friends' groups for key sites and a group of 'super-volunteers.'
- b) Engage new volunteers through taster days, 'challenge' days and volunteer fairs with a focus on expanding age ranges and supporting access requirements.
- c) Provide informal and accredited training opportunities. Market and promote the volunteer programme.
- d) Produce exhibitions and volunteer celebration events.
- e) Evaluate the project, pass on best practice and plan for continuation following project completion.

4. The Project Board

The Natural Discovery Volunteer 'Project Board' was set up to oversee the project from the outset. Board representatives include: the Chair of the Greening the Borough Working Group; the Council's Ground Maintenance team; the Project Officer; Manager and Park Warden. Plus, towards the end of the project, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) also attended in order to provide an update on progress made. The Board acted as an important check and challenge group, which met quarterly throughout the project.

5. The Friends of Brocks Hill

The Friends of Brocks Hill Country Park was set up in 2010 to establish a group of like-minded, passionate people who care about Brocks Hill and wanted to support the development of the Country Park for wildlife and people. They are an independent voluntary group, with their own Constitution and group bank account.

The Friends of Brocks Hill's pro-active involvement in the project from the start was tremendous. This group not only helped to shape the initial bid, carry out consultation and engage with the community but also acquired external partnership funding. They also provided their own contribution in volunteering hours within the Country Park as well as volunteer time spent on meetings in order to shape the bid. They also hold events and talks to raise funds for the benefit of the Country Park, its wildlife and visitors.

The Friends of Brocks Hill work closely with Oadby & Wigston Borough Council in the work they do and they have representation on the Project Board.

The external funding and money raised by the Friends of Brocks Hill was a valuable asset to the project. They continued to raise further funds during the project for specific schemes. An example of this is the work they undertook with Millgate School. They worked in partnership with Millgate School to produce a Sculpture. The pupils put forward a number of design options for the Friends Committee to assess. The Sculpture (a slug bench) was then created by the sculptor Peter Leadbeater and the students and installed at Brocks Hill Country Park in summer 2017. Many positive comments have been received about the bench which is a very popular addition to the Country Park, particularly amongst the younger visitors. This very successful project could not have been achieved without the funds raised directly by the Friends of Brocks Hill and the support by the school. The project funding is outlined below:

- £1,010 from the Oadby Village Hall Fund
- £60 raised by the pupils of Millgate School
- £850 from the raised fund of the Friends of Brocks Hill



The Slug Bench at Brocks Hill Country Park

6. Funding

This project would not have achieved its goals without the financial contribution from a range of stakeholders, including Heritage Lottery and Oadby & Wigston Borough Council. The total project budget amounted to £71,775. The following provides a breakdown of the organisation and their contributions:

- £43,900 – Heritage Lottery grant
- £21,600 – Oadby & Wigston Borough Council, through the Greening the Borough strategy
- £2,275 – Edith Murphy Foundation, for training and promotion

Other stakeholder financial contributions:

As part of the project plan, the Friends applied for funding from a range of external organisations and forums: They were successful in the following grants:

Funding towards the purchase of the electric vehicle:

- £2,000 from the Oadby Residents Forum
- £1,000 from the Wigston Residents Forum

Funding towards the training of the Volunteers:

- £350 Florence Turner Trust
- £500 Grant from The Oadby Village Hall Trust
- £150 from the Friends of Brocks Hill's own funds

Unfortunately the Friends of Brocks Hill were not successful in obtaining an additional £1,000 from the South Wigston Residents Forum, as this funding application was declined in November 2015.

However, as previously mentioned the Friends group were able to provide further funding from their own funds, raised through talks and events, e.g. an additional £121.40 towards further volunteer training; this amount was utilised towards the Park Hill external training course cost.

This is in addition to a further £403.94, which the Friends used to directly purchase additional tools for use by the Volunteers and a water heater, to use to make tea and coffee for the benefit of all the volunteers. These additional items are now used on a regular basis.

"The opportunity to meet people - getting out into the fresh air and learning new skills whilst contributing, even in a small way, in improving the environment and helping in the community"

Brocks Hill/Offsite volunteer

7. Achievements

7.1 Lead Volunteers:

Without doubt one of the key elements to the success of the project has been the commitment, dedication and input from the Lead Volunteers. These individuals took on extra responsibility to lead groups of people on a range of tasks, communicating with the Park Warden and reiterating and relaying important safety information to the groups they were leading. The investment in training meant that the Lead Volunteers were not only fully First Aid trained, but they received a range of specific individual training, such as Brush-cutter training and Wood-chipper training to assist them individually in their lead volunteer role.



Photograph of the Lead Volunteers, during the December 2017 presentation event

A range of corporate clothing has been produced for the Lead Volunteers, so they can easily be identified by the general public and volunteers alike. This has only been possible by the Heritage Lottery grant. Clothing includes polo shirts, caps, knitted hats and a fleece for each of the Lead Volunteers – all embossed with the Council and Heritage Lottery logos.



7.2 Electric Vehicle

Another really positive element of the grant was the 'pooled' funding, which allowed the Council to purchase a low energy electric vehicle. This vehicle has enabled the team to transport volunteers and tools around the Borough, increasing opportunities and minimising disruption to neighbourhoods where work is undertaken. In the past Staff and Conservation Volunteers have done this using their own private vehicles for work at sites.



The electric van

7.3 Tools and Equipment:

The tools and equipment purchased through the grant have enabled more volunteers to work across the same site. Prior to this project there was limited equipment and tools available. In addition, more environmentally friendly tools were purchased e.g. two cordless battery powered brushcutters which are not only more efficient with zero hazardous fumes, but are much lighter pieces of machinery for volunteers to handle. Other tools include additional bowsaws, loppers and gardening kit, as well as a small boat to be used for pond maintenance. A range of PPE was also purchased to enable the safe execution of tasks, including a variety of gloves, steel-toe capped boots, knee-pads, waders, ear defenders and safety helmets.

7.4 Training:

An important element of the project, as mentioned, was to upskill the volunteers. There was significant investment in upskilling and educating the Lead Volunteers, this included the important First Aid training, Management training course, and safeguarding (see below for full list). It was also important to provide a range of opportunities for all volunteers to undergo, including equality and diversity training, tree pruning training and sharps training. Regular tool safety talks take place before the start of each volunteering session to ensure all are aware of the requirements, their safety and the safety of others around them. This message is reiterated by the Lead volunteers during the group working sessions.

List of training delivered:

Overview:

| Summary | Int/ext | No. of Attendees |
|--------------------------|----------|------------------|
| First Aid | External | 5 |
| Management course | Internal | 5 |
| Sharps | External | 15 |
| Safeguarding | External | 5 |
| Equalities and Diversity | Internal | 22 |
| Brush Cutter | External | 2 |
| Wood chipper | External | 2 |
| Fruit tree pruning | External | 15 |
| Risk Assessment | External | 5 |
| Leadership | External | 5 |

Detailed information:

| Date | Training provider | Course | Who |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| April 2016 | OWBC – Park Ranger | Health and Safety Training | X4 Lead Volunteers |
| August 2016 | OWBC – Park Rangers | Management training course | X4 Lead Volunteers |
| 14/09/2016 | First Aid Int LTD | Emergency First Aid at work | X4 Lead Volunteers |
| 15/03/2017 | All Things Training | Sharps training (The Management of Discarded Needles and other Drug-Related Waste) | X15 volunteers attended |
| 26/06/2017 | TCV | Safeguarding training | X5 Lead Volunteers: |
| 04/07/2017 | Park Hill Training | Brush-cutter training | One Lead Volunteer |
| 06/09/2017 | Red Cross | First Aid for Adult | One Lead Volunteer who joined after the initial First Aid course was delivered. |
| 27/09/2017 | OWBC – Community Engagement Officer | Equalities and Diversity | X17 volunteers Two sessions delivered over two days to engage with all volunteers |
| 04/10/2017 | OWBC – Community Engagement Officer | Equalities and Diversity | X5 volunteers A mop up session to engage with those that couldn't attend the first session |
| 27/09/2017 | Park Hill Training | Brush-cutter training | One Lead Volunteer |
| 31/10/2017 | Park Hill Training | Wood-chipper training | One Lead Volunteer |
| 29/11/2017 | Park Hill Training | Wood-chipper training | One Lead Volunteer |

| Date | Training provider | Course | Who |
|------------|--|----------------------------------|---|
| 31/01/2018 | Nigel Deacon - Leicester Heritage Apples | Fruit tree pruning | X15 volunteers attended |
| 07/02/2018 | Nigel Deacon - Leicester Heritage Apples | Fruit tree pruning | X15 volunteers attended |
| 22/02/2018 | TCV | Risk Assessment training | X5 Lead Volunteers: |
| April 2018 | TCV | Proposed: Leadership training | Open to x5 Lead Volunteers (pending) |



Equality and diversity training

"The funding has allowed some volunteers to receive training that otherwise may not have been possible"

Brocks Hill/Offsite volunteer

7.5 Volunteering Hours:

The achievement in volunteering hours, year-on-year, were extremely positive. Below provides details of the hours achieved each month between 2015 and 2017. It is interesting to note that the numbers continued to grow even during the two breaks in project delivery, due to a changeover in project staff.

| Month | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| January | 269.3 | 272 | 229.25 |
| February | 275 | 330.45 | 447.75 |
| March | 292.15 | 323.05 | 493.50 |
| April | 266 | 331 | 238.7 |
| May | 388.3 | 516.2 | 236.25 |
| June | 485 | 347.3 | 448.25 |
| July | 312.45 | 280 | 256.50 |
| August | 212 | 268.5 | 274.00 |
| September | 216.5 | 232.75 | 265.75 |
| October | 170.05 | 223 | 307.50 |
| November | 243 | 323.4 | 299.75 |
| December | 153 | 121.5 | 142.50 |
| TOTAL | 3,282.75 | 3,569.15 | 3,639.7 |

Volunteering hours achieved from 2015 to 2017

*"Volunteering gives me a reason to spend time
in a beautiful place, doing something which
helps other people"*

Brocks Hill volunteer

7.6 Approved Purposes:

At the beginning of the project, five Approved Purposes were set, which are listed below. It is pleasing to note that the Approved Purposes were met, as detailed below:

| | Approved purpose | Outcome |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Create 'Friends' groups for key sites and a group of 'super-volunteers.' | <p>The Friends group continues to thrive at Brocks Hill. An informal Friends of Fludes Lane group developed as the project progressed, particularly when The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) were commissioned to lead the off-site volunteering tasks days.</p> <p>A total of five Lead Volunteers were established during the project. These individuals lead other groups of volunteers on a regular basis, under the supervision of the Park Warden. This includes conservation work, in addition to gardening tasks, working with students from the local college.</p> |
| 2 | Engage new volunteers through taster days, 'challenge' days and volunteer fairs with a focus on expanding age ranges and supporting access requirements. | <p>The Brocks Hill volunteering sessions have continued to expand, with new volunteers signing up and the regular volunteers continuing to give their time by working across the Country Park. In addition, corporate volunteering from external companies, including Charnwood Foods has been extremely successful, e.g. this local company have worked in partnership with the Council and bring employees to Brocks Hill to carry out tasks across the Country Park, helping to improve the environment and increasing the volunteering hours given to the area. The local College has gained a tremendous amount of benefit from their engagement with the project; their students with learning disabilities have taken on the tasks of gardening and growing their own vegetables. Student volunteers were also recruited throughout 2017 and helped with surveys at Brocks Hill, providing invaluable help in carrying out bird, bee and butterfly surveys across the country park.</p> <p>Two volunteer fairs were held at Brocks Hill, as part of a county-wide campaign to engage with new volunteers. A range of accessible opportunities were possible through the use of raised beds at Brocks Hill and partnership working and planning.</p> |
| 3 | <p>Provide informal and accredited training opportunities.</p> <p>Market and promote the volunteer programme.</p> | <p>As previously mentioned, a range of informal and accredited training opportunities were provided during the life of the project for the volunteers. The main investment has been in the Lead volunteers, in order to aid sustainability of the project post funding.</p> <p>A wide range of marketing tools have been utilised, including social media – Facebook and Twitter; the local residents newspaper 'Letterbox'; talks at the three local Residents Forums and formal Committee Reports to name a few. Updates in the local media have also assisted in raising the profile of the funders, Heritage Lottery, and the project.</p> |

| | Approved purpose | Outcome |
|---|---|--|
| 4 | Produce exhibitions and volunteer celebration events. | <p>Since the beginning of the project (Oct 2015) a total of five celebration events have been held. These include summer volunteer 'Get Together' events, the 2016 and 2017 Christmas celebration event and the end of project buffet held in February 2018 to celebrate and acknowledge the tremendous contribution of all the volunteers.</p> <p>A number of exhibitions have taken place throughout the life of the project; this includes the provision of information boards at local Colleges, Forums and in the Brocks Hill Centre.</p> |
| 5 | Evaluate the project, pass on best practice and plan for continuation following project completion. | <p>When producing the end of project report, it became apparent the huge difference the Heritage Lottery project has made to people and the environment. Many examples within the report have identified this, which can also be seen by the many positive quotes received from the volunteers themselves.</p> <p>The survey feedback from those involved in the project, (shown in Appendix 1 of this report) will be used to produce an Action Plan for further improvements, post funding.</p> |



Promotional information board

"Working under the volunteer's umbrella, I get a tremendous feeling of belonging to something important and worthwhile"

Wildlife survey volunteer

8. Photographic evidence

A range of photographs were taken during conservation tasks at the Council's various sites including Brocks Hill Country Park and the off-site venues of Fludes Lane in Oadby and Pochins Bridge in South Wigston. Below provides a sample of the work undertaken.

8.1 Fludes Lane:

Fludes Lane is a linear site, linking the urban environment to the wider countryside. The path leading along Fludes Lane runs adjacent to residential areas, the Washbrook and semi-natural woodland. A large amount of litter picking was undertaken across the site and from the Washbrook by volunteers throughout the course of the project. Light trimming of path-side vegetation was undertaken in the spring and summer, with scrub cutting to open up selected areas throughout autumn and winter. This regular maintenance allowed Fludes Lane to become more welcoming and accessible.



*"A chance to show by example to passing people
that ordinary folks can make a difference"*

Fludes Lane volunteer

8.2 Pochin's Bridge:

Pochin's bridge is a site containing areas of grassland and newly-planted woodland, adjacent to a relatively new residential area, with the canal to the south. Volunteers helped with path maintenance, litter picking and light trimming of vegetation around access points in spring and summer. In autumn and winter, work was started on the large task of thinning the crowded woodland blocks. Volunteers made good progress throughout the project with TCV in felling small trees and creating dead hedges. This management is a good start on winter works that will continue for the foreseeable future.



"Well organised and good communication from the organisers"

Pochin's Bridge volunteer

8.3 Brocks Hill:

The regular volunteer group at Brocks Hill received the highest amount of volunteers throughout the project, with between 14 and 20 individuals attending every week. A large amount of work has been completed by the volunteers over the course of the project, including:

- Rejuvenating the raised beds
- Gardening and maintaining flower beds around Brocks Hill Centre
- Path and step maintenance
- Gate and noticeboard repair
- Timber treatments on benches and knee rails
- Litter picking
- Cutting and raking grass
- Coppicing
- Hedge laying
- Scrub cutting
- Tree pruning
- Chipping and burning branches
- Creating habitat piles

With such high numbers of volunteers, this work will be able to continue post-project, to ensure the country park is maintained in accordance with the Management Plan.



Preparation of the raised beds at Brocks Hill

"It's an opportunity to contribute to development of green spaces and there's a sense of camaraderie on activity days especially Wednesday"

Brocks Hill volunteer

Tree Pruning course



A variety of management tasks carried out



"It is good getting to do different tasks and it has improved my confidence"

Brocks Hill volunteer

9. Evaluation results

All volunteers were surveyed to ascertain their opinions on the delivery of the two-year Heritage Lottery project. The following provides a summary of responses to the Volunteer survey. Full details can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

9.1 Response rate

30 distributed, 23 responders =77% (2 were only partially completed)

65% of the responders were over the age of 65.

83% were White British, Male and Retired.

For comparison, in the list of registered current volunteers the M/F split is 71% to 29% and 50% are over 65, so those surveyed do not necessarily reflect the full volunteer population (see limitations below).

9.2 Summary

87% of the responders were regular volunteers with 13% occasional, with the split almost 50:50 for those who had been volunteering less than versus over 2yrs. 74% volunteered at Brocks Hill (or BH and other sites) with the remainder split equally between the two other sites.

A high proportion had volunteered prior to the project so knew about the project from this, otherwise the 'Letterbox' publication and word of mouth were the main means of hearing about the project.

Motivation for volunteering was directed more towards wanting to improve local green space and being involved as part of a group and to a lesser extent for self-improvement/fitness and gaining experience.

The majority of respondents had a good experience whilst volunteering with over 90% rating their experience as Excellent or Good. There was an average positive response of around 84% for areas where they reported feeling valued, felt they'd made a difference, had increased confidence, gave them a chance to learn new skills, felt more connected to the community, met new people and felt more healthy.

For the challenges when volunteering, 17% felt that volunteering could be better organised and it would be worth looking at the comments from these to see where improvements could be made. None agreed that efforts were not appreciated and none agreed that sites were difficult to get to. Only 9% (2 people) said it was difficult to get information, however this may be an area of work which could be looked at and improved.

The majority of volunteers felt they had been well supported and had sufficient tools and training to carry out the tasks, some felt they could have more independence and/or would like opportunities to do more.

70% of respondents had attended events held during the project.

What has been good about the Project - Allows people to get satisfaction from contributing and being involved as part of a like-minded group, benefiting from the training which has been made available and a chance to do a variety of tasks to make a difference, be outside and doing the type of work they enjoy.

What could be improved - Some volunteers would like more opportunities to participate and to work more autonomously. They would also like more secure funding for permanent staff to support the volunteers and would like to get more individuals involved and more promotion of the environment for schools and local businesses.

9.3 Limitations of the survey

It was mainly regular volunteers who responded, there were fewer female responders than expected with, in some cases, couples completing only one questionnaire and no responses from ethnic minority groups.

Ideally a comparison would be made between those who have been volunteering long term vs those who have volunteered in the last two years while the project has been running, however it would be difficult to draw any conclusions due to the small numbers.

The survey was not sent to those who had registered an interest in volunteering, but had not actually volunteered, however we are enquiring to find out why they hadn't been able to participate.

Finally, if Surveys had been carried out earlier in the project, this will have given a baseline for comparison.

10. Challenges

10.1 Changes to the project:

There were a number of challenges to the project quite early on, due to a number of changes in personnel. This resulted in a request to Heritage Lottery to extend the project finish date on two occasions.

However, even though these elements did disrupt the project, Oadby & Wigston Borough Council were able to implement a range of innovative actions in order to ensure the continuation of the project. Initially, the Council's Grounds Maintenance team supervised all the volunteering sessions each week, as an interim measure, until a new Project Officer and Council Park Warden had been recruited. In addition the overall management of the project was assigned to Council's Health & Leisure Services Manager. New regular Lead Volunteer meetings were set up, in order to ensure appropriate communication channels between all parties continued.

Following a positive meeting with Heritage Lottery, it was identified that a new strategy needed to be implemented, following the resignation of the second Volunteer Project Officer, in order to deliver the final phase of the funded project. In addition it was agreed that due to the number of breaks in project delivery that the project end date be extended from the end of October 2017 to the end of February 2018. The new strategy that was implemented is shown below:

- a) In order to continue to deliver the off-site conservation tasks, Oadby & Wigston Borough Council bought in the Services of The Conservation Volunteers group (TCV), to take on the supervision of the volunteers at Fludes Lane and Pochin's Bridge. In addition to overseeing the Gardening project at Brocks Hill Country Park, attended by the local College.
- b) In place of a full-time Volunteer Project Officer, Oadby & Wigston Borough Council recruited a part-time Admin Officer to carry out all the administrative tasks. This work included: promotion of the Heritage Lottery project; updating the various websites including social media and updating information boards with new photos; producing a calendar of events and communicating with the volunteers as well as our external deliverers (TCV); booking training and actioning all financial matters, whilst also keeping track of the volunteering hours achieved.
- c) The Council's Park Warden continued to supervise the Brocks Hill Wednesday volunteer group - assign tasks, carry out tool talks and Health & Safety matters, and compiling Risk Assessments for all groups. Furthermore, the Park Warden will plan all off-site tasks and communicate with TCV to ensure all works carried out are in line with the Borough's Management Plan.

10.2 Lead volunteer recruitment

One of the key elements of the project was to increase the number of Lead Volunteers, which was achieved. However, the difficulty identified was none of the Leads were able to commit to leading 'weekend sessions' due to family and other commitments, therefore impacting on the continuation of the off-site locations at weekends, post funding.

As a result a decision was made to carry out a Lead Volunteer recruitment drive, with support from TCV who assisted with the job advertisement and job description etc. This opportunity was advertised locally and County-wide over a 4 month period. It did result in one person coming forwards; however this individual was then unable to take up the position due to external factors beyond his control.

The Lead Volunteers, based at Brocks Hill, preferred this site over the other locations. With no Lead Volunteers to lead tasks at Fludes Lane and Pochin's Bridge, a new strategy will be implemented post-project with the Park Warden taking on all aspects of volunteering. Volunteering will continue at all sites, with Brocks Hill as the base for fortnightly weekday volunteering. Fludes Lane and Pochin's Bridge will each be visited once a month, with opportunities for the current off-site volunteers and Brocks Hill volunteers to attend these sessions. Unfortunately, no weekend sessions can currently be continued due to officer commitments.

10.3 Ambitions of the project

A number of problems were encountered throughout the course of the project relating to the high ambitions of the project. The high amount of individual volunteer recruitments and volunteer hours originally expected were not feasible for the relatively small size of the sites and seasonal constraints. For example, a large proportion of work carried out in winter could involve large numbers of volunteers (hedge laying, scrub cutting, etc.), but in spring and summer some sites had a much smaller amount of work to carry out in order to avoid disturbing nesting birds and other wildlife. Another aspect was the finite amount of tasks for a site and the number of volunteers in relation to this. Individuals would be at risk if the number of people per task exceeded a certain safe amount, so after an initial successful drive to increase Brocks Hill's volunteers, the number was capped for health and safety reasons.

The sustainability element of the project was inherently flawed, as the considerable amount of administration and organisation of volunteering requires an office-base and can only be carried out by a paid officer. Post-project this has been taken on by the Park Warden: formation of projects such as this should aim to be more realistic regarding continuation of particular elements in relation to future staff. Changes in the operation of the Brocks Hill Centre have also meant that all volunteers must be in contact with the Park Warden at the beginning and end of a task as the tool barn must be locked and unlocked, whereas previously the Information Officers and Project Officers assisted with this. This change is not entirely negative as direct lines of communication are essential for on-going volunteering, however this does require extra time from the Park Warden.

10.4 Sub-commissioning

Another key challenge was around the sub-commissioning of the off-site sessions. Initially these started well, however when staff who had been sub-commissioned to deliver the service were ill or the weather was against them, the sessions invariably had to be cancelled.

There was also the difficulty and delay experienced in obtaining confirmed dates for formal training requested. This made it necessary to request permission from Heritage Lottery for the course fees of a particularly important training session (Leadership Training) to be honoured, post project.

10.5 Office move

A challenge towards the end of the project was the 'Office Move' from the Brocks Hill Centre to the main Council Offices / Oadby Depot. Due to a 'Service Redesign', agreed by Councillors in order to save money, it was decided to outsource the Brock Hill Centre service to the current private leisure provider. This resulted in the Health & Leisure Services team moving offices three months before the end of the volunteer project. Whilst there was no major impact on the volunteers, as they continued to meet at the Brocks Hill Barns as normal and work with the Park Warden, it did impact on a little on communications. However with the use of I.T. and access to mobiles phones, it was workable.

11. Learning

All of the key staff involved towards the end of the project were not involved in the initial project planning, funding bid or delivery at the beginning of the project. Therefore, through the course of this evaluation the staff were able to identify a series of recommendations if a similar local volunteer development project was to be implemented again. The following reflects the general consensus of opinion:

- Set a more realistic salary for the Project Officer, in order to retain the post holder longer
- Set more realistic individual KPIs, taking account of the seasons and number of volunteer hours that can be accumulated across a relatively small site such as Brocks Hill Country Park
- Plan for changes – contingency planning
- Ensure there are robust monitoring and evaluation procedures set-up from the start of the project
- Ensure all aspects of the projects are considered in relation to sustainability, beyond the fixed term funded project, including the administrative element
- Being more realistic with the assigning of budget heads, for example, whilst a new electronic vehicle had been purchased, there was no need to include a cost for a new battery, as the original battery has a 5-year warranty. Therefore, following dialogue with Heritage Lottery, this allocation of money was able to be reinvested elsewhere in the project

11.1 Positives:

Having said that, there are many positives and a huge lasting legacy achieved as a result of the Heritage Lottery grant and partnership funding:

Tools and resources:

Brocks Hill now has a well-stocked tool store provided through the grant. The Brocks Hill Barns acts as the central store for all the tools and resources purchased by the grant. This will leave a lasting legacy for volunteers now and into the future.

Electric Van:

The purchase of the low energy vehicle will also provide a lasting legacy. It will act as a means to transport small groups of volunteers and tools to different locations around the Borough.

Access:

Activities for those with limited mobility will continue to be provided at Brocks Hill, due to the location of access and welfare facilities, in addition to the construction of raised beds.

Volunteer engagement:

Reliable well-trained Lead Volunteers are regularly passing on their knowledge and expertise to other volunteers. Volunteering hours are increasing, which not only helps to improve the general health and wellbeing of all those engaged, but it is making a vast difference to the environment, ensuring sites are more welcoming and accessible for visitors and future generations.

Input by Heritage Lottery:

The support provided by Heritage Lottery was greatly received. It was extremely reassuring to hear that 'change' is a normal part of project development and is not seen by Heritage Lottery in a negative light. Sincere thanks are extending to Heritage Lottery and their team.

12. Sustainability

The development of sustainability for the management of green spaces under the Council's care has been assured, firstly by the Council's commitment to support a full-time permanent Park Warden, who in turn supervises the well trained volunteers; and secondly by the Lead Volunteers who are enthusiastic and committed to leading groups of volunteers across a number of tasks.



APPENDIX 1 – Breakdown of survey responses

Type of volunteer (23)

Of the responders: 87% (16+4 lead) regular volunteers; 13% (3) occasional volunteers

Length of time volunteering (23)

52% (12) had been volunteering 0-2yrs

48% (11) >2yrs

Frequency of volunteering (23)

78% (18) 1day/week; 9% (2) 1-2 days/month; 9% (2) several times a year; 4%(1) very occasional

Sites of volunteering (23)

74% (17) volunteer at Brocks Hill – but (10) have also volunteered at the other sites including CB

13% (3) volunteer at PB only

13% (3) volunteer at FL only

How they found out about the volunteering project (21- includes multiple responses)

8 volunteered prior to the project;

6 Letterbox;

5 word of mouth;

2 Website;

1 BH reception;

1 notice board/leaflet;

1 other POTB

Motivation for getting involved (19-20 responses)

| How important | Very | somewhat | Not very | Not at all | No response |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|----------|------------|-------------|
| improve local green space | 57% (13) | 22% (5) | 9% (2) | 0 | 13% (3) |
| feel part of a group | 52% (12) | 35% (8) | 0 | 0 | 13% (3) |

| How important | Very | somewhat | Not very | Not at all | No response |
|------------------------------------|--------|----------|----------|------------|-------------|
| improve self (health, fitness etc) | 4% (1) | 39% (9) | 35% (8) | 4% (1) | 17% (4) |
| Wanted to get experience | 4% (1) | 39% (9) | 35% (8) | 4% (1) | 17% (4) |

Motivation for volunteering was more towards wanting to improve local green space and being involved as part of a group and to a lesser extent towards self-improvement/fitness and gaining experience.

Training (22-includes multiple responses; 1 non resp)

96% (22) had received some form of training; 4% (1) non resp

21 on the job training; 7 formal OWBC; 7 external; 7 learned from others; 1 non resp.

21 stated training was adequate; 1 said n/a but had received training; 1 non resp

Tools (22)

100% of responses agreed the tools were adequate to perform the tasks

Experience as a volunteer (18-21 responses)

| Experience as a volunteer | strongly agreed | agreed | disagreed | strongly disagreed | Not relevant | No response |
|---|-----------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|
| supervisors made them feel valued | 48% (11) | 39% (9) | 4% (1) | 0 | 0 | 9% (2) |
| they could see they'd made a difference | 43% (10) | 48% (11) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9% (2) |
| volunteering had increased their confidence | 17% (4) | 52% (12) | 9% (2) | 0 | 9% (2) | 13% (3) |
| gave them a chance to develop new skills | 22% (5) | 57% (13) | 4% (1) | 9% (2) | 0 | 9% (2) |
| improvement to employment prospects | 0 | 4% (1) | 9% (2) | 4% (1) | 70% (16) | 13% (3) |
| felt more connected to the local community | 26% (6) | 61% (14) | 4% (1) | 4% (1) | 0 | 4% (1) |

| Experience as a volunteer | strongly agreed | agreed | disagreed | strongly disagreed | Not relevant | No response |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|--------------|---------------|
| felt more healthy; | 17% (4) | 74% (17) | 0 | 4% (1) | 0 | 4% (1) |
| helped them to meet new people | 30% (7) | 65% (15) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4% (1) |

87% (20)– agreed or strongly agreed **that supervisors made them feel valued**; 4% (1) disagreed

91% (21)– agreed or strongly agreed **that they could see they'd made a difference**;

70% (16)– agreed or strongly agreed **that volunteering had increased their confidence**; 9% (2) disagreed; 9% (2) stated not relevant

78% (18)– agreed or strongly agreed **that it gave them a chance to develop new skills**; 4% (1) disagreed; 9% (2) stated not relevant

70% (16)– stated that **improvement to employment prospects** was not relevant; 4% (1) agreed; 13% (3) disagreed or strongly disagreed

87% (20)– agreed or strongly agreed **that they felt more connected to the local community**; 9% (2) disagreed or strongly disagreed

91% (21)– agreed or strongly agreed **that they felt more healthy**; 4% (1) strongly disagreed

96% (22)– agreed or strongly agreed **that volunteering helped them to meet new people**

Challenges when volunteering

| Challenges | strongly agreed | agreed | disagreed | strongly disagreed | Not relevant | No response |
|---|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Volunteering could be better organised | 0 | 17% (4) | 57% (13) | 17% (4) | 4% (1) | 4% (1) |
| My efforts not appreciated by the group | 0 | 0 | 57% (13) | 39% (9) | 0 | 4% (1) |
| My efforts not appreciated by the organisation | 0 | 0 | 48% (11) | 43% (10) | 4% (1) | 4% (1) |
| Meeting points hard to get to | 0 | 0 | 48% (11) | 30% (7) | 17% (4) | 4% (1) |
| Difficult to get information | 4% (1) | 4% (1) | 61% (14) | 13% (3) | 13% (3) | 4% (1) |

7% (4)– agreed that **volunteering could be better organised**; 74% (17) disagreed or strongly disagreed; 4% (1) stated not relevant

96% (22)– disagreed or strongly disagreed that their **efforts were not appreciated by the group**;

91% (21)– disagreed or strongly disagreed that their **efforts were not appreciated by the organisation**; 4% (1) stated not relevant

78% (18)– disagreed or strongly disagreed that the **meeting points are hard to get to**; 17% (4) stated not relevant

8% (2)– agreed or strongly agreed that it was **difficult to get information about volunteering opportunities**; 74% (17) disagreed or strongly disagreed; 13% (3) stated not relevant; 4% (1) no resp

Rating of experience as a volunteer

43% (10) Excellent; 48% (11) Good; 4% (1) Average; Poor and very Poor = 0; 4% (1) no resp

Attendance at events

70% (16) have attended events associated with the project

30% (7) had not ticked any of the events listed

What's good about the Project

- I get huge satisfaction from monitoring the parks butterflies, publicising the results and taking people on guided walks
- Opportunity to learn and practice new skills
- Seeing Brocks Hill develop over the years
- Being involved in this type of work
- I have found that the project has allowed me to participate with other like-minded people in the upkeep and improvements in the Country Park and the advantages that this gives during retirement in the development of wellbeing and confidence.
- Outside and feeling better
- Opportunities to "clean up" the local environment and feeling as if "I'm doing my bit", having a feeling of pride in volunteering and opportunities in being able to take part in other training

What could be improved?

- Need to be able to volunteer more than one day per week at Brocks Hill
- More money for projects
- Rangers and F/T volunteer organisers need long-term decent job security - not always short term contracts
- Get more people involved if possible

- 1. Get more volunteers involved and on a regular basis; 2. do more promotion of caring for the local environment; 3. use schools more to involve students in respect and pride in our countryside; 4. make local industries responsible for keeping their own doorsteps tidy.
- Better use of data I have collected (bird surveys)

What volunteering has meant to me (quote)

- It's just part of my way of life and if I could start again I would have looked for it as a career.
- It has improved my confidence
- A good opportunity to really get to know a local resource that we are so lucky to have and to understand how it is managed
- Feeling useful and engaged after retirement
- A good experience so far and friendly people
- A chance to improve our environment
- The opportunity to take part in something worthwhile for the environment, the community and in your own local area to be able to protect our green fields for generations to come

Please also see quotes provided, in colourful boxes, in the main section of this report.

Demographics

Age group:

36-45 = 4% (1)

46-55 = 4% (1)

56-65 = 17% (4)

66-75 = 43% (10)

>75 = 22% (5)

No resp = 9% (2)

65% of the responders over the age of 65

Gender:

M= 83% (19)

F = 9% (2)

No resp = 9% (2)

Ethnicity:

White British 83% (19)

No resp 17% (4)

Occupation:

Full time employment = 4% (1)

Not in employment education or training = 4% (1)

Retired = 83% (19)

No resp = 9% (2)

Disability:

Disability = 4% (1)

No disability = 91% (21)

No resp = 4% (1)

Received sufficient support to enable contribution as much as able

Yes = 87% (20)

No = 9% (2)

No resp = 4% (1)

Age / gender check of current volunteers list

Of the registered volunteers who are current volunteers the **M/F split is 71% to 29%**

And the age groups 18-25 7%; 26-35 2%; 36-45 12%; 46-55 17%; 56-65 12%; 66-75 33%; 75+ 17%

Percentage over 65 = 50%

Nb. This does not include SLC or corporate volunteers

