

10 November 2014

**Limestone Landscape
Programme - Update**

**Joint report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive and
Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic
Development**

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background information on the Limestone Landscape Programme in advance of a presentation by Tony Devos, Limestone Landscapes Programme Manager, Regeneration and Economic Development providing an update on the Limestone Landscapes delivery programme and the forward strategy for the Limestone Landscapes Partnership.

Background

- 2 In July 2011 the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an overview presentation on the Limestone Landscapes Programme and the work of the Limestone Landscapes Partnership within County Durham. Following the presentation it was suggested that the committee would receive a further update when appropriate on the development of the project.
- 3 When refreshing the work programme of the committee for 2013/14 it was agreed by members that a visit should be undertaken by the committee to Limestone Landscapes within County Durham so that members could see 'first hand' the development work undertaken by Durham County Council and partners. The visit was held on 10th July 2013 to Thrislington and Raisby quarries and it was felt by those members who attended the visit that a presentation should be provided to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the September meeting for those members who were unable to attend.
- 4 At the meeting on the 26th September 2013 members were provided with a presentation focusing on:
 - The importance of the globally unique Magnesian Limestone Grassland communities.
 - Thrislington National Nature Reserve – one of the ecological crown jewels of the region.
 - Opportunities for the restoration of the Thrislington Quarry.

- Raisby Quarry an example of where we are already restoring grassland habitat and utilising it as a place to interpret the geology.
- 5 it was agreed by members following the presentation that the committee would receive a further update on the development of the Limestone Landscapes programme at a future meeting. Arrangements have been made for Tony Devos, Limestone Landscapes Programme Manager to attend the meeting on the 10 November to do a short presentation focusing on:
- What has been delivered over the last 3½ years of the Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme?
 - Successes and lessons learnt.
 - The Forward Strategy for the Limestone Landscapes Partnership.

Limestone Landscapes Programme - background

- 7 The three key drivers behind the programme were the European Landscape Convention, the Natural Environment White paper which looked at how fragmented habitats were joined together and finally the lessons learned and best practice derived from past projects.
- 8 The Magnesian Limestone Plateau is a wide area stretching almost from the Tyne to Tees and from the coast to central Durham. The area is unique, with common themes and patterns in the landscape and strong links between natural and cultural heritage.
- 9 The Limestone Landscape Programme is driven by a Limestone Landscape Partnership (an initiative led by Durham County Council and Natural England) which developed between 2007 and 2010 and is made up of a broad range of local authorities, public, voluntary and private sector organisations that are committed to making a positive difference in the quality of life and unique natural environment of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau National Character Area. The programme area covers parts of East Durham, Sunderland, South Tyneside, Hartlepool and Darlington.
- 10 The project work is delivered by a combination of 9 key delivery partners and is overseen by a core team based at Durham County Council. The work is also overseen and scrutinised by a Programme Board.
- 11 In December 2010, it was confirmed by the Heritage Lottery Fund that the submission by the Limestone Landscape Partnership (Durham) to the Landscape Partnership had been successful which unlocked a grant worth £1.9m over 3 years with a further £925k in match funding and in-kind contributions, to help conserve the distinct character of the Magnesian Limestone Plateau. Over the three years of the programme the Limestone Landscape Partnership would carry out work on 25 projects which would have links to biodiversity, geodiversity, cultural heritage and the historic environment within this landscape. The Limestone Landscape Programme is now in the final year of projects running from 2011 to 2014.

- 12 Landscape Partnership schemes need to contribute towards all of the four outcomes listed below.

Conserving and restoring built and natural heritage features typical of the area.

Engaging more people and a wider range of people to take an active part in their local landscape heritage.

Increasing opportunities for people to have access to and learn about the landscape and its heritage.

Providing training opportunities for people in local heritage skills.

Current position

- 13 To date the Limestone Landscapes Project has spent nearly £2.4m of its £2.8m budget. It is anticipated that all projects will complete by the end of March 2015.

- 14 Achievements to date include:

Conserving and Restoring

- 235 Hectares of Biodiversity Action Plan habitat brought under positive management.
- 4 Kilometres of hedgerow restored or planted.
- Two grade 2 listed buildings restored along with one unlisted building
- Restoring two Geological Sites of Special Interest from declining condition to achieving condition.

Community Engagement

- 9 Community archaeology digs delivered.
- Working with 2,615 community group members from 175 groups
- 2,447 volunteers involved in the project, contributing 22,800 hours of work.
- 38 health projects involving 832 participants

Learning

- 4,855 primary school children worked with at 203 schools
- 613 secondary school pupils worked with at 12 schools
- 24 wildlife surveys undertaken
- Over 6,000 new species records reported to the Environmental Records Information Centre North East (ERIC).

- 257 adult training courses with 1,870 participants covering heritage skills such as archaeology, archiving, blacksmithing, building skills, interpretation, habitat & land management, local history, rural skills (including hedging & walling), species identification/biological recording skills, wood-turning, lime mortaring / lime pointing, stone masonry and homeowner days.

Access

- 3.5 Km of public footpaths and 1.6 Km of bridleways improved
- 1.25 Km of new footpaths created
- 202 guided walks organised with 2,291 participants

Next steps

- 15 The Limestone Landscapes Partnership have developed a Forward Plan of projects to be delivered over the next five years. A report on this programme has received outline approval from RED Management Team, for Durham County Council to host the legacy work identified.

Recommendation

- 16 It is recommended that the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the information provided during the presentation.

Background Papers

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Report - Limestone Landscapes Report and presentation – 26 September 2013

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – Limestone landscapes programme for County Durham was awarded £1.9m grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund which would attract £925k of their cash funding, in kind donations and volunteer time, giving a total budget of £2.825m.

Staffing - None

Risk – None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – The work of the partnership will be inclusive and reflect the diverse community of the Magnesian Limestone Natural Area and those who visit. People of all ages and abilities from every sector of society will have the opportunity to enjoy the area.

Accommodation – None

Crime and Disorder – Raising community awareness of issues facing the Magnesian Limestone Natural Area and encouraging participation in local environment initiatives is important to engendering community ownership and reducing anti social behaviour.

Human Rights – None

Consultation – The work of the partnership is based upon wide ranging consultation and participation.

Procurement – None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications – None