



High level summative report

Prepared by: Kate Measures, Lead Consultant
Eleanor Forey, Research and Evaluation Officer

Contact: inspireme@heritageinsider.co.uk
+44 (0) 7966 298516
www.greedysquirrel.co.uk



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Summary

5
fish passes
installed

6.5km
of river has been reconnected

4319
bin bags and
20,000kg of rubbish
removed from the
river including ...

184
volunteers trained with a
certificate or qualification

386
volunteers

29 Shopping trolleys removed
87 tyres removed

36 traffic cones
REMOVED

2799
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

3988
People at events

43
community
organisations
involved

1177 children and
young people
inspired to be River
Guardians

The River Don (or the Don) is a highly urbanised river with a long history of metal manufacture and engineering. Water powered industry at its edges was extensive and much of the physical infrastructure is still intact.

The Living Heritage of the River Don is the Don Catchment River Trust's (DCRT) £1,420,000 first HLF funded project. It aimed to make a **transformational change** in the way in which people are engaged with the heritage of the River Don and the level at which this happens and to remove the physical barriers to aid the return of the Atlantic salmon to the river.

Overall the Living Heritage of the River Don project has been **highly successful**. The project has met or exceeded the expectations of stakeholders¹ and the following are areas in which it has particularly excelled:



Furthermore, this 'pathfinder' project has managed to either **meet or exceed the vast majority of its ambitious targets**.

There are 21 weirs on the Don between Doncaster and Beeley Wood Lower weir above Sheffield City centre. At the time of the bid to HLF, ten were already passable to salmon. Since then the project has installed **fish passes into five** of the 'orphaned' weirs reconnecting 6.5km of the Don and opening up 10km of spawning grounds to migratory fish in the middle of Sheffield for the first time in 200 years. **Atlantic salmon sightings** are now beginning to be reported in previously impassable areas of the river which is an amazing success. The capital works were bought in **on time and under budget** which is something many projects and organisations struggle with.

The DCRT are now undertaking further feasibility studies to understand how numbers of salmon using the passes can be monitored and how to assist passage of the fish back down the river and out to sea to completely connect their migration route.

The River Don has a rich, multi-faceted heritage and one of the triumphs of this project has been not to stay solely focussed on the natural heritage but to embrace and **celebrate all aspects of the**

¹ During key informant interviews, conducted autumn 2018.

heritage including the cultural heritage of local communities and built and industrial histories of the river corridor.

DCRT's reach before the project was very limited and the project has allowed the organisation to **significantly expand** the range and number of people with whom it engages and to deepen the level of that engagement.

The project enabled DCRT to undertake much new work in the areas of **community engagement, partnership work and establishing and retaining a volunteer team**. Valuable lessons have been learnt and successful ways of working identified, for example, development of themed geocaches, a long distance walk and employing social media to help engage with new audiences.

The project team's **flexible approach** has also enabled them to capitalise on relevant events and media coverage for example, the recent spotlight on the impact of plastic pollution in aquatic environments.

The project is an excellent example of **evidence-based planning** and activity delivery. For example, during the development phase non-users of the river stated 'too much rubbish/litter'² and 'never thinking to visit' as the top two reasons for not engaging with or visiting the river previously. The project tackled these head on by **mobilising communities** to undertake river clean-ups in their area; removing more than **20,000kg of litter** and making a very visible impact. The project did much to raise awareness of the River Don and its heritage through a concerted programme of social media, web content, PR, interpretation, community liaison, partnership working and a packed events calendar.

The Living Heritage of the River Don project has provided a **fantastic learning curve** for the DCRT trustees, staff and volunteers. It is testament to their 'can do' attitude that they have found solutions to many of the challenges they have encountered and delivered a highly successful project. DCRT has been able to retain the project team which is highly valuable and will help to feed into future projects lessons learnt from the Living Heritage of the River Don.

The DCRT is now more **resilient organisation** in a strong position to be able to realise their organisational vision and go from strength to strength. A reflective practice and action learning approach will well equip them to continue to learn and grow.

The ambition to reconnect people, communities and decision makers to the heritage of the River is obviously a complex and highly ambitious task. It was recognised in the planning phases that the Living Heritage of the River Don project alone would never be able to achieve this, especially given the huge population centres clustered around the river.

However, the project has begun to make headway in this task as evidenced in this report. Whilst this is not a wholesale change of attitudes towards the heritage of the River, it is clear that there is now a greater level of awareness of the heritage and those who have been directly engaged with the

² stated by 20% and 16.5% of non-users of the River Don during development stage.

project, nearly without exception, have a positive view of it. This shows that the project was successful in achieving its goal for those it engaged but the community and people engagement work would need to be scaled up significantly and the recovery of the river to continue for the vision to be attained completely. Integration of work on the River into other organisation's work programmes and strategies will also assist in this task.

The iconic headline for the project was the return of the Atlantic salmon to the river. This is now starting to become a reality and will only serve to accelerate the work started by the Living Heritage of the River Don project. This has already started to be an **invaluable tool** for maintaining traditional print media and social media profile for the work of the project.

Whilst the vision has not been entirely attained yet, the future of the River Don's amazing heritage is looking a lot brighter as a result of the Living Heritage of the River Don project and its improvement is set to continue with the **momentum** built by the project. It is clear that those sections of the local community who have engaged with the project have greater awareness, understanding and ownership of the heritage on their doorstep and the River Don has a higher profile than it did before the project. It is hoped that the River Don will be central to increased feelings of local pride and sense of place for this amazing area of heritage in such a diverse and often urbanised environment as the project's work has a ripple effect into the wider community.

DCRT have already been successful in securing funding for another freshwater project this time in North East Derbyshire. The challenge for DCRT and its partners now is to **finish cementing the legacy** of the Living Heritage of the River Don project and build upon the momentum built by the project in its wider work.



Introducing the project

The Don Catchment Rivers Trust

The River Don (or the Don) is a highly urbanised river with a long history of metal manufacture and engineering. Water powered industry at its edges was extensive and much of the physical infrastructure is still intact. Working waterwheels can still be found at Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet and at Shepherd Wheel in Sheffield.

The Don Catchment River Trust (DCRT) was established in 2008, achieving charitable status in 2010, with a mission 'to conserve, protect, rehabilitate, and improve the Rivers Don, Dearne, and Rother and the associated non-tidal and tidal systems that might influence their fauna, flora, water quality and hydrology.'³

DCRT has a wide range of objectives which seek to maintain and improve the physical environment of the River Don, including the ambition to achieve the following:

- Ensure future generations have a better understanding of river catchments and river catchment management
- Promote and increase participation in river stewardship schemes in the Don catchment.

Engagement with the people and communities in the Don catchment is central to the work of the Trust, and it is only through these people and communities that the rivers and their heritage will be better cared for and valued into a sustainable future.

DCRT's Mission for the project is:

Our ambition is to **reconnect** people, communities and decision makers back to the River Don and its **rich natural, cultural, built and industrial heritage.**

We want to change their beliefs and attitudes so that the River Don and its heritage will be **better valued** as a major asset to South Yorkshire and **better protected** into the future.

The project

Aimed to make a transformational change in the way in which people are engaged with the heritage of the River Don and the level at which this happens and to remove the physical barriers to aid the

return of the Atlantic salmon to the river. It aimed to affect a true step change in the opportunities people have to interact with this heritage of local, regional, and national importance.

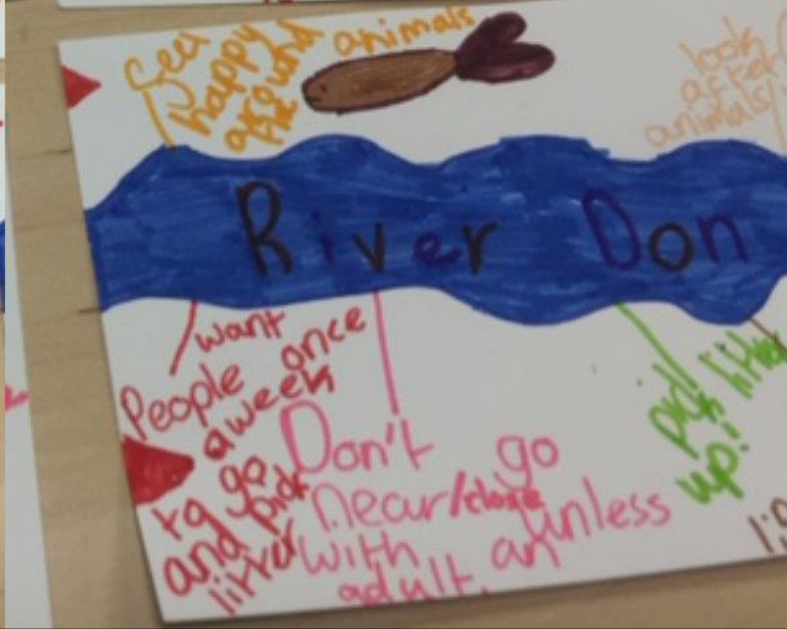
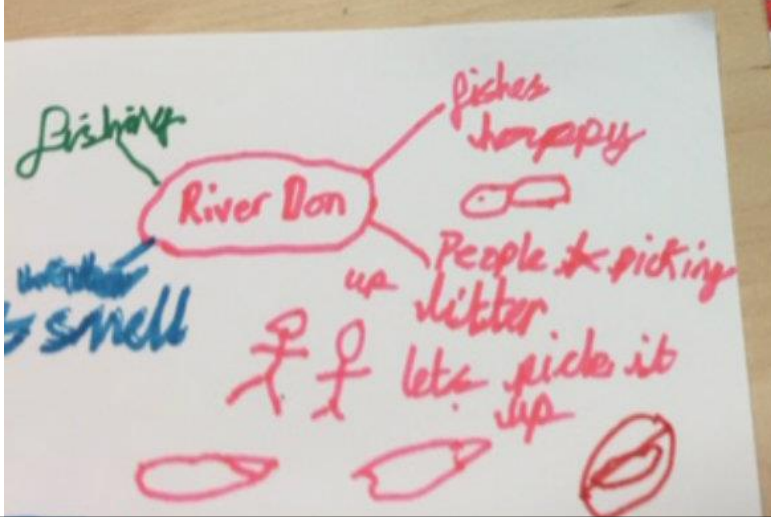
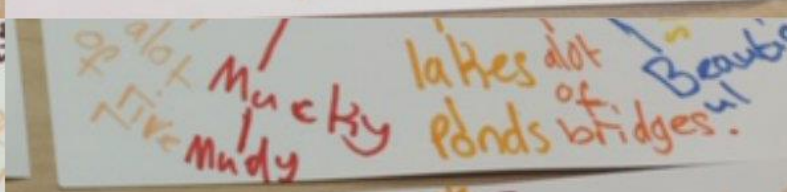
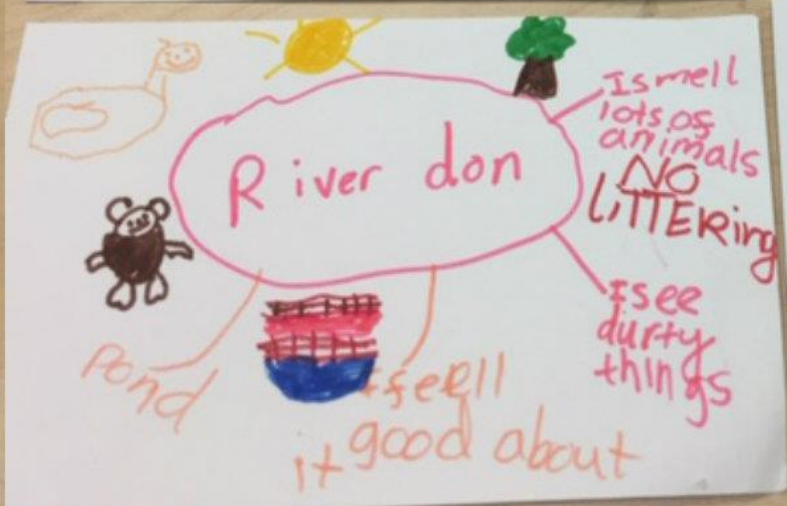
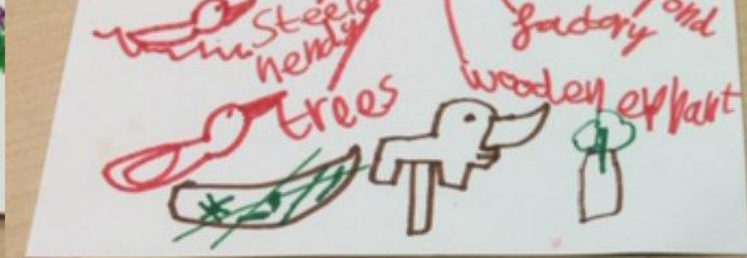
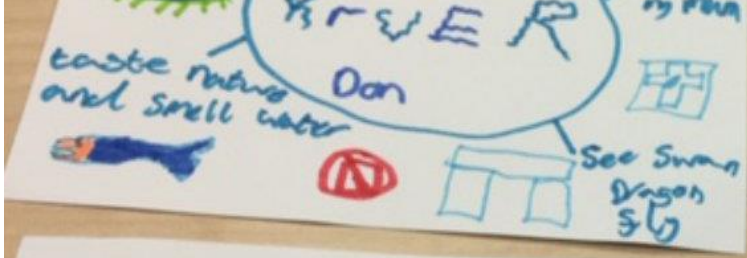
The project was comprised of four primary aims. The first was **supporting the return of salmon to the River Don**, which involves the construction of a number of fish passes to enable salmon and other fish to cross weirs in the River Don. The second aim was to **inspire and mobilise local communities**. Included under this aim were the HLF aims for people such as ‘people will have had an enjoyable time’ and ‘the local area will be a better place to live, work, or visit’. Aim three was **develop skills for heritage and capacity**. This included ‘people will have learnt new skills’ and ‘the organisation will be more resilient’. The fourth and final aim was **to foster understanding of heritage and change perceptions**. HLF aims categorised under this aim included ‘people will have learnt about heritage’ and ‘heritage will be better interpreted and explained’.

Each aim is examined in turn as part of this report.

Monitoring and evaluation methods

A mosaic approach has been employed for this evaluation which involves triangulating a variety of evaluation techniques to help minimise bias, gather as robust a picture of the project as possible and engage a variety of stakeholders. Data was then synthesized from across these data sources to create a professional and independent interpretation of the results. Data collection methods for this stage of evaluation are as follows:

- Review of the interim evaluation report
- Review of key monitoring data
- Telephone interviews with key informants. Stakeholders n= 17 Volunteers n=6. See Appendix 1 for list of participants and question framework and Appendix 2 for interview summaries
- An in-depth review of the project outputs via monitoring spreadsheet
- A Project Learning Review, 25th October 2018 n=5. See Appendix 5
- Legacy planning session with members of the project and trustees team, 20th February 2018. See Appendix 6
- Two focus groups with pupils (aged 8-9 years) from Canklow Woods Primary School, 4th December 2018 n=12. See Appendix 3 for summary of focus group
- Online engagement and perceptions survey n=50
- Evaluation of the youth arts events by artists
- Events programme evaluation cards n=38
- Public engagement and perceptions survey winter 2018 n=50
- Comments and quotes diary kept by the project team
- Sample of project photos
- Review of social media feeds
- Results of the DCRT administered volunteer survey 2018 n=7.



Main evaluation findings

Funding breakdown and budgeting

DCRT were successful in securing all the £1,420,000 funding for the Living Heritage of the River Don project from a variety of sources, shown below.

Funding sources

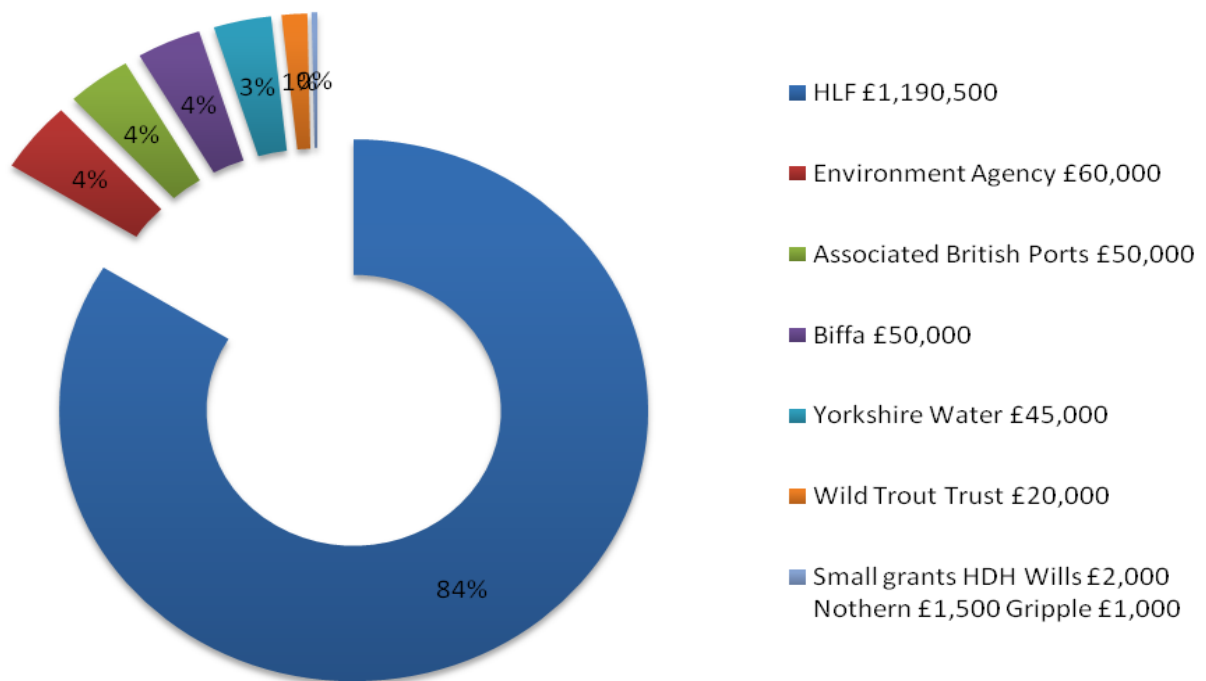


Figure 1 Doughnut chart showing the funding sources for the Living Heritage of the River Don project.

All stakeholders⁴ felt that the project had had an appropriate budget, number of staff, and that they had been adequately supported for delivery of the project. The budget was viewed as well put together and that it had allowed the project team to deliver what they set out to do.

“The budget was well put together, we weren’t short for anything really. Our support has come from a wide range of services, lots of organisations and professionals; if we didn’t have any in house knowledge, we’ve always been able to find out someone who can help with it.”

- DCRT Director

Project management, staffing and partnerships

Overall all stakeholders’ expectations of the project had been either met or exceeded, rating these at a ‘three’ or above on a scale from one to five⁵.

⁴ Source: key informant interviews n=15

⁵ With one being ‘not met’ and five being ‘exceeded expectations’.

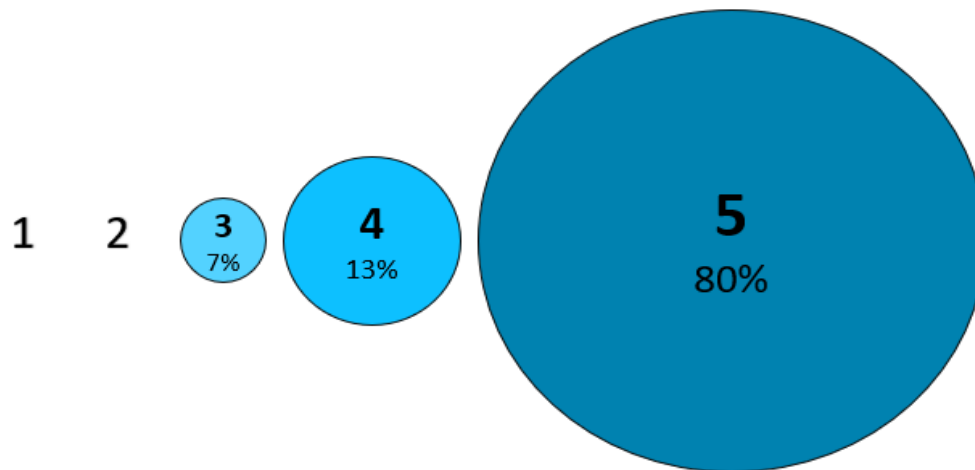


Figure 2 Bubble chart showing the extent to which stakeholder expectations of the project have been met. 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'exceeded'.

The high level of satisfaction with the project is largely due to stakeholders feeling that it delivered exactly what the interviewees hoped it would, and then going above and beyond to add to this, for example by developing innovation. Some interviewees also feel that the project has successfully achieved a complete change in attitude amongst local people, with this working better than many of the interviewees expected and being evidenced through such outcomes as the volunteers completely taking ownership of their aspects of the project.

Level of support received was also seen as successful, with stakeholders feeling that the support received from outside organisations and professionals had resulted in clear guidance to support the project team. The internal support amongst the project team was also praised by stakeholders. One-to-ones and regular team meetings were introduced amongst the project team, helping to bring the team together and resolve any issues quickly and simply, as well as keeping everyone 'in the loop' and helping the project to run smoothly day-to-day.

The level and variety of partnership working has been a success of this project with over 40 organisations engaged with (see beneficiaries' section). Through the course of the project DCRT has learnt a lot about carefully identifying organisations with whom a partnership will not only be mutually beneficial but also most fruitful and provide best value for money for the effort put in on both sides.

The project team's inclusive approach meant that partners reported feeling like a real part of the project, having been involved in the project website and social media and feeling that they could easily talk to project team

"I've learnt a lot, mainly to value nature more but also, how we can cause massive issues for wildlife through negligence. It's our responsibility to make a change."

- Project Apprentice

members about any concerns or opportunities arising for the project. The work of the project team was also praised by stakeholders and partners, who feel that the team were always organised and have been able to develop from strength to strength due to the project. Interviewees also feel that the recruitment of the two apprentices has been a real success, hoping that they will continue to work within this industry going forwards.

The main delays or blockers to project progress or impact revolved around people, including project staff turnover, which interviewees felt did add a challenge due to poor exit procedures⁶ the Trust had in place resulting in work being duplicated, losing some time and momentum. The Trust struggled with this issue at the start of the project and there was a high staff turnover. DCRT now believe this was due to a lack of structure in job roles as a project of this calibre had never been carried out by the Trust previously. DCRT has used this experience to ensure that staff roles are now much more clearly defined, with current staff providing direction for new staff.

Were the project aims met?

The extent to which each of the four project aims was met is explored within this section.

Aim 1: Supporting the return of salmon to the River Don

There are 21 weirs on the Don between Doncaster and Beeley Wood Lower weir above Sheffield City centre. At the time of the bid to HLF, ten were already passable to salmon. In December of 2015 salmon were seen and recorded jumping at Aldwarke weir on the Don. This was the season after a hydroelectric scheme with a fish pass had been installed at Thrybergh weir, the next weir downstream.

Since then the project has addressed five of those ‘orphaned’ weirs by installing fish passes reconnecting 6.5km of the Don and opening up 10km of spawning grounds to migratory fish in the middle of Sheffield. Of the remaining six, Aldwarke weir had a fish pass installed as part of a hydroelectric scheme in 2016; the Environment Agency demolished Beeley Woods weir and work commenced on Ickles weir in May of 2017 as part of a biomass power plant.

The capital works has been a very successful element of the project, with all the capital works having been successfully installed. The capital works completed **on time** and **below budget** demonstrates that community organisations can deliver their works at significantly less cost than public bodies.

“To get the five fish passes done in the length of time it’s taken is a great success, to manage something of that size, it was a big ask.”

- DCRT staff member

DCRT’s top tips for bringing in capital works on time and under budget are:

⁶ This is one of the lessons learnt identified by the DCRT during the Project Learning Review and has now been addressed through improved working practices and systems to more effectively capture corporate knowledge.

1. Planning
2. Talking to right people
3. Right budgets by involving contractors during development of funding bid, came back as expected
4. Employment of a contracts manager to manage/control contractors – being robust
5. Being robust regarding cost variation.

Interviewees feel that the project work to keep the river clean and tidy has also been instrumental in helping salmon to return to the river. Almost every interviewee named the return of salmon to the River Don as the greatest legacy of the project, discussing the effectiveness of both the fish passes and the clean-up of the river.

Interviewees feel that the project will act as a catalyst for a successful breeding population of salmon in the River Don, and hope that this will encourage future projects to construct even more fish passes further up the River Don.

“Getting salmon back into the centre of Sheffield for the first time in over 200 years. That is an immense achievement. We’ve achieved so much in terms of changing perceptions also, giving people a better understanding of what the river means, that is a legacy I’m proud of.”

- DCRT Trustee

There were also delays caused due to needing to seek different permissions for each weir and in gaining consent for the original fish pass plans.

There are plans for the remaining three weirs with one already being complete (fish pass at Jordan Dam installed by Yorkshire Water and officially opened November 2018).

“The river is now capable of supporting a breeding salmon population. Sheffield did have one of the most polluted rivers in Europe, where now we have a virtually clean river, is a startling achievement.”

- DCRT Trustee

Sheffield City Council has now agreed the budget for fish pass works at Sanderson’s weir and work will commence next year.

Masborough weir is owned by the Canal and River Trust and DCRT have been in talks with them for how this last piece of the jigsaw can be resolved to open up the whole of the River Don for salmon migration. Largely because of DCRT’s track record of delivering this project there is already funding in place to undertake the design work for the last remaining fish pass. All that remains is to identify funding to complete the capital works (aimed for completion in 2019) and DCRT are currently negotiating a partnership between themselves, the Environment Agency and the Canal and Rivers Trust.



Figure 3 Photo of an adult Atlantic salmon caught on the River Don in November 2018, featured in the Sheffield Star newspaper.

The real success of the project is in

whether the Atlantic salmon return to the River Don and use the fish passes. Initial sightings and feedback is encouraging with the photo (right) being posted on Facebook in November 2018 of an Atlantic salmon caught by an angler (and then re-released!) on the River Don⁷.

There is currently no robust system in place to monitor the effectiveness of the fish passes. Based on the one year inspection of the fish passes, DCRT have commissioned three pieces of work (all paid for by project capital under spend):

1. Installation of debris boom at Steelbank
2. Feasibility study where / how to place a fish counter along the river system
3. Study into notching of weirs to assist salmon returning down the river system.

DCRT are also exploring other monitoring methods for example, analysis of fish DNA. In addition, DCRT also need to review, agree and secure funding for a final maintenance regime for the fish passes.

Aim 2: Inspire and mobilise local communities

This area of activity aimed to re-engage the local community with the heritage of the River Don which is right on their doorstep. Working with over 40 established volunteer groups and organisations, the activities enthused, inspired and galvanised them to take pride in their rich and diverse River heritage. It included three main activity areas:

Heritage community volunteer programme – the project developed a range of roles and opportunities creating an attractive and accessible way for communities to help care for, begin to feel ownership of and learn about their local River heritage. Volunteering has been a high point of the project and for creating capacity for DCRT and this project and into the future. In total **386 volunteers** have contributed **2799 hours** of their own time to the project.

The volunteer programme has been hailed a success by stakeholders⁸ due to the wide range of people who have been involved and taken ownership of the river as well as developing a variety of skills through the workshops and courses.

Stakeholders reflected that more could have been done to recruit more volunteers earlier on in the project, and that volunteers having more of an input in the creation of the Don Valley Way would have been beneficial and made things run smoother. Whilst there was a slow start to the volunteering programme the project team have been praised for their hard work at drawing in volunteers, which resulted in high numbers of local community members participating in the project.

DCRT has now achieved Rotherham Volunteer Kitemark PLUS. This Kitemark is intended to showcase good practice within volunteer involving organisations in Rotherham and the surrounding

⁷ The location of this catch is not verified but is likely to be just below Masborough Weir, one of the last barriers to be addressed on the river.

⁸ Source: key informant interviews n=15.



areas⁹. DCRT achieved not just the kitemark but the ‘gold standard’ in recognition of the way in which the organisation invests in the professional development of those who support volunteers either in a paid or unpaid capacity and how it recognises the value of volunteers.

“The river is clean, amazing and interesting.”

- Year 4 pupil, Canklow Woods school

All the volunteers would like to continue volunteering along the River Don following the close of the project, with some feeling concerned that this will fall by the wayside as the project ends and support lessens. See Beneficiaries section for more information about the volunteering experience.

River Guardians programme – this brand new programme aimed to engage with a minimum of six local schools and educational organisations with the care of the River whilst delivering heritage learning. It aimed to inspire children to care for and take pride in the River on their doorstep through a range of ongoing activities such as river dipping, practical volunteering and survey work. This approach is to develop longer term sustainable relationships with a cluster of local schools through a structured programme rather than to just deliver one hit, one-off education sessions.

“The scouting movement is built on the love of life outdoors, so your event was in keeping with this. Your event helped to ignite their imagination outdoors, and gave them all an incredible sense of wellbeing, something that simply cannot be achieved to the same level indoors.”

- 31st St Peter’s Warmsworth Cubs leader

The targets were ambitious and there was an initial difficulty in engaging schools in target areas, especially those away from the river itself. However, after a thorough review the DCRT team decided to take a strategic and pragmatic approach to delivery of educational engagement. They therefore concentrated for the remainder of the project on schools in the river corridor for deep engagement and then shallower engagement for those further away. By the end of the project the team had achieved 27 school visits against an original target of 24.

It is clear the messages from the sessions stayed with children and have influenced their behaviour and thoughts about the future of the River Don.

⁹ To be awarded the basic kitemark DCRT had to meet 7 criteria:

1. Volunteering is open to everyone (Diversity)
2. Organisations aim to deliver a good volunteering experience (Recognition)
3. Recruitment of volunteers is fair and accessible (Diversity)
4. Organisations have appropriate policies for managing volunteers (Standards)
5. Volunteers are supported and supervised within their role (Give and take)
6. Volunteer programmes provide the training and information that volunteers need to carry out their role (Give and take)
7. Insurance, health and safety, safeguarding and other legal requirements are met (Standards).

During the school focus groups¹⁰, children were asked to think about how they would like to see the River Don in five years' time. They saw it as important that the wildlife stayed the same or increased and hoped to see more bins along the river to discourage littering. Litter and its impact on wildlife was their biggest concern about the future of the river, and they discussed various strategies which could be implemented to discourage this, including litter pickers, signage, new litter bins, tougher laws for littering, or fencing to prevent direct access to the river.

The children were also concerned about people killing animals, with some having heard about animals being shot along the river and discussing ways this could be prevented, such as river patrols. The children's primary concern was for the wildlife and the prevention of the destruction of river habitats.

"[As a result of my visit I will] Tell my friends not to put rubbish in the rivers."

- Pupil, St Gerard's Primary School

River safety was also discussed, with some of the children, who were fearful of potentially falling into the river, wanting to see such measures as fencing or life-rings available to be thrown in.

The children were keen to play an active role in protecting wildlife, feeling that they would all like to be involved in litter picks when they were older and that they would like to teach others about the importance of nature conservation and to be more respectful of the animals living along the river.

See Beneficiaries section for more information on the outcomes for schools and pupils.

Youth art project – this mini project aimed to work with local youth groups. Using professional creative practitioners, the project provided young people the opportunity to learn about and be inspired by the heritage of the River. They worked together to develop creative interpretation and artistic responses to the heritage that can be temporarily displayed along the new Don Valley Heritage Trail. 52 young people were engaged against a target of 30 and whilst the target was exceeded, the project team reflected that more young people could have benefitted and DCRT have learnt lessons in delivering such work. For example, this kind of engagement work can be done without partnership by working with a famous local artist which is a great way of attracting young people.

¹⁰ n=12

Those young people who did engage had a high quality and positive experience of the River Don and it resulted in creative and inspiring interpretive works.



Figure 4 Photo of young people during one of the art events creating a riverside mural.

Aim 3: Develop skills for heritage and capacity

This project aim focussed on up-skilling for volunteers and community groups to undertake the activities outlined through a programme of training opportunities.

This was viewed by stakeholders¹¹ as a success in terms of the numbers of people to be trained and the diversity of the skills training offered to project participants. The project apprentice, for example, had been able to pick up a range of skills which he believes will help him to build a career. He has also been able to gain experience with a variety of different audiences such as school pupils, members of the public, and volunteers.

Other interviewees feel that this aim has successfully been achieved through the courses open to volunteers and members of the public, which have both helped to build skills and to engage a wider audience.

There were some comments surrounding uncertainty of how embedded the training is within the Trust's delivery in future, and uncertainty regarding how many of the skills learnt in training had been able to be used in practice.

¹¹ Source: key informant interviews n=15.

Environmental conservation apprenticeships -

Two Environmental Conservation apprenticeships were delivered, over three years, incorporating conservation skills. Whilst the preferred target young people were identified as NEETs and young offenders through the Youth Justice Scheme, this was a challenging group to target in practice.

“I’ve learnt lots of new skills, I can build a career from the things I have experienced and learnt. We do lots of courses – water safety, PPE. We go to schools and talk about the river, on volunteer days we share a lot about wildlife too.”

- Project Apprentice

Group management and practical task training –

this training provided the skills needed to be involved in, organise and manage practical volunteering opportunities. Training opportunities included safety training, water awareness, first aid and safe guarding.

Developing conservation and heritage skills – for 210 people (21 days over three years, 10 people per day) this included a range of skills needed to complete the tasks outlined in Aim 1 including vegetation management, tool maintenance, hedge laying, wildflower identification and using mammal tracks for surveying. It was found to be a good niche for volunteer training – particularly for the more ‘professional’ or river specific types e.g. hydromorphology, which was oversubscribed so another session was run.

Establish ‘Friends of’ groups – this focussed on the development of a minimum of two sustainable ‘Friends of’ groups rooted within the local communities they serve. It is envisaged that these groups will be self-sustaining in the future and the project provided the training required to facilitate the groups forming and running themselves for example, roles and responsibilities, minute taking and running meetings, supervising practical conservation tasks. The project has also helped to develop other groups, and hopefully inspired individuals to get involved in groups, even if they are not DCRT’s own volunteers (not necessarily identified in the targets).

In addition to their own Friends of groups, DCRT have supported and put capacity into groups with interests in the river – e.g. Friends of Shirtcliffe, Moss Valley Wildlife Group, Friends of Wardsend Cemetery, Warmsworth Environmental Group.

DCRT see this as a more sustainable way of the Trust supporting volunteers and the EA has indicated that they would like them to use the Don Network grant money to continue supporting groups. They just need to decide what that support looks like.

Of those volunteers who had taken part in training, all found it useful to some extent¹².

¹² Source: DCRT administered volunteer survey 2018 n=7.

Aim 4: To help foster understanding of heritage and change perceptions

The River Don has a rich, multi-faceted heritage (see diagram right) and one of the triumphs of this project has been not to stay solely focussed on the natural heritage but to embrace and celebrate all aspects of the heritage.

Aim 4 is focussed on tackling the two greatest of barriers to engaging with the heritage of the River Don; negative perceptions and lack of awareness (as identified during the activity planning process). These are key barriers to overcome if the DCRT is to attain its ambitious vision. Changing people’s attitudes and/or behaviour towards the river is a key objective for their project.



The return of salmon will be a fitting, unique and powerful way to change attitudes and perceptions of the River Don. Salmon have an iconic high status, symbolic of clean, healthy and valued rivers. The signs of resurgent life and restored natural heritage will help to renew interest in the built and industrial heritage of the river helping to protect it in the long term.

“On the reengagement aspect, I’ve seen a complete change in attitude, many people still found it difficult to recognise the river as an ecological environment. They were very sceptical, now their attitude has changed”

- DCRT Trustee

Overall it is felt by interviewees that the project is beginning to positively change people’s perceptions of the river, although it was viewed as a difficult thing to measure. Interviewees feel that perceptions are beginning to change through the project team and volunteers’ interactions with the public along the river, helping them to understand the importance of the river heritage, community events such as discovery days, and making the river a more pleasant area to be around resulting in higher engagement with it and subsequently changed perceptions from it being a ‘dirty’ place to a nice place to visit.

See the Attaining the vision section for more information on changing perceptions.

Heritage discovery events programme – The project provided people with the chance to enjoy time down by the River through an events programme. These activities also addressed the lack of knowledge exhibited by local residents regarding the heritage of the River Don and provided fun interesting ways to learn about its natural, cultural and built heritage.

Motivations for attendance

Most of the attendees¹³ had been to the events due to a general interest in, or pre-existing relationship with, the river or surrounding areas. Some of the attendees were already volunteers in neighbouring areas, or part of friends’ groups such as the Friends of Wardsend Cemetery. Others were simply interested in discovering more about the river and saw the events as a good opportunity to do this whilst having an enjoyable day out.

Most interesting thing discovered

Attendees listed a variety of things they had found interesting during the events, with most surrounding plants and the river’s wildlife, and some also being surprised about how the canal locks function.



Plants

The interesting things attendees had discovered about plants included the dangers of such plants as Himalayan Balsam to the ecosystem, and Hogweed to humans.

Primarily, however, attendees had been interested in the wildlife, particularly enjoying learning how to catch butterflies, watching birds, and learning about the different species of bees and butterflies along the river. The diversity of the river’s wildlife was surprising to some attendees and discovering about the different wildlife helped to change perceptions of the river for others, who previously saw it as ‘just a river’, and now recognised it as a hub of activity for a variety of species.

Perceptions of the river

Most people’s perceptions of the river had been altered due to attending project events, with those whose perceptions hadn’t changed being because they were already familiar with the river, and appreciative of it and its plants and wildlife. The events had generally helped attendees to understand more about the river and therefore appreciate it more. Many attendees described the way they viewed the river prior to attending the event as ‘cool’, ‘great’, or ‘like it’, moving on to describe the way they viewed it after the event as ‘even cooler’ ‘even better’, or ‘like it even more.’



Wildlife



Locks

“It [the river] is a haven for wildlife and an important part of local ecology.”

- Project event attendee

“[The river is] A gem for the region!”

- Event attendee

“I’ve always liked the river and I’m glad to see it being valued.”

- Event attendee

¹³ Source: creative comment cards n=38

Others had simply taken the river at face value before, seeing it as a place to walk or ‘look at’, but the event has shifted the way they view it, now often seeing it as a ‘haven for wildlife’ or a ‘gem’, better understanding the multiple layers to the river and its functions within the ecosystem.

Some of the attendees had never previously visited the river before, having either just moved to the area or simply never thinking to visit. When asked what their perceptions of the river were following the event, all who had never visited before responded positively, seeing it as interesting and a valuable resource.

As a result of visiting

Attendees were also asked to think about whether they would do anything as a result of the events. Most said that they would, with many wanting to visit the river more often, either through walks along it, boat trips, or visiting to take part in an activity such as fishing. Others would like to engage more with the plant or wildlife along the river, through birding, bug hunting, or foraging.

Some attendees said they would like to become volunteers with the project as a result of the events so that they would be able to make a difference to the river.

Don Valley Way Heritage Trail – the key recommendation of the Access Audit during the development stage¹⁴ was to create a formal heritage trail along the linear River Don with possible side loops to this into neighbouring priority communities. It now provides an engaging new way for people to encounter a rich natural, industrial and built heritage along the river. The physical trail largely existed before the project and so the capital costs for its establishment were minimal. The project improved access, highlighted the trail by improved signage, maps, leaflets and activities.

“We did an evaluation recently, of the creation of the Don Valley Way, what we found was that we really rushed it out in the first year. We also found that volunteers helping more on the creation of the don valley way would have really helped us out.”

- Project Manager

Geocaching along the route has been one of the unexpected successes bringing a huge new audience to the banks of the River Don virtually overnight through the placement of new caches and trackable challenges. ‘Cache in, trash out’¹⁵ events have been held as a part of these project. These events relate to the geocaching and to the river clean-up activities. The CITO events not only resulted in the River Don being made a little cleaner, it also attracted a more diverse audience, as geocachers may not have learnt about the project had they not been drawn to the CITO events.

¹⁴ See Activity Plan appendices.

¹⁵ ‘Cache in, trash out’ (CITO) is an environmental initiative supported by the geocaching community, which help to preserve natural spaces. The idea is that geocachers are able to earn virtual souvenirs through attending CITO events and picking up litter from a selected area, in this case a section along the River Don.

The Don Valley Way is now a riverside 29 mile route connecting the major population centres of Doncaster and Sheffield. It is accompanied by eight circular heritage walks exploring the surrounding communities adjacent to the River. The trail is freely available via its own dedicated high quality website including interactive mapping, audio trails, downloadable community heritage trails and accompanying audio trails, information about access and other things to do in the area.



Some stakeholders feel that it would have been better, in hindsight, to spend more time launching the Don Valley Way as some elements of it were a little rushed as a result of trying to prepare it all within the first year of the project, and better community links may have helped with the trail launch.

Voices of the Don – in order to foster understanding of the heritage of the Don and gather the voices of local communities, oral histories were collected to feed into the interpretation. At the end of the project, stories, poems, images and thoughts about the River Don from stakeholders and communities were collated into a high quality hard back book. A limited edition of 300



copies was produced and given to volunteers, stakeholders and the writers as a thank you gift. This poignant celebratory piece further conveyed a positive image of the river and its heritage in line with the project’s core aim.

Figure 5 Photo of the Voices of the River Don book copyright Genie Creative.

Project communications and PR – the project has achieved much success in attracting media attention and utilising their social media channels to engage existing and new audiences including local communities. The project blog provided an up-to-date window on the work of the project whilst the two websites provided key information.

Some communication issues were raised by stakeholders¹⁶, particularly with the use of social media and online materials, which some interviewees would like to see improved, with better presentation of the website for the purposes of the project, and increased interaction with national media.

¹⁶ Source: key informant interviews n=15.

Summary of outcomes

The Living Heritage of the River Don project has delivered a raft of outcomes. The table below summarises these in the context of the HLF outcome framework.

HLF outcome area	Examples of how this has been achieved
Outcomes for heritage	
Heritage will be better managed	
Heritage will be in better condition	Five fish passes were installed by the project opening up 6.5km of river for Atlantic salmon migration. A number of activities helped to improve the condition of the River, for example, community litter clearance.
Heritage will be better interpreted and explained	A range of interpretation has improved the way in which the stories of the River Don’s varied heritage are told and the prominence of these stories. This has in turn begun to foster a greater understanding of its heritage within the local area and partner organisations.
Heritage will be better identified/recorded	Oral histories were collected, and local history researched to inform the interpretation delivered by the project
Outcomes for people	
People will have developed skills	184 volunteers trained gaining a certificate or qualification and two apprentices over the life of the project.
People will have changed their behaviours/attitude	Across the full range of activities, those engaged in the project have either had a change in their perceptions about the heritage of the River Don (previously cold audiences) or have extended their learning (already warm audiences)
People will have had an enjoyable experience	A greater understanding of the heritage has been fostered, 3988 people at events. Every activity including the heritage discovery event programme provided enjoyable and positive experiences for local people connecting with their River and heritage
People will have volunteered time	A robust and vibrant volunteering programme was created, and 386 volunteers gave 2799 volunteer hours
People will have learnt about heritage	1177 children and young people have been inspired to become River Guardians
Outcomes for communities	
Negative environmental impacts will be reduced	Negative impacts of industrialisation and pollution have begun to be reversed by the project along a 10km stretch of the River Don
More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage	Inspired and mobilised local communities and a wide range of individuals through the programme of volunteering and events. A wide range of community organisations have been involved in the project totalling more than 43.
The local area will be a better place in which to live or work	Physical improvements to the River Don through fish pass installation, hot spot clean ups and improved interconnection between local organisations.
The local economy will be boosted	Use of local suppliers and improvement in skills locally through training and apprenticeships. The contract for the fish pass installation, for example went to a local company who had not done one before, but this built on their skills and capacity
The organisation will be more resilient	Development of a vibrant volunteering programme and skills in volunteer management.

Figure 6 Table summarising the outcomes delivered by the Living Heritage of the River Don project.



Beneficiaries

A number of target audience groups were identified during the development phase of the Living Heritage of the River Don project. The evaluation process examined who has benefitted from the project.

DCRT’s reach before the project was very limited and the project has allowed the organisation to **significantly expand** the range and number of people with whom it engages and the deepen the level of that engagement.

Local communities in the river corridor

From the list of 39 potential local communities identified in the development stage of the project, 10¹⁷ were identified to be priority targets for this project, all situated along the River and chosen as they are the most deprived. From the outset, DCRT recognised that this may be too large a number of communities to successfully engage with given the organisation’s then inexperience and the low level of current engagement. This was however a starting point from which to begin engagement and plans were reviewed in terms of the depth and breadth of engagement during the delivery of the project.

1. Non-users of the River Don
2. Community groups (see below)
3. Young people and in particular NEETs and young offenders (see below)
4. Offenders
5. Formal and informal education institutions (see below)
6. People whose physical and mental health would benefit from the outdoor experience of the heritage trail.

In the first half of the project contacting the right people and the right groups was a challenge, as was making sure the people with a potential interest in the project were aware of what DCRT were offering. The Trust had very little experience of community engagement prior to the commencement of the project, so found this challenging, but it has improved as the project has gone on. Some communities were also difficult to reach, and to partially help resolve this, some members of the Trust engaged on a training course on a spectrum of media, including social media, to learn how to better target new groups.

Recreational users both local and regional of the River Don including walkers, canoeists and anglers have certainly benefitted from the improvements to the river, its environs, access and interpretation. In addition, daily and weekly users who use the river side as part of their commute to work or school or to access local amenities (i.e. a route to somewhere else rather than a destination in itself) have also benefitted, especially from access improvements and an improved feeling of safety and security when beside the river.

“It’s good to see the river clearer and being utilised.”

- Event attendee

¹⁷ Denaby Main; St George’s, Doncaster inc parts of Hexthorpe, Hyde Park, St James & Balby; St. James’ Doncaster inc parts of Hexthorpe, Hyde Park; St James & Balby; Dalton; Masborough; Clifton including Eastwood; St Leonards, Thrybergh; Ellesmere parish including Burngreave (including Fir Vale) and Brightside; Attercliffe and Darnall; Tinsley, Sheffield.

Local children and schools

The project was successful in inspiring 1177 children to become River Guardians. Feedback from schools and pupils was overwhelmingly positive to this high quality programme.

A small sample of school children who had engaged with the River Guardians programme¹⁸ were invited to take part in a focus group to interrogate the potential outcomes of the programme further. The children were asked to describe their relationship to the river in their own words, through discussions of project activities as well as visits to the river outside school time with their families and friends.

“It was amazing! We found frogs, tadpoles, and dragonflies. It was full of nature.”

- School pupil

When discussing activities they had participated in as a part of River Guardians, the children focused heavily on the wildlife they had seen there as well as discovering how human beings had a negative influence on the river. Wildlife they had been particularly excited about included damselflies, Ramson Snails, dragonflies, and grasshoppers.

The children also spoke about how the activities had altered their perceptions of the river. At the start of the activities on the river, many had taken the water at face value – seeing it as ‘dirty’ or ‘mucky’, but they had then learnt about the wildlife and tested the water for pollution levels. This had revealed that the water was in fact clean, and the dirt, plants, and silt which the children could see were necessary to make a positive habitat for the wildlife living in the river.

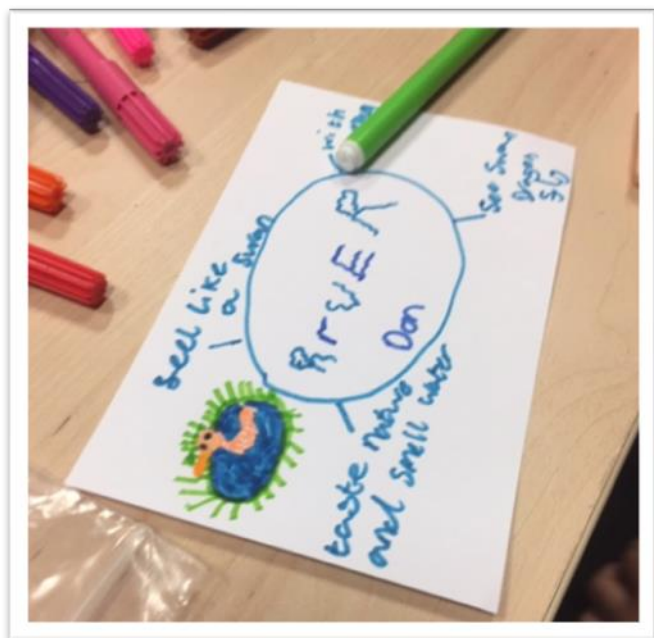
“The river is muddy so that animals can hide in it.”

- School pupil

The children explained that the water was muddy so that creatures could use it to hide in and had generally been able to learn a valuable lesson that even though the water looks ‘dirty’ to humans, in fact that made it a good environment for wildlife.

This relationship was also explored within a familial context outside of school time in order to better understand any other influences on the children’s usage and perceptions of the river. Most of the children had either visited the River Don with their families or discussed the River Guardians activities at home.

Their families were likely to see the river as a positive space, with many encouraging the children to pick up any litter they saw along the river or discussing negative human influence on the wildlife. The children also saw the river as a social



- School pupil

Figure 7: Progress photo of one of the children's personal meaning maps

¹⁸ Source: School focus group n=12.

space, having used it mainly for fishing, family walks, or collecting litter as a family. One child discussed a visit with his uncle, in which he told his uncle to stop littering along the riverbank and shared his learning from the River Guardians activities with him.

Children were asked about any actions they had taken for the river as a result of their involvement with the project¹⁹. Most of the children had taken positive actions since participating in River Guardians, primarily:



Figure 8: Graphic of actions the children have taken since participating in the River Guardians programme

All the children were now more conscious about littering, ensuring that they were careful about putting things in the bin instead of simply throwing them on the ground. They also said that when there were no bins around, they now take rubbish home with them to throw away at home rather than littering.

Sharing knowledge was another thing which most children said they had done, often encouraging friends or family members to recycle or to stop littering and helping the people around them to understand the negative impacts of littering on wildlife.

Some children had asked their parents to purchase reusable plastic bottles for them to bring to school instead of using single-use drinks and had also tried to be mindful of recycling plastics instead of just throwing them away where recycling bins were available.

Young people

52 young people were engaged through arts events. They benefitted by learning about the River Don and their local heritage through practical activities such as bat walks as well as having the opportunity to work with artists and creative practitioners, try out new techniques and exhibit their work publically.

¹⁹ Creative comment cards which the children completed on site following River Guardians activities were used as a basis for this, including a section on ‘actions you will take for the river’

It is clear from the evaluation that there was a seismic shift in the young people’s awareness and perceptions of the River Don and its heritage as a result of engagement in the project.

This work is clearly important in engaging this audience group in a positive and appropriate way for their age and interests. The most success was achieved when the project worked with well known artists as a draw for young people and when working in partnership with organisations

who already had a mandate to engage with young people such as Sheffield College. The Living Heritage of the River Don project has tested this way of working and future projects could expand upon this to engage more young people and deepen impacts.



Figure 9 A sample of the artwork from the October 2018 youth art project.

Volunteers

The volunteers got involved in the project in a variety of ways, with many being retired and using the project to keep active or to contribute to their local communities.

All the volunteers have found their roles enjoyable, particularly finding it satisfying to see the areas they work on during litter picking become clearer and knowing that they are making a difference to the river. The social aspect of the volunteering was also viewed as enjoyable, enabling the volunteers to make new friends and to meet like minded people.

“I have found it very enjoyable. It’s very satisfying when the location becomes clean and tidy. The most enjoyable part is meeting new people and like-minded people.”

- Volunteer

Volunteers feel strongly that they were provided with a high level of support from the project team throughout their participation. All DCRT volunteer felt welcomed or extremely welcomed²⁰ when they joined the project team and found their volunteering experience meaningful.

“It has helped us a lot, it’s helped us mentally too, since retiring we’ve been twiddling our thumbs a bit. It’s a reason to get out and do things, it’s a pleasure to work.”

- Volunteers

It was felt that adequate equipment was provided for any activity it was needed for, including PPE, and that the project team always adhered to the appropriate health and safety regulations. Volunteers were also pleased with the training programme, feeling that it had been of an excellent quality. All volunteers rated acceptance of volunteers by staff, recognition given to volunteers, volunteers being trusted with important things and support by staff as good as excellent.

²⁰ Source: DCRT administered volunteer survey 2018 n=7.

Although not all the volunteers had been able to gain practical skills through project participation, as many felt that they were already competent in all the necessary skills, it was felt that being involved in the project had helped volunteer mental health through keeping many of them active during retirement. Some volunteers were also able to pick up skills for natural heritage, such as tree and wildflower identification.

Local organisations

The project engaged with **over 40 local organisations and community groups**. Partnerships were formed in a variety of styles and to a range of depths depending on the area of activity being collaborated on and the mutual aims of the organisations. The following types of groups of people benefited from the project:

- Community groups – who can act as gatekeepers to communities and who we can help strengthen by providing them with volunteer activities
- Special Interest Groups – e.g. local history groups
- Non-governmental organisations, statutory bodies and peers
- Partner organisations and stakeholders.

Examples of the range of size and types of organisations engaged include Canal & River Trust, Don Gorge Community Group, Warmsworth Environmental Group, Mexborough Ferryboat Association, Kelham Island Community Alliance, Friends of Wardend Cemetery, Friends of Chapel on the Bridge, Go Green, Love Where You Live (Rotherham), the RSPB, Thurnscoe Local History Group, Carcroft Local History Group, the Environment Agency and Hillsborough College.

Other projects

DCRT have been actively sharing their lessons learnt and good practice throughout the project, particularly their work on fish pass planning and installation. They have been approached by a wide range of projects and organisations for advice and help. They have also organised specific sharing events. For example, DCRT invited peers from the sector to a two day sharing event in Sheffield in autumn 2018. This was attended by 33 on the first day and 28 on the second representing organisations ranging from other River Trusts, Wildlife Trusts, local authorities, other HLF projects, community groups and some volunteers from the wider DCRT team.



Lessons learnt

Drawing lessons learnt from a project is an important step toward action learning²¹. The lessons can be used by DCRT to improve future projects and shared amongst peers to gain wider benefit. Lessons learnt have been identified in three ways:

1. Through self reflection by stakeholders²²
2. Through a team reflection session
3. During a Project Learning Review²³ or PLR facilitated by Kate Measures, Technical Head of Research and Evaluation at Heritage Insider; the project’s appointed evaluation consultants.

It is also important to recognise what steps need to be taken to act upon the lesson learnt. Findings are grouped into topics. A summary of the PLR and team reflection session can be found in Appendix 5 and a summary of stakeholder interviews can be found in Appendix 2. A few examples are given below.

Management and Partnerships

Three key lessons were identified by stakeholders . The first revolves around project staff, with interviewees feeling strongly that doing everything possible to retain staff at the start of the project is important. This includes making sure that staff feel listened to, and creating a positive working environment, as well as making sure that job roles and descriptions are very clear so that staff understand exactly what is required of them before even officially entering their roles.

“Retention of staff is really important, so creating an atmosphere where people are really enjoying their work is important; where going to the office is a positive experience.”

- Project team member

Some stakeholders also felt that DCRT had learnt about the power of working in partnership, and what can be achieved when this is done properly.

Lessons were also learnt about steps in the planning process and how to navigate bureaucracy. Stakeholders reflected that whilst there will be a lot of this to get through, the project team should not be put off by it as there is always a way to work around it.

Engaging audiences and communities

The project team were able to work with a wide variety of different audiences and communities, from contractors to school pupils, the press, and community groups across the project area. Valuable lessons were learnt in which tactics to employ for engaging with different groups, learning

²¹ Revans, R. W. (1998) *ABC of action learning*. London: Lemos and Crane.

²² Captured during key informant interviews n=15.

²³ A Project Learning Review or PLR is a form of group reflective practice. Reflective practice is a way of studying our own experiences to improve the way in which we work, and the project performs. It can help us to deal with real, complex and difficult situations as well as helping the team to recognise and capture successes. The DCRT PLR was facilitated by Kate Measures, Technical Head of Research and Evaluation at Heritage Insider; the project’s appointed evaluation consultants. The DCRT team worked together and were asked to use the Rolfe (2011) model of reflective practice to explore their experiences of the project.

the importance of a varied approach and how effective it can be at spreading motivation throughout the community. DCRT also learnt about:

- The importance of detailed planning when engaging with audiences on every front
- How to effectively manage contractors
- The importance of maintaining flexibility to allow the organisation to review and adjust with the overall aim/vision still in mind
- Getting the right mix of team members and planning for adequate capacity is essential
- How tracking achievements/targets can help to motivate staff and volunteers but also identify problems early on.

Developing skills and capacity

The first apprentice hasn't continued in employment in the conservation sector. DCRT learnt that an improved recruitment process can enable more effective recruitment of the right candidate. This includes the inclusion of a practical/teamwork 'test' in the interview process, advertising apprenticeships more widely and changing timing of adverts to tie in with A level results. Furthermore, DCRT recognise that it's important for the organisation to have the confidence to re-advertise if they do not get suitable applicants first time round.



Attaining the vision

Missions or vision statements are always more ambitious and longer term than any one project. However, each project should positively contribute towards moving the organisation towards attaining its goal.

The vision of the Living Heritage of the River Don project was as follows:

Our ambition is to **reconnect** people, communities and decision makers back to the River Don and its **rich natural, cultural, built and industrial heritage.**

We want to change their beliefs and attitudes so that the River Don and its heritage will be **better valued** as a major asset to South Yorkshire and **better protected** into the future.

DCRT planned to deliver the vision through supporting the return of salmon to the River Don by reconnecting isolated river habitats with fish passes allowing their passage. The work to reconnect the River Don planned for the project has been completed and other works now in progress will see the whole length of the Don connected for the first time in 200 years.

The ambition to reconnect people, communities and decision makers to the heritage of the River is obviously a complex and highly ambitious task. It was recognised in the planning phases that the Living Heritage of the River Don project alone would never be able to achieve this, especially given the huge population centres clustered around the river.

During the development stage as part of consultation²⁴, both 'warm' and 'cold'²⁵ audiences were asked to express their perceptions of the river by choosing three words to describe it. The cold audiences had very negative perceptions, see the word cloud on the following page.

²⁴ See Activity Plan for further detail.

²⁵ 'warm' audiences being those already connected with the River Don and/or its heritage and 'cold' audiences are those who have not engaged to date.



Figure 11 Word cloud showing the words used by 'cold' or non-users to describe the River Don and its heritage

This was in stark contrast to the mix of words the 'warm' audiences used, see word cloud below:



Figure 10 Word cloud showing the words used to describe the River Don by 'warm' or user audiences before the project started.

The children perceived the river as a wildlife-rich environment, excitedly discussing the various creatures they had been able to see first-hand. They often described the river as 'dirty' or 'mucky', however this was seen as a good thing as it meant the river was a good habitat for its species. It was also often viewed as 'smelly' but, again, this was seen as positive as the smell was 'natural' and made a good environment for wildlife.

"It's clean for animals, it just looks mucky for us."

- Year 4 pupil, Canklow Woods school

The children were concerned about the negative impacts of littering on nature, although during discussion the children stated that they felt that DCRT's work had helped to reduce the amount of litter within the river.

"[The river is] better now that the Trust clean it."

- Year 4 pupil, Canklow Woods school

The only other negative perception, along with the littering, which some of the children held about the river was that it was dangerous. Some were concerned about potentially getting too close to the edge and falling in, although most felt confident around the river and discussed the river safety training which they had participated in.

The river was also seen as a calming, peaceful place, with many of the children discussing the beauty of the river and how they felt relaxed when they were beside it. One child said that the river made him feel 'like a swan', as he was able to gain a better understanding of the river's wildlife through experiencing its sights, smells, and sounds, and he stated that being around the river made him feel 'free', which many of the other children agreed with.

"At the river I feel close to nature. I feel like I'm free, like a swan."

- Year 4 pupil, Canklow Woods school

Many children also discussed the river's built or industrial heritage, having learnt about the remains of factories along the river and seeing it as important that these are preserved in the future.

"It's noisy there but it's just all the animals talking to each other. There's lots of different animals there."

- Year 4 pupil, Canklow Woods school

Generally, the children perceive the river as a 'wild' place, which looks messy, with 'mucky' water and overgrown plants. However, this is seen as a positive thing as it results in a comfortable habitat for various creatures such as fish, birds, and insects. The river is also perceived as a place with plenty of exciting opportunities to see diverse wildlife, which the children had not encountered before, such as the Ransom Snails.

The iconic headline for the project was the return of the Atlantic salmon to the river. This is now starting to become a reality and will only serve to accelerate the work started by the Living Heritage of the River Don project. This has already started to be an invaluable tool for maintaining traditional print media and social media profile for the work of the project.

"I'd say it's [the project] been very successful because a salmon has now been caught in Sheffield, we've had videos sent in and some sightings."

- Project Apprentice

Whilst the vision has not been entirely attained yet, the future of the River Don's amazing heritage is looking a lot brighter as a result of the Living Heritage of the River Don project and its improvement is set to continue with the momentum built by the project.

Before the industrial revolution the Don was rich in wildlife, and was full of salmon, so many that one area on the banks is called Salmon Pastures, where factory workers went to eat their salmon sandwiches for lunch. Perhaps we'll all be eating River Don salmon sandwiches again, in the not too distant future...



Developing as an organisation

The Living Heritage of the River Don project has provided a fantastic learning curve for the DCRT trustees, staff and volunteers. It is testament to their ‘can do’ attitude that they have found solutions to many of the challenges they have encountered and delivered a highly successful project.

Some of the main ways in which DCRT has benefitted from the project as an organisation include:

- More **robust internal systems** such as staff recruitment and induction
- **Improved governance** through strengthened trustee representation and skills
- Being **‘funding ready’** with a better understanding of the requirements of funders including the Heritage Lottery Fund and have just been successful in securing £450,000 for a new project to reintroduce meanders to a Derbyshire river²⁹ and accompanying activity programme
- **Increased capacity** through a vibrant volunteering programme which has won the Rotherham volunteering kite mark and gave a total of £47,475 equivalent time during the Living Heritage of the River Don project
- **Increased organisational profile** and built a **strong reputation** in the sector
- **Range of experience of community engagement** - from the start of the application process, the DCRT team were focussed primarily on the reintroduction of salmon to the River Don as a project aim. However, several organisations, including HLF and the Canal and Rivers Trust (CRT) pointed out that community engagement was another key feature, and that you could not have one without the other. It is important that the local community take ownership of the project to ensure future sustainability. By the time the Trust arrived at the delivery phase of the project, they had formulated an engagement plan, but it was a steep learning curve to create the plan and ensure that it was implemented. A further learning curve was finding a comfortable balance between the resourcing of the engagement side relative to the capital side. DCRT are now in a very strong position to deliver community engagement work going forward
- Strong **project management experience** and experience of successfully navigating the planning and commissioning of fish pass works
- Identifying and developing strong partnerships that are effective and deliver results.

The DCRT is now more resilient organisation in a strong position to be able to realise their organisational vision and go from strength to strength. A reflective practice and action learning approach will well equip them to continue to learn and grow.

²⁹ The DCRT have just been successful in securing HLF funding to restore a North East Derbyshire river ravaged by industry for over two centuries is to be restored to its natural glory. The project will help local communities to rediscover the waterways and learn about the industrial heritage. Some 170 volunteers will be recruited and trained to restore natural habitats by planting trees, laying hedgerows, clearing litter and removing invasive vegetation in a project working in partnership with Moss Valley Wildlife Trust. An exciting and ambitious Citizen Science education programme has been devised involving 60 events and targeting more than 3,000 people. Activities will include BioBlitz days where groups undertake a ‘record everything’ census in a specific location, nature-themed treasure hunts and river visits for 600 children from ten local schools. The North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society will also help volunteers to identify and record the industrial heritage.



Leaving a legacy

The funding to the Don Catchment River Trust for the Living Heritage of the River Don project and all associated works and activities are now drawing to a close.

An appropriate exit strategy is now needed because time and money invested in projects can quickly dissipate unless plans are made to secure the legacy. This means, for example, that capital works need to be protected from damage or decay, habitats may need ongoing management if they are to remain in favourable condition, and individuals and groups may need support and encouragement if they are to remain engaged in heritage activities. Safeguarding legacy also has additional benefits beyond simply maximising the value obtained through HLF funds for the heritage people and communities in the River Don Catchment area.

Project stakeholders³⁰ identified the main areas of project legacy as linked to its greatest successes, see below:



In February 2018, project staff and DCRT trustees came together to start to plan in earnest to review the plans for legacy laid out in the original project plans, identify additional areas of legacy and actions required to cement the legacy.

When thinking of legacy DCRT has considered a three tier approach as shown in the diagram below.

³⁰ Source: key informant interviews n=15.



The project team agreed on the following principles to guide the development and delivery of the legacy of the Living Heritage of the River Don project:

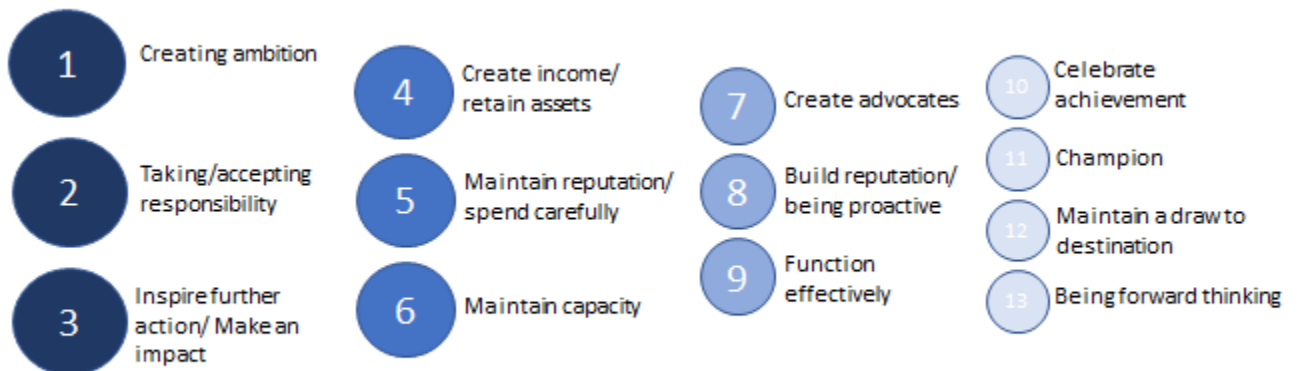


Figure 15 Legacy principles for the Living Heritage of the River Don project.

Appendix 6 contains a detailed Legacy Action Plan which includes areas of legacy; risks if nothing is done to secure the legacy; agreed actions; assignment of task to an individual or group and progress to date. Broad areas of legacy and examples of how each of the areas of legacy will be cemented are provided below to provide a flavour of plans:

Inspiring and mobilising the community

Examples of project legacy in this area

- Wildlife ID improved in volunteers and wider public
- Friends of the Don Valley Way, Facebook group platform
- Sustainable volunteer groups, skills for volunteers, organising and managing volunteers
- Improved attitude to river and better awareness = better care for the river
- Volunteers organising their own events and litter picks
- Volunteers support each other e.g. Car shares
- Volunteers attend community events and get involved in whole project
- Good working environment that engages the community well and is also a good social group as well as benefitting the environment
- Support from volunteers for learning difficulties and mental health difficulties
- Volunteers feedback and make suggestions to programme E.g. Ideas schedule
- DCRT awarded the Duke of York’s Certificate for their work.
- For many of the volunteers, the project has led to something else for them³¹. This includes additional volunteering, such as the Rotherham ‘Love Where You Live’ initiative, which involves local litter picking with the local council. Three of the six volunteers have become involved with this as a direct result of the project. Another has also been involved with the Swinton Lock Activity Centre in taking children with disabilities for trips on a narrow boat. One member of the DCRT project team has helped the centre on their way to applying for a grant to purchase new equipment for the centre.

Risk if nothing is done

- DCRT lose volunteers and therefore capacity to do tasks and projects
- Would be difficult to look after the whole Don Valley Way / might have to not maintain it
- Loss of opportunity for volunteers to get involved (especially if they have a particular motivation for volunteering)
- Wouldn’t be able to meet criteria for awards and kite marks etc.

“The volunteers don’t want things to stop but they are wondering how to do it on their own.”

- Volunteer

Agreed actions required to secure legacy

- Provide Trust support for volunteer programme and friends of the Don Valley Way

³¹ Source: key informant volunteer interviews n=6.

- Continue creating skill and capacity and confidence with the friends of groups
- Keep up links with other community groups and signpost people to other volunteering opportunities
- Seek funding to pay volunteer travel and expenses.

Capital works

Example of project legacy in this area

- Don Valley Way and associated website / app
- Geocaches
- Youth Art Murals
- Superbins
- Geocaches
- Interpretation panels.

Risk if nothing is done

- Items go into disrepair / get vandalised / get lost
- Public cannot learn from or use them.

Agreed actions required to secure legacy

- Volunteer time to keep up maintenance
- Staff time to oversee schedule – need to identify a budget to support this work.

Project management and partnerships

Example of project legacy in this area

- Good relationships with other environmental bodies and groups
- Significantly improved credibility with EA, HLF and local groups leading to better funding and project opportunities for DCRT
- Creation of momentum that feeds new projects addressing the challenge of returning salmon to the Don
- As a result of our delivery of fish passes we have encouraged other organisations including Yorkshire Water, EA and Canal and Rivers Trust to build passes on their assets
- LHRD directly led to the development and HLF funding of the Aire River Trust's project to return salmon to the River Aire
- Other River Trusts (River Aire project) are a 'clone' of our project and seek advice
- EA have developed their way of delivering environmental improvements through support of groups like DCRT
- Local authority now include river on their community volunteering days.

Risk if nothing is done

- Loss of reputation
- Loss of momentum (and capacity for) for river restoration projects

Agreed actions required to secure legacy

- Keep up hosting role for Don Network
- Keep linking into other organisations priorities to find opportunities for delivering projects
- Keep attending committee and partnership meetings.

Delivering skills and building capacity

Example of project legacy

- The skills of our organisation have developed as a result of the LHRD project. for example, Wildlife recognition, Health and safety, Tool skills, Communication skills, Identification of invasive species
- Apprentice learned valuable skills and experience in the sector and helps provide them with a future career path
- The creation of a team of staff means greater capacity to seize new opportunities
- Our tools and equipment enables us to deliver new projects we wouldn't be able to otherwise.
- DCRT has become the main deliverer of physical improvements in the catchment

Risk if nothing is done

- Skills loss would mean lack of capacity to deliver projects and engagement programme
- Loss of momentum within the catchment for river improvement projects.

Agreed actions required to secure legacy

- Funding to keep staff and tools required for tasks
 - Commitment from Trusts to carry on with community engagement and staffing levels.
-

List of available appendices

Appendices are provided as separate documents available on request.

Appendix 1 Full list of interviewees and question frameworks

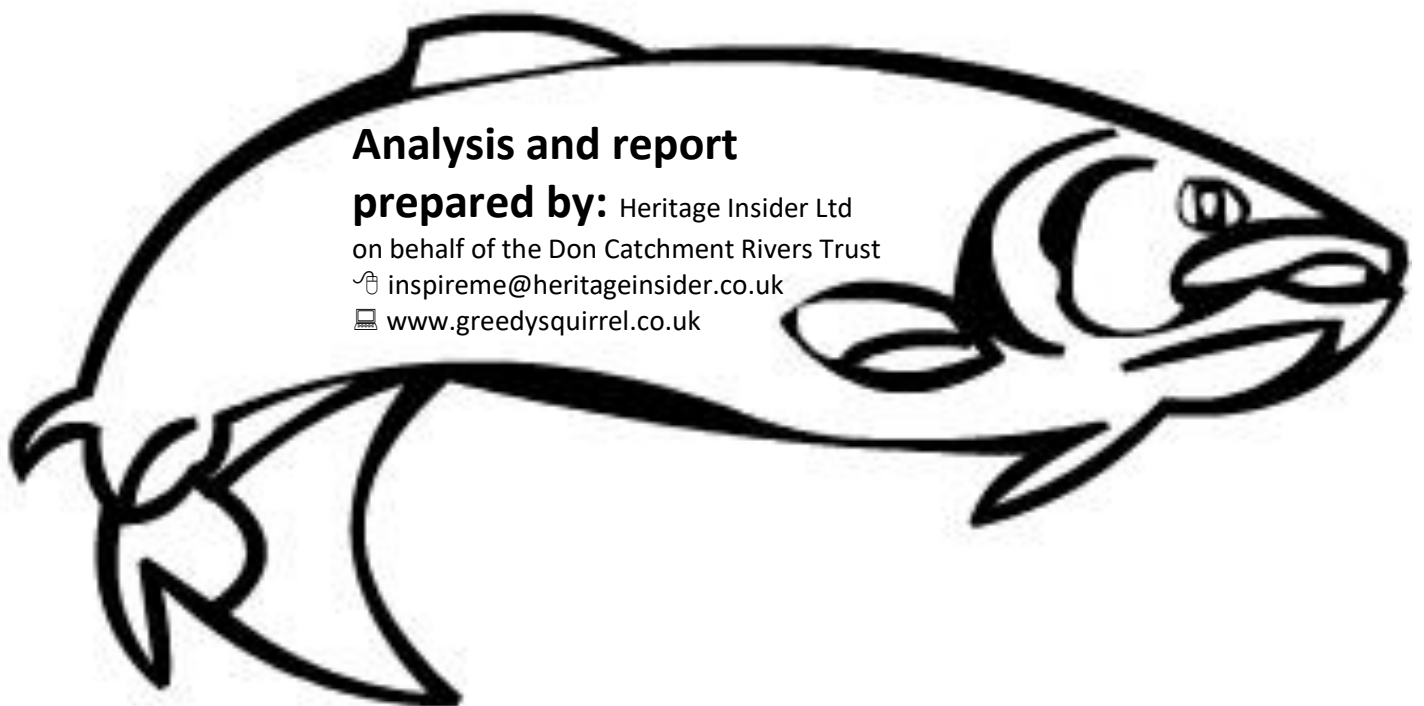
Appendix 2 Summary of telephone interviews

Appendix 3 Summary of focus group

Appendix 4 Summary of comment cards

Appendix 5 Notes from Project Learning Review

Appendix 6 Project legacy plan



Analysis and report

prepared by: Heritage Insider Ltd
on behalf of the Don Catchment Rivers Trust
✉ inspireme@heritageinsider.co.uk
🌐 www.greedysquirrel.co.uk