



# Workington Nature Partnership

## Evaluation and Future Direction

**Funding raised by  
The National Lottery**

and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



## Executive Summary

Report prepared by  
Shirley Muir Associates and  
ACTion with Communities in Cumbria

May 2018

## Executive Summary

### Workington Nature Partnership Now

Workington has an extensive open space network, including some sites that are green gems where wildlife flourishes.

- ❖ Workington Nature Partnership has successfully managed and improved key sites for both wildlife and people.
- ❖ Having a skilled and dedicated member of staff has allowed carefully planned and managed habitat improvements to take place that are appropriate to each of the sites.
- ❖ Allerdale Borough Council and Workington Town Council should be commended for their approach.

### Extending the Reach of Workington Nature Partnership

The Partnership is currently operating at capacity and there is a threat from the increasing pressures on local authority budgets in future. There is also a desire expressed by the Partnership to extend its role.

- ❖ The Workington Nature Partnership approach could be applied more widely to the green network within, and possibly beyond, Workington, and it could build on its success to engage a wider range of people, subject to securing additional resources.
- ❖ Connectivity is a key element in the sustainability of wildlife habitats; and green routes can also encourage people to walk, run and cycle. There is great potential in Workington for linking sites to each other, to local communities and to the town centre along green corridors. A circular route linking key sites would be an easy first step towards this.
- ❖ Blue spaces, such as rivers, streams and ponds are also important features, providing links to the coast and to the industrial and cultural heritage.
- ❖ Workington Nature Partnership could extend its remit to include built and cultural heritage where they are associated with the green and blue network.
- ❖ Extending the Partnership's work will require additional resources. This needs careful consideration in the context of current and planned projects and funding applications, especially the restoration of Workington Hall Parklands and Cumbria Wildlife Trust's Pollinator Project, which are both the subject of Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) applications.

### Engaging More People

It is widely accepted that urban green space provides wide-ranging benefits for both wildlife and people. Of particular relevance to Workington are the benefits for physical and mental health, for children and young people, and for families to encourage an active lifestyle as part of making healthy choices.

- ❖ The results of the online survey show that the sites are highly valued for their wildlife and heritage, but also for the benefits they provide for people's health and wellbeing. One respondent described Harrington Nature Reserve as 'balm to the soul' and others mentioned contemplation, serenity and space to think.
- ❖ There are good opportunities to engage a wider range of people, particularly young people and families, subject to securing additional resources.

- ❖ Engaging with volunteers provides benefits, both for the councils in terms of value for money and ensuring good management of the sites, and for the volunteers themselves. Currently volunteers contribute over 420 days per year, valued at over £20,000. There is a regular group of volunteers who are local residents who work once or twice per week; and larger groups are brought in, often from other organisations, for bigger tasks.
- ❖ There are opportunities to engage more volunteers if additional staff and resources can be secured. They may be from local communities working on nearby sites, interested people from a wider area, groups that engage young people and others, or trainees under a structured training programme.

## Engaging More Partners

National policies and guidance documents, such as those from Natural England, highlight the value of urban and coastal green spaces and the importance of partnership working.

- ❖ Potential partners include Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Sustrans, Cumbria County Council and Cumbria Youth Alliance. These organisations were invited to, and played an active part in, the workshop that was organised as part of this review
- ❖ Of particular note is the Pollinator Project currently being developed by Cumbria Wildlife Trust, which will have a direct impact on sites in Workington, providing opportunities for volunteering and the potential to attract further match funding.

## Governance and building resilience

Workington Nature Partnership is well managed, being limited mostly by its resources.

- ❖ The current management arrangements between Allerdale Borough Council and Workington Town Council are effective and should continue.
- ❖ To broaden involvement it is proposed that an advisory group with wider representation and interests, including health and well-being, children's services, police, environment and community interests, be developed. The development of the group could be the subject of a funding application if needed and it could be the catalyst for a wider programme and partnership funding application.

## Recommendations

### Effective Partnership

The partnership between Workington Town Council and Allerdale Borough Council works well and current management arrangements are appropriate. Its work would benefit from the engagement of a wider group of partners.

- An advisory group with members signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding would assist in expanding the work of Workington Nature Partnership and could help to secure funding. Friends and volunteers should also be part of this wider group. Advisory meetings or workshops should be held at least twice a year and could be topic-based.

Workington Nature Partnership meetings are constructive and informal. Some small improvements could improve efficiency:

- Invitations can be extended to other staff as required, such as for input on health
- The Partnership Officer should circulate a short report on progress before the meeting
- Action points should be noted at the meeting and reviewed at the next one
- The budget and spend of the Partnership should be clearly reported

The three key sites have management plans intended to direct works on the ground but they are unwieldy and are not regularly used. They are due for review.

- Shorter and more user-friendly management plans should be developed, which would help volunteers to take more control of the required management schedules.
- Some key indicator habitats or species could be identified for the sites and a brief annual report produced that can be circulated widely. More regular recording and reporting on the condition of sites would help to demonstrate the success of Workington Nature Partnership and raise awareness of its work.

## Engaging People

There are opportunities to engage more people that would result in benefits for the people involved, for the sites and for the Partnership. Resources are currently a limiting factor.

- It is recommended that Workington Nature Partnership develops a volunteering policy which sets out who it wants to involve and why and is clear about the processes involved.
- The Partnership can trial some events and activities, such as fun runs, guided walks from the leisure centre or the museum, or children's activities as part of an organised summer playscheme. This would help to identify where there is good potential and could inform future funding bids.

## Green Infrastructure Plan

A Green Infrastructure Plan to map and prioritise sites and routes within the green network, and links where communities can become more engaged, is needed to direct the expansion of the Nature Partnership's work. Those involved in the Workington Nature Partnership already know a great deal about the value and potential of sites and routes in Workington. The workshop held as part of this evaluation engaged others in drawing up some proposals on a map.

- Workington Nature Partnership should set aside some time to develop the Green Infrastructure Plan, engaging external help where required. It should include community engagement proposals if possible. A small funding application may be required to complete the work and produce a document.
- The Green Infrastructure Plan can be used by Allerdale Borough Council's planning department to develop further as Supplementary Planning Guidance to provide better protection for the sites.

## Current Opportunities

- A circular route exists, linking the Sustrans route to England's Coast Path, which could easily be improved and signposted as a first 'green routes' project. A 'Workington Nature Trail' should be developed with signage and interpretation. Funding may be available through Allerdale Borough Council's Tourism and Culture work and/or from external grants, such as Awards for All from the Big Lottery.
- Working with other partners will help to co-ordinate actions to benefit wildlife and people and attract funding. West Cumbria Rivers Trust is looking to develop an apprenticeship scheme and it would benefit both parties to work together on the proposal.
- Cumbria Wildlife Trust's Pollinator project has now been given approval from HLF for the development phase, which will take place in 2018. It directly affects sites in Workington and provides opportunities for joint working, especially with community engagement and volunteering. Trialling activities as part of the project development could provide evidence for extending the work of Workington Nature Partnership in future. It is important that the Partnership and the Trust develop a good working relationship and the two projects work together.
- The restoration of Workington Hall Parklands provides an opportunity to establish a practical operational and educational base for use by Workington Nature Partnership. It can also provide a base for extending the approach and outreach activities of the Partnership across the town, engaging the community in green infrastructure and wildlife, and realising health and wellbeing benefits.